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FORGING A DIASPORA: JAMAICAN IMMIGRATION TO NEW YORK, 1965 – 2003

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation delves into the experiences of the Jamaican immigrants who ventured to New York City in pursuit of a new life. Their stories encapsulate the challenges, triumphs, and cultural amalgamation inherent in the immigrant experience. The narrative unfolds against the backdrop of socio-economic complexities, cultural adaptation, and the quest for identity in a foreign land. Their resilience in navigating these challenges illuminates the resourcefulness and determination embedded within immigrant communities. Through qualitative interviews and ethnographic insights, this dissertation aims to capture the nuances of Jamaican migration – from the initial aspirations and struggles to the evolution of their diaspora in New York. It explores the dynamic interplay of cultural preservation and assimilation, showcasing how Jamaicans negotiate between maintaining their roots and embracing the opportunities presented by American culture. The Jamaican immigrant experience in this study, evolves around the legacy of Martha Gayle, whose narrative serves as a microcosm reflecting shifts in immigration, assimilation, and the formation of diasporic communities. The study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the Jamaican immigrant experience in New York City, offering valuable insights into the complexities of cultural integration and identity formation in an urban context. Ultimately, it is a story emblematic of the resilience and adaptability of the Jamaican immigrant narrative that contributes significantly to the diverse tapestry of New York City's landscape.

DEDICATION

To my daughter, Ashley Marie, my north star.

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They say it takes a village to raise a child. I have discovered this is equally true for writing a dissertation. Within my village, I express my deepest appreciation to Martha Gayle. Though we may never meet, thank you for living an extraordinary life that epitomize the Jamaican immigrant experience in New York. You broke through so many obstacles to become a self-made success. Your story is the story of all of us immigrants who journey to the "land of opportunity" in pursuit of the American dream.

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INTRODUCTION

On April 16, 1924, the SS Alegria left Port Antonio, Jamaica for New York. Martha Gayle, A Jamaican immigrant awaiting a new life in a foreign country, was aboard the vessel. Gayle, who was born in 1902, journeyed to New York in 1924, and died in 2000. Her life spanned the history of Jamaican migration to New York. Economic hardships and a yearning for better opportunities steered many towards the bustling metropolis of New York City. They brought with them a mosaic of traditions – music, cuisine, and a resilient spirit – that would indelibly contribute to the city's cultural landscape. Various historical events and processes of racialization have influenced these developments. Although these events date back to the early 1900s, a visibly cohesive Jamaican community began to take shape in the latter half of the twentieth century. Accordingly, this dissertation primarily focuses on Jamaican migration to New York during the latter half of the twentieth century. However, it begins with the arrival of Gayle and the Jamaican migrants who resettled in New York in the early 1900s. Given her documented longevity, Gayle forms a seminal piece of this study. The project culminates in 2003, with Prime Minister PJ Patterson's impassioned speech acknowledging the diaspora's powerful economic evolution. This temporal framework encompasses pivotal moments in the history of Jamaican migration to New York, offering insights into the community's development and its enduring impact on both Jamaican and American societies.

The timeframe for this project was purposefully chosen: in 1965, the United States enacted the Hart-Celler Act, which expanded immigration from the Caribbean from a restrictive 100 persons per country per year to a generous 20,000. This legislative

change made 1965 an attractive starting point for navigating the Jamaican immigrant experience in New York. However, upon further research, it became apparent that Jamaican immigration to New York was much more involved than the Hart-Celler Act expanding immigration from the Caribbean Basin. It is a complex story that intertwines with British West Indian neglect and American commercial interests in Latin America. Despite the complexities, a definitive beginning was needed to explore the Jamaican immigrant experience in New York. This research began in 1924 because that was the year the first wave of Jamaican immigrants to New York peaked and was quite nicely tied to when Martha Gayle arrived on the SS Alegria. While the bulk of this study is centered around post-1965 immigrants, the Martha Gayle Collection richly informs this study. Therefore, those who arrived before 1965 are brought into focus for historical context. The culminating year (2003) was chosen in reverence to Prime Minister PJ Patterson's speech to the diaspora in Brooklyn, the mecca of the Jamaican immigrant community in New York.

When the Jamaican immigrants arrived in New York, they faced a myriad of challenges, from navigating a new social terrain to establishing themselves in an unfamiliar urban setting. Yet, their pursuit of the American dream contributed to a thriving Jamaican community in New York. Their contribution highlighted the ways in which West Indian immigrants contributed to the city's colorful neighborhoods. Today, there are noticeable Jamaican enclaves primarily in Brooklyn and the Bronx. While there are pockets of Jamaicans throughout New York, these boroughs have the strongest concentration, and they evolved from the foundations put in place by the first wave of Jamaican migration to the city in the early 1900s.

The life story of Martha Gayle is one of the best aides in recording this migration history. Gayle was a relatively unknown migrant, yet she experienced every phase of Jamaican migration to New York. In this project, her story is intertwined with the broader tapestry of Jamaican migration, reflecting her community's hopes, struggles, and successes. Her journey illustrates the fusion of cultures, resilience against adversity, and the enduring spirit that defines the Jamaican community in New York City. Gayle's legacy expands beyond New York as she furthers the conversation on women's empowerment, Black diversity, and social mobility in the United States. She is the only recorded migrant from the island who has transcended all waves of Jamaican migration to New York. This remarkable longevity makes her a poignant figure for any immigrant community, not just Jamaican. Moreover, having gone through the emigration and immigration processes and becoming a facilitator for others makes her an exceptional example on how immigration to the United States works. Her lived experienced will be used as a vehicle for thinking about these larger issues.

Historical Background

For a relatively small country, Jamaica has made a noteworthy impact on the United States. Nowhere is this more apparent than in New York City itself. The Jamaican imprint is discernably visible throughout the city, especially in the Black American community, whether through the economy, popular culture, politics, or the arts.[1]

[1] For more on Jamaican influence on hip-hop and the performing arts, see Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005); and "40 Black Celebrities You May Not Have Known Were of Jamaican Descent," *Atlanta Black Star*, December 19, 2016, https://atlantablackstar.com/2014/09/23/38-black-celebrities-you-may-not-have-known-were-of-jamaican-descent/6/.

However, less is known of Jamaican immigrants' historical migration patterns and their assimilation in New York. On the surface, it would appear Jamaicans only recently began migrating to the city. However, underneath the surface, archival records revealed it is a migratory pattern that spans over a century.

For Jamaican immigrants, traveling to the United States presented life-changing opportunities. In the early 20th century, Jamaica had severely limited economic opportunities at home, wherein those who had access to employment relied on agricultural work or small service sector jobs. Many did not have those options, which provided a major impetus for them to migrate. Despite gaining independence in 1962, the situation in Jamaica did not change much in the latter half of the 20th century. Notwithstanding, many post- independence Jamaican migrants followed the pre-independence migrant's path to New York. These two periods of migration combined illustrates how limited resources at home continuously pushed people to find alternatives outside of their homeland.

Martha Gayle, a towering figure who is practically unknown outside of a very small circle lived a well-documented life. Her arrival in 1924 was at the high point of Jamaican migration to the United States, and it marks a fitting starting point from which to raise new questions about the story of Jamaicans in New York. She occupies a seminal position in Jamaican migration to New York as an embodiment of the immigration process from start to finish. Her transnational ties and role as a facilitator for others resonated with many within the diaspora. Her legacy is an important piece of this project, and I explore her experience with regard to the broader Jamaican immigrant community

in popular consciousness. Jamaican identification thus forms a significant component of this study.

Migration to New York did not happen on a whim. It took planning and considerable financial resources. To draw a linear explanation of how this works, many of the first wave migrants drew resources from those who had migrated to Central America. The first wave of migrants in the United States later supported those who came after independence. Martha Gayle was a perfect illustration of this process. Her travel was supported by a relative who worked on a banana estate in Costa Rica, and she, in turn, helped other relatives. This chain migration over time shaped the diaspora in the United States.

What accounts for Jamaican chain migration to New York? I argue that the answer lies in a change in US immigration law, namely the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, commonly referred to as the Hart-Celler Act. This legislation opened-up legal migration from the island from 100 to 20,000 person per year. Before 1965, the entire Jamaican population in the United States was less than 100,000. Within thirty years after the Hart-Celler Act was passed, over 300,000 born Jamaicans migrated to the United States. More than half of that figure resettled in New York.[2] That transformation provides the foundation for a rich legal history. To interrogate these migrants' collective experiences, my project considers how legal history help us understand the processes of immigration and adaptation in the United States. Of specific interest is an examination of how a change in immigration law was pivotal to the decision-making processes migrants faced, most centrally where to live and work. Exploring these dimensions uncovered the

[2] *The Newest New Yorkers 2000: Immigrant New York in the New Millennium* (New York City Department of City Planning, 2005), 90.

tensions and negotiations that played out at local levels to forge the Jamaican diaspora in New York.

Early Jamaican migrants were met with both contempt and patronage from Americans in New York, and the same rang true for the post-independence wave of migrants. In response, many developed particular patterns of recognition and consciousness. These new patterns of identification emerged in an already developing melting pot of migrants, spurred by a number of historical events and as a process of living in a hyper-racialized country. Notions of estrangement were crucial to the development of the patterns of identification Jamaicans utilized when negotiating space in New York. The stark reality of the role race played in everyday life was a shock to the migrants, and their collective struggles in the city upset the salutary perceptions the United States projected as "the land of opportunity."

What accounts for this dynamic relationship between Jamaicans and New York? They have been migrating to the city from as early as 1899.[3] Still, their discernable presence as a distinct diaspora truly stemmed from a migratory wave that began in the 1960s and accelerated over the subsequent four decades with the passage of the Hart-Cellar Act.[4] According to New York City Department of City Planning, Population Division, there were 178,900 born Jamaicans residing in the city in the year 2000. That made Jamaicans the city's largest diaspora of Black immigrants and the third largest

[3] Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1999), 7-12.
[4] The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, commonly known as the Hart-Celler Act, was established to abolish that national-origins quota that placed a restriction on how many non-white immigrants could enter the United States. It lifted the ceiling from 100 to 20,000 immigrants per year for Jamaica. See "An Act to Amend the Immigration and Nationality Act, and For Other Purposes, Pub. L. 89-236, 915 Stat. 79 (1965)."

overall, behind Dominicans, and Chinese respectively.[5] Yet, their collective history remains understudied particularly among historians. This project seeks to redress this shortcoming by identifying the migration patterns and exploring the motivations and experiences of Jamaican immigrants in New York.

The new arrivals produced identity reconfigurations within the Black community, spurring a new collective consciousness in Black diversity. Here, it is worth highlighting Gayle's experience in the post-Hart-Cellar period which was an important era for Jamaican immigration. She witnessed an influx of Jamaican immigrants' arrival, which reoriented her consciousness as a racialized alien in the city. Her interactions with native Blacks exacerbated differences in class and culture, which led her to reject the term "African American" to describe her and her Jamaican community. As a historical actor, Gayle's social and political consciousness, which developed over decades of residence in New York, helped to inform the Jamaican process that involved both negotiations of American society and burgeoning patterns of mutual identification among the migrants. As the particular subject of this study, Gayle was an educated domestic worker who worked her way up to become a successful landlady. In the latter half of the twentieth century, she witnessed and influenced the migration of other Jamaican migrants who were skilled and semi-skilled tradesmen, industrial workers, nurses, and teachers who rejected the Black American label and built a stronger sense of Jamaican-ness.

Several influential, political, and cultural figures rose from within the ranks of those who came after the Hart-Cellar Act was imposed. Like Gayle, they maintained correspondence with friends and loved ones on the island, including Tyrone Lee, who

[5] *The Newest New Yorkers,* 90.

became a godfather for his hometown, and Richard Collins, who built a mansion on Jamaica's north coast (he envisioned it as a place where his American-born children could call home). DJ Kool Herc is another notable highlight from the post-1965 wave. Herc is widely esteemed as the founder of hip-hop. While the genre is viewed as fundamentally Black American, little is known of its Jamaican roots. Therefore, Jamaican contribution to the Black American community is warranted.

In this research, I have categorized how the Jamaican diaspora in New York manifested: first-wave migration in the early 20th century, strong homeland ties, liberal immigration policies, economic clout, and organic collective action. These mechanisms developed concomitantly alongside racialized encounters that emerged from the experience of alienation and discrimination in New York. Organic collective actions refer to loosely organized political activity among Jamaican immigrants, whether facilitated by formal organizations or garnering participation primarily from interested individuals. The banding together of the West Indian immigrant community in the face of injustice with the David Cato accident in Brooklyn and the Michael Griffith murder in Queens stands out as two glaring examples.[6]

Mid-century Jamaican migration to New York represented a significant development in US-Jamaican relations. The island became an independent nation in 1962, followed by the Hart-Cellar Act in 1965. During this decade, too, communication between Gayle and her relatives picked up steam. Rapid migration to New York was

[6] Michael Griffith was a Trinidadian immigrant who was physically assaulted and chased to his demise by a group of white American youths on December 20, 1986. David Cato was the son of two Guyanese immigrants. He tragically lost his life an accidental collision with a white motorist. Both incidents were viewed as racially motivated by the West Indian community. See Robert McFadden, "Black Man Dies After Beating by Whites in Queens, *The New York Times*, December 21, 1986; see also John T. McQuiston, "Fatal Crash Starts Melee With Police in Brooklyn," *The New York Times*, August 20, 1991.

inspired by a few push and pull factors, including, most prominently, the lack of employment opportunities on the island and the perceived abundance of jobs in New York. Understanding how the Hart-Cellar Act provided for family unification is of primary concern. It allowed first-wave migrants like Gayle to petition for their family members to join them in the United States. How Jamaican immigrants utilized this facet of the immigration law may be insufficient in retelling their experience in New York. This investigation goes beyond the legal parameters of immigration to explore the emigration and integration processes. Therefore, how Jamaicans fit themselves into the larger American society is also a central concern, as is how they differ from other immigrant communities in a city known to be an immigrant haven.

While my work is more interested in developments within the United States, it is imperative to understand the political and economic contexts in the 1970s and 1980s Jamaica that informed people's decisions to emigrate. These were the decades during which the island endured the greatest wave of migrants relocating to the United States. For instance, the island's middle-class exodus during Michael Manley's tenure as Prime Minister between 1972 and 1980 was influenced by his infamous "social democracy" idealization. In addition, he had a cordial relationship with Fidel Castro and made the seemingly bizarre and contradictory statement that "there is a flight a day… for anyone who wanted to leave."[7]. Not surprising, it was during this timeframe, the island also experienced two of its bloodiest elections, in 1976 and 1980, complicated by a problematic CIA shaped US foreign policy. This research will describe the correlation between those incidents and Jamaican emigration to New York.

[7] Cheryl L. King, *Michael Manley and Democratic Socialism: Political Leadership and Ideology in Jamaica* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 23.

Terms and Definitions

In this project, identification refers to what Jamaican sociologist Stuart Hall termed "the process by which groups, movements, and institutions try to locate us for the purpose of regulating us as part of a conversation around social positioning at any time."[8] Likewise, Jamaican identity in New York has been constructed over a period of time, primarily in response to American racialization. Though most Jamaicans in this study were phenotypically Black, many asserted that it was only after arriving in the United States that they realized what that meant. In contrast to the sense of pride it affirmed in Jamaica, being Black in the United States defined Jamaicans' social standing in America's racial hierarchy. The Jamaican experience with race in New York has meaningful insights to offer. It gave rise to a heightened Jamaican-ness, shaping a community separate, though not exclusive of Black Americans. As a result, many preferred to identify as Jamaican rather than be grouped with Black Americans.

Yet Jamaicans' diasporic identity was formed not solely in response to racism. In *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America,* Aristide Zolberg demonstrates that immigrant groups tend to cluster with those who share similar political structures, values, and beliefs.[9] Likewise, the Martha Gayle collection illustrates that Jamaican group identity was framed through interactions by those with a common cultural background. When Gayle became a landlord, she rented almost exclusively to Jamaicans. The notable exceptions were a Trinidadian with whom she shared a similar West Indian cultural history, and a Black American sailor, with whom she shared the

[8] Stuart Hall, "Politics of Identity" in *Culture, Identity, and Politics: Ethnic Minorities in Britain*, ed. Terence Ranger, Yunas Samad, and Ossie Stuart (Aldershot, England: Avebury, 1996), 130.
[9] Aristide Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

same racial identity.[10] Though not all-encompassing, most identify as Jamaican first, West Indian second, then Black or other.

In the historiography of Black Caribbean immigrants, Jamaicans are typically grouped with the West Indian or the larger Caribbean immigrant communities. This grouping simplifies a complex mixture of people. Even the terms West Indian and Caribbean are not synonymous. The definition of West Indian defines the Anglophone Caribbean. According to the renowned sociologist Nancy Foner, "there is no straight jacket definition, many scholars have followed this convention."[11] This group identity is further moored to the West Indies cricket team (a fundamentally British sport) and the West Indies Federation, which included only the Anglophone islands.[12] In recent times, the term West Indian has come to mean Black foreigners from the Caribbean due to the centrality of race in the United States. This incorporates Haiti as well as the Dutch and French Caribbean. The notable exception is the Spanish Caribbean because Latinx is considered its own race in the United States. Nonetheless, the term West Indian used throughout this research refers only to the Anglophone Caribbean. It is from this group that the largest diaspora of Black immigrants has emerged. The fact that a relatively small country like Jamaica has formed a rather large diaspora in New York should be of great concern for social historians and immigration scholars alike.

It is important to note also that this dissertation aims to depart from the outdated "African American" term when referring to Black individuals collectively, recognizing

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[10] Martha Gayle's Single Letters, Box 3, Folder 11, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2001, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn New York.
[11] Nancy Foner, ed., *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 3.
[12] The West Indies Federation was a short-lived political union between the British Caribbean islands vying for independence from Britain. The intent was for the British Caribbean to unite and become one independent state.

that many Black foreigners do not identify themselves as such. Rather, they often perceive themselves as something other than African Americans.[13] Additionally, the dissertation addresses the complexity of terminology for Black individuals who have immigrated to the United States. For instance, what is the appropriate term for a Black African who becomes an American citizen? Is this individual now considered an "African American" in the same sense as a Black American with a deep-rooted connection to the United States? The somber reality is that most Africans and other Black immigrants do not consider themselves African Americans. Bewildering it is then that Black Americans are called African Americans.

Through interviews with several Black foreigners, the dissertation underscores the inadequacy of the term "African American" for capturing the diverse identities and experiences within the Black community. Instead, the term "Black Americans" is reserved for individuals born in the United States and possessing a grounded history in the country. Meanwhile, the term "Blacks" is employed when discussing the collective identities of all Black individuals, encompassing various cultural backgrounds and nationalities. This approach reflects a more nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in Black identity and immigration experiences in the United States.

Within the framework of this project, it is crucial to define the concept of diaspora. Kevin Kenny, in *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction*, argues against using diaspora as a mere synonym for migration, and its broader implications. He posits that diaspora encompasses not only the act of migration but also the process of settling, adapting, and adjusting to new environments. Similarly, Robin Cohen, in *Global*

[13] Milton Vickerman, *Crosscurrents: West Indian Immigrants and Race,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 139.

Diasporas, delineates the characteristics of a diaspora, emphasizing aspects such as dispersal from a homeland, whether voluntarily or traumatically; the presence of a collective memory or myth of the homeland, often accompanied by a desire for return; a strong consciousness of ethnic distinctiveness and solidarity; and a complex relationship with the societies in which diaspora members reside.[14] These perspectives offer a comprehensive understanding of diaspora, which directly applies to the Jamaican diaspora in the United States. Therefore, Kenny and Cohen's definitions provide a suitable framework for understanding the Jamaican diaspora and its multifaceted dynamics.

Understandably, there is a difference between New York City and New York. However, they will be used interchangeably throughout this research. New York, used throughout, typically refers to the city and the metro area. It is never intended to give an account for the entire state. Instead, it is used in brevity to represent the city and its adjacent suburbs. Sometimes, it represents only the city, but the context will make it clear.

It is also important to remind readers of the words emigration, immigration, and "black" as the research speaks to both sides of the immigration process and the academic use of the word "black." Emigration used throughout refers to those in the act of leaving Jamaica. Immigration refers to those who have already left the island. Lastly, the academic punctuation of the term Black when referring to those of Afro descent has changed over the years. Therefore, it is worth pointing out that when the word is capitalized, the passage refers to people and not the actual color.

[14] Kevin Kenny, *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 40; and Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 26.

Historiography

Three major historiographies inform this project: diaspora formation, West Indian Immigration, and Black American history. Black American literature is quite expansive, especially given the United States' complex history with race. Cultural studies have also made significant scholarly contributions, though I provide a more historicized notion of the development of social and cultural formations. Sociologists have made many meaningful connections between foreign and domestic Blacks in the United States, but often at the expense of fully contextualizing different historical, cultural, and social formations. I argue that the seemingly disparate historiographies that inform this work can be effectively addressed in a novel way that utilizes both theoretical insights of social history and historical patterns of migration, negotiation and racialized identification of Jamaicans in New York.

This project mostly explores Jamaican immigration to New York after 1965 (after the Hart-Celler Act). However, using Gayle's life experience as a guide, it is evident there was a Jamaican presence before 1965. Hence, assessing the scholarship on prior Jamaican migration to the city is essential. Jamaica was neither an independent country nor a significant source for a population diaspora to the United States before 1965. Yet earlier literature on Jamaican immigrants, particularly those who emigrated during the Harlem Renaissance, exists under the West Indian heading and adds historical depth to my analysis. In the pre-1965 period, West Indians etched an ethnic niche in Harlem.[15]

[15] On West Indian immigrants in Harlem, see Irma Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); James, *Holding Aloft*; Colin Grant, *Negro With A Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008); Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1928); Ira Reid, *The Negro Immigrant: His Background Characteristics, and Social Adjustment, 1899-1937* (New York: Columbia University Press 1939).

These pioneers were instrumental in setting a foundation for others to come. Works such as *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America*; *The Negro Immigrant: His Background Characteristics, and Social Adjustment;* and *Negro With A Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* all address West Indian assimilation in New York during that period. They cover the first wave in great detail with a strong emphasis on intellectual history, particularly Black enlightenment, and empowerment in the early twentieth century.[16] These literatures make clear that the first wave was influential in shaping Black and white Americans' views of West Indians, but more importantly, they documented a thriving West Indian community in New York. I will continue the conversation by exploring the consciousness and identity of the Jamaican diaspora as well as analyzing the intricate intersection of diasporic identity and transnational migration. The Jamaican diaspora exemplified a new kind of transnational movement that operated on different levels and can fit into multiple categories, which previous scholarship on West Indian immigrants has failed to address adequately.

My work transcends a mere analysis of Jamaican immigrants in New York; it delves into the ongoing dialogue between Jamaica and its diaspora in the city spanning from the early 1900s to the early 2000s. This study represents a groundbreaking historical examination, being the first of its kind to explore this intricate relationship. Despite the notable figures like Martha Gayle, David C. Hurd, and Maud Ariel Powell (mother of decorated US Army general, Colin Powell) being processed through Ellis Island, the

[16] On the history of Jamaican immigrants before 1965, see James, *Holding Aloft*; Tammy L. Brown, *City of Islands: Caribbean Intellectuals in New York* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015); Ira Reid, *The Negro Immigrant.*

narrative of Black immigrants passing through this iconic gateway remains largely overlooked.[17] Their absence from commemorative monuments and honor walls is a glaring omission in the historical narrative. Yet, it was the transnational connections forged among these invisible immigrants that cultivated a welcoming environment for subsequent waves of Jamaican immigrants and facilitated the growth of their diaspora in New York City. The discernible linkages between the first and second wave immigrants underscore the timeliness and significance of this work. By illuminating these connections and exploring the multifaceted interactions between Jamaica and its diaspora in New York, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of migration, identity, and community formation in a transnational context.

Given its contemporary context, there is little historical literature on Jamaican immigrants in New York since 1965. Anthropologists and sociologists have written the bulk of the scholarly work on this group. Some of their work compares New York to other large cities that have a significant Jamaican population, such as London, Miami-Fort Lauderdale, or Toronto.[18] For instance, in *Jamaican Immigrants in New York and London*, Nancy Foner mainly focuses on the significance of the racial and ethnic contexts of the receiving societies into which Jamaicans resettled. In *Jamaican Immigrants in the United States and Canada,* sociologist Terry-Ann Jones analyzes the socioeconomic progress that Jamaicans have made in Miami-Fort Lauderdale and Toronto. Jones based her findings on Jamaican immigrants' education, occupation, and income in these

[17] Colin Powell, "The America I Believe In," April 11, 2005.
[18] On Jamaican immigration to other urban centers in the western world, see Nancy Foner, "West Indians in New York City and London: A Comparative Analysis," *The International Migration Review* 13, no. 2 (1979): 284-97; Terry Ann Jones, *Jamaican Immigrants in the United States and Canada: Race, Transnationalism, and Social Capital* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2008); Heather Horst and Andrew Garner, *Jamaican Americans: New Immigrants* (New York: Chelsea House Publications, 2007).

metropolises. She concludes that Jamaicans in South Florida fared better in all three categories mainly because of the large Black American presence in the United States. By analyzing the emigration and immigration processes, my work instead looks at the significance of transnationalism in shaping immigrant communities.

Analyzing the lived experience of Martha Gayle also raises new questions about ethnic diversity and identity within the Black community. Scholars have long been aware of this rich issue. For example, in the edited volume *Islands in The City: West Indian Migration to New York*, several authors point out that Black immigrants comprise a small but growing portion of the population in the United States. Foner, for instance, notes that half of the foreign-born Black immigrants were born in the Caribbean. Jamaicans account for nearly one-fifth of that population, followed closely by Haitians at 15%. To put the outsized representation of Jamaicans among New York's foreign-born Black immigrants into perspective, Jamaica's population is just 3 million, while Haiti has well over three times that amount. The literature also pays particular attention to the ways that Black West Indians have challenged and helped redefine the racial and ethnic categories of the United States. For instance, essayist Milton Vickerman makes the argument that "the meeting of contending West Indian and American conceptions of race is helping to slowly erode the traditional monolithic conception of blackness."[19] Vickerman's work is indeed a worthy template for analyzing and appreciating Black diversity. With Gayle's collection, I will add an analysis of the Jamaicans' specific conceptions of race to this perspective, which will further underscore the dynamic nature of blackness in New York.

[19] Vickerman, *Crosscurrents*, 21.

For Martha Gayle, emigration was viewed as a rite of passage that embodies a sign of success, however elusive that success might prove to be. There are three somewhat recent works that pick-up aspects of this argument: *Jamaican Immigration in the United States and Canada,* by Terry-Ann Jones; *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race,* by Philip Kasinitz; and *The New Immigrants: Jamaican Americans* by Heather Horst and Andrew Gerner. These books illustrate how emigration has developed into an integral part of Jamaica's culture. Jones, for example, argues that emigration has become not only an economic strategy for Jamaicans but also a culturally and socially desirable practice, evolving into a decision-making process that is, in some cases, "obsessional rather than rational."[20] Horst and Gerner further this concept by detailing the many ways in which Jamaicans facilitate paths for family members to join them in the United States. Some common practices include business marriages, finding work sponsors, and housing family members who overstayed their visiting visas. Each of these works brings to life important dimensions of Jamaican experiences in the diaspora. My study adds to that conversation by illustrating how Gayle successfully executed her rite of passage from start to finish, as well as a firsthand account of how she sponsored other family members.

While Jamaicans are surely the most influential group of West Indians in New York, they are certainly not the only immigrants that comprise New York's dynamic Black community. Dominicans and Haitians have, for example, played valuable roles in shaping New York society and culture. Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof's *Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950,* and Michel Laguerre's *American Odyssey:*

[20] Jones, *Jamaican Immigrants,* 5.

Haitians in New York City provide impressive analyses of the creation of two ethnic Caribbean Diasporas in New York. Both authors set the foundations for their work in developments internal to the Caribbean. For example, the lack of resources in the rural areas triggered rural-to-urban migration in both nations. Overcrowding and resource scarcity in Santo Domingo and Port-au-Prince, combined with repressive political regimes, amplified the need for emigration. Both authors also highlight other factors, such as the United States' intervention in internal Caribbean affairs.[21] Their findings have many parallels with what was unfolding in Kingston in the 1970s and 1980s. Jamaica experienced two of its bloodiest elections in 1976 and 1980 respectively. The ripple effect caused many Jamaicans to seek refuge in the United States. Perhaps not surprisingly, Jamaicans, Haitians, and Dominicans are rapidly becoming the largest nationalities in New York City.[22]

Given the United States' racial complexity, and the fact that Jamaica is a predominantly Black country, my work offers an interesting perspective on race. A large volume of literature discusses Black immigrants through the lens of race in the United States. Three important contributions include: *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race*; *Transnationalization and Race in a Changing New York;* and *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities*. What these books share is an emphasis on racialization, a process through which West Indians became racially defined as Black in America. It is through this experience of racialization

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[21] On the transnational turn in United States history, especially as it relates to immigrants from the Caribbean, see Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Euclid Rose, *Dependency and Socialism in the Modern Caribbean: Superpower Intervention in Guyana, Jamaica, and Grenada, 1970-1985* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002); Phillip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Horst and Garner, *Jamaican Americans*; Zolberg, *A Nation by Design*.
[22] "Population - The Newest New Yorkers – 2013 Edition,"

that many took a radical stance against racial oppression in New York. In *Transnationalism and Race in a Changing New York,* the author highlights how racialization has shaped whether migrants were accepted or rejected in the receiving country. Immigration scholars such as Mary Waters, Philip Kasinitz, and Nancy Foner have argued that Jamaican immigrants became more successful than Black Americans because Jamaicans placed less emphasis on racism as a barrier to upward mobility. As a result, many white Americans view Jamaicans as a model minority that is both hardworking and upright.[23] Yet, they had to confront the reality that race permeates every segment of their life. *Black Identities* also points out that social networks sometimes help insulate West Indians (including Jamaicans) from racism. *Caribbean New York* and *Black Identities,* alternatively, focus more directly on how West Indians react to being Black in America. They also highlight how West Indians, and by extension Jamaicans, effect change through civic engagement. I furthered this conversation by elucidating the ways in which Jamaican immigrants develop relationships with Black Americans and how that transmits to political bodies to make demands for social, political, and cultural inclusion.

In *Between Dispersion and Belonging*, Amitava Chowdhury and Donald Harman Akenson explore the formation of identity among individuals who share a cultural background, presenting a compelling argument for when a displaced group of people transitions into a diaspora. Kenny also illuminates the point in *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction* that a diaspora is sometimes the scattering away of people from a homeland which enables 'connections' and networks to not only be maintained away from the

[23] On perceptions of Jamaicans in New York see: Hector R Cordero-Guzman and Robert C Smith, ed., *Migration, Transnationalism, and Race in a Changing New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Waters, *Black Identities*; Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York*.

homeland, but actually grow. Therefore, the attachment to a common place of origin lay at the heart of a diaspora. This dream of a homeland also brings the hope of return. Kenny astutely observes that this dream, while sometimes feasible, may not always materialize, as few individuals actually uproot themselves and return to their homeland. These themes ring true for most diasporas. However, my research highlights that the Jamaican diaspora in New York is unique in its dynamic relationship with Jamaica. For instance, despite being unable to participate directly in the island's political process, the diaspora exerts significant influence over it and plays a pivotal role in shaping various aspects of Jamaican society and culture.

Significance of The Project

Only a limited number of historical works have focused solely on Jamaican immigrants in New York. Even within the broader existing scholarship on West Indian and Caribbean immigrants in the United States, the unique experiences of Jamaicans are often missing. Most of the work on post-1965 Jamaican immigration has been done by scholars who were not trained as historians. The history of Jamaican immigrants – on its own or as it overlaps with the history of West Indian immigrants in New York – adds crucial dimensions to existing work on race in the postwar United States.[24]

According to Foner et al., Jamaicans have long been dubbed the invisible immigrants because they are often mistakenly presumed to be Black Americans. Using Gayle as an example, some Jamaicans frown upon this assumption. Still, others see themselves as united with Black Americans in a larger racial struggle to achieve upward

[24] On the West Indian experience in New York see: Foner, *Islands in the City,* and Brown, *City of Islands*.

mobility. One of the goals of this study is to examine the complicated relationship between Jamaicans and Black Americans. My work intends to probe questions about Black diversity and relations among different nationalities within the Black community. It seeks to depart from the monolithic views of Black identity. Americans tend to view all Blacks as "African Americans," both foreign and domestic. However, the increase migration of Black foreigners complicates that notion.

As with other large immigrant groups, Jamaican immigrants have adopted the concept of diaspora as a new means of defining who they are. This reflects a more self-aware and action-fused identity that encompasses not only the experiences of migrants but also points to the impact migrants intend to have on their host societies. Diasporas define and operate in many types of public spheres, where migrants come together collectively, despite being dispersed globally, to engage in rational, critical debate. These public spaces exist not just physically but also ideologically, shaped through discourse on identity, citizenship, and nationality. That said, there is something unique about how Jamaicans established themselves in this nontraditional community that has grabbed the attention of other migrants, politicians, intellectuals, and academics. This is the context in which my research is taking place.

My interest in the Jamaican diaspora stems from the fact that the Jamaican government frequently cites it as a valuable asset that can be harnessed to aid in the island's development and is, therefore, a major part of the solution to Jamaica's problems. Historically, the Jamaican government has had a negative relationship with its citizens who have settled abroad. However, since the 1990s, Jamaican politicians have made powerful strides to repair this damaged relationship by adopting new attitudes

towards Jamaicans in the diaspora. Every Prime Minister since 1990 has, for example, organized at least one meeting with Jamaicans in New York in a town hall setting.[25] The shift in attitude has strengthened the bond between the Jamaican government and Jamaicans in New York. This new context calls out for a historical consideration of Jamaica's diaspora.

Overall, this research will provide new perspectives on questions about diasporas, identity, and social history. These underlying and imminent factors help determine Jamaica's migration characteristics and patterns. From these underlying springs two subfactors, chiefly sociopolitical and cultural which can be used to identify evolving trends in migration flows and their effects.

Methodology and Sources

Migration studies tend to employ qualitative methods that focus on capturing lived experiences. As a project rooted in the analysis of the Jamaican diaspora, I intend to follow this trend, using qualitative evidence to examine the patterns, linkages, and organizational structure of Jamaicans' movements into New York. The project is, at heart, a social history with elements of politics and law as it also addresses politicians and immigration law. Politics is induced to incorporate the island's political dynamics, given the close links between political violence and emigration.[26] Immigration law is introduced to highlight the ebbs and flow of immigration.

[25] "Visits by Foreign Leaders of Jamaica," Office of The Historian, Department of State, accessed June 5, 2024, https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/visits/jamaica.
[26] Logistical apprehensions limited the political implication to secondary sources.

The research draws chiefly from the Martha Gayle collection stored at the Brooklyn Center for History. Gayle's collection of letters is undoubtedly the clearest way to get a sense of what life was like before and after she migrated. Her collection also gives a firsthand account on how she ascended from a domestic worker to a self-employed landlady. Her collection is more than correspondence between family members. It has property titles, litigation documents, and insurance policies, amongst other things. It is a rich depository of primary sources. More importantly, it paints a more general picture of the immigrant community because of her interaction with a sizeable sample of individuals. Her long life and careful recordkeeping masterfully connect the two great waves of Jamaican migration to New York.

When Gayle arrived in New York, most Black migrants, both foreign and domestic, settled primarily in Harlem. However, her residency in Brooklyn was a stark contrast from what was the norm. Hardly any scholarly work covers West Indian migration to Brooklyn in the early 20th century. The Martha Gayle collection as well as the recent publication of David C. Hurd Papers offer a fresh outlook on this seldom talked about history. Like Gayle, Hurd was a Jamaican immigrant who came to Brooklyn in the early 1900s and kept a collection of letters he wrote to a woman he was courting in Jamaica (she became his wife). Gayle and Hurd's letters are crucially important. They shed light on the little-known fact about early West Indian presence in Brooklyn and help explain why Brooklyn took over the mantle from Harlem to become the West Indian Mecca in New York.

In addition to archival material, my dissertation draws from other migrants' collective experiences, which I gathered through oral history interviews. Oral histories

are another credible straightforward way to get firsthand accounts of the migrants' lives before and after migration. Participants were informants, not respondents, chosen precisely because they were not typical. For my project they include Gayle's relatives, counselors, school principals, and other influential personalities. These persons gave unique perspectives on community histories, civic engagement, and cultural identity. The respondents' positions and occupations have given them greater access to information and prominent roles in the formation of group opinions beyond those of other community members. I asked them various questions about the impact of the Jamaican immigration experiences in New York. These human sources were essential in documenting the development of New York's Jamaican communities in framing the Jamaican diaspora.

Newspapers were also an essential source that augmented my research. *The Jamaica Gleaner* collection on Jamaican migration to Central America and on returning residents provided refreshing perspectives. *The Jamaica Observer* afforded insight into the history of Jamaican migration and ethnic composition. Articles from *The New York Times* was used to reference the various types of employment Jamaican immigrants were moving into and how they were recruited. Local options such as *Carib News, The Amityville Record,* and *Newsday* were used to take a more intimate look at civic engagement. These sources are available in print and online. Some are available for free, whereas access to others requires a fee. The major papers, such as *The New York Times, The Jamaica Gleaner,* and *The Jamaica Observer*, are all available online. *The Amityville Record, Carib News,* and *Newsday* are available in local repositories at the Amityville library, and the Brooklyn and Queens main libraries. Newspaper reporting such as "A Jamaican Way Station in the Bronx; Community of Striving Immigrants Fosters Middle-

Class Values" and "West Indians in Pursuit of the American Dream" (both by *The New York Times*) tell transitional histories of Jamaicans in the Bronx and examine their subsequent transition to suburban life in Mount Vernon. In summary, these papers touch on various issues relating to the Jamaican experience in New York, including racism (via *The New Yorker* "Black Like Them") or cultural inclusion (via *The Amityville Record's* "Copiague Students Take Part in Cultural Diversity Program").[27] These real-time recordings helped contextualize the overall project.

Social networks and organizations such as Linkup Radio and Irie Jam Radio are intrinsic to Jamaican identity in New York. They provide entertainment, legal services (mostly in reference to immigration), advice about real estate, spiritual programming, news, and discussion about other events that are of fundamental importance to Jamaicans in the diaspora. Likewise, churches provide entry points into the community. Most Jamaicans are practicing Protestants, a lasting legacy of the island's past as a former British colony. The national anthem, "Eternal Father," and the phrase from the national pledge, "so that Jamaica may remain a nation under God," are two revealing illustrations of that reality. These sources echo a sense of community, and as such, I use them to demonstrate how they help strengthen and enlarge Jamaican identity over time.

Lastly, the Queens main library has an archival survey of the Jamaican and Trinidadian communities in New York. This source highlighted the pockets of Jamaican neighborhoods in Canarsie, Crown Heights, East Flatbush – Brooklyn, and St. Albans, Springfield Gardens, Rosedale – Queens. Additionally, the West Indian Day Carnival Association archives were used to reference minutes centered around organizing the

[27] Malcolm Gladwell, "Black Like Them," *The New Yorker*, April 29, 1996; and Malachi Bailey, "Copiague Students Take Part in Cultural Diversity Program," *Amityville Record*, May 30, 2001.

event. It is noteworthy that when Grand Marshalls from the political sphere - Ed Koch, Hilary Clinton, or Chuck Schumer, for example - attend the West Indian Parade, they do so because they understand the importance of the West Indian vote. These sources helped to demonstrate that Jamaican immigrants, like other West Indians, are not just financial remitters but also organized visible collectives that influence politics in many ways.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter one provides an overview of the factors that led to Martha Gayle's journey to New York. The chapter highlights how the issues she faced coincided with the broader Jamaican migration history to New York City prior to 1965. Jamaican immigrants, particularly during the Harlem Renaissance, provided some radical voices not only for Jamaicans or West Indian immigrants but also for the Black American community as a whole and, at least in the case of Marcus Garvey, the entire Black World. Therefore, it is essential to highlight how the migrants of Gayle's generation laid the foundation for future immigrants, as well as their contribution to the Black American experience in New York.

Chapter two analyzes the legal history of migration and explains how immigration policies influence immigration patterns. The Hart-Cellar Act, in particular, received special attention because of its impact on Jamaican migration to New York. One glaring example was how Gayle artfully used the family unification clause of the new immigration policy to petition for her family to join her in the United States. While there were other immigration laws that impacted Jamaicans, such as the Walter-McCarran, the Hart-Celler Act was by far the most important because, without it, there would not have

been a Jamaican diaspora in its current form. Notably, British immigration policies were highlighted as well to explain why the citizens of a former British colony reorientated themselves to New York and not London. The chapter also underscored other flashpoints in the 1960s, such as the Civil Rights Movement and the importance of commercial air travel. Both were significant in the expansion of the Jamaican diaspora in New York.

Chapter three focuses on Jamaican emigration and adjustment to life in New York. In the literature on immigration, most scholars rightfully assess how migrants assimilate after they arrive in the receiving country. However, Jamaican immigrants are unique in the sense that they rarely assimilate; they adjust. Here, Gayle serves as a solid example. She lived in the United States for seventy-six years, but she never became an American. She held on to her Jamaican identity until death. Hence, this chapter investigates the reasons for the deep-rooted Jamaican-ness and the blockades that hinder them from becoming Americans. The chapter also analyzes the demography of Jamaican emigrants in terms of gender, age, and skill. The other issues of demography that are explored include where migrants settled, who they settled with, and where they worked.

Chapter four tackles the complicated issue of race and ethnicity. Jamaicans often tried to negotiate a Black identity separate from Black Americans, yet as the location of Gayle's properties showed, they shared the same neighborhoods. Based on her civic engagement, they also shared the same political and social fate. Hence, this chapter will address how Jamaicans dealt with being Black in America. It will explore the ethnic and racial boundaries they found most salient and the methods they developed to present their self-identification to others. The chapter also examines their relationship with the Black American community and how they respond to polarizing events. The chapter facilitates

an understanding of the Jamaican culture in the diaspora and considers the factors that have contributed to maintaining that cultural identity, even in the face of the powerful assimilation pressures that Jamaicans living in New York faced.

Chapter five focuses on political and economic influence. Jamaicans have carved out distinctive enclaves for themselves and transplanted homeland norms and institutions in New York. They have maintained close relations with home, staying actively in-tuned and engaged with home affairs. Nonetheless, they have also become New Yorkers. Therefore, it is important to note how they wield their political influence. Here, Gayle's political allegiance is important as it gives insight into why Jamaicans prefer one party over the other. This chapter also examines the diaspora's relationship with the island. It has become a regular occurrence for Prime Ministers to harness people in the diaspora to enhance political and economic support at home. For instance, Prime Minister P.J. Patterson made several visits to New York to engage the diaspora in dialogue on development projects in the 1990s. His last visit (as Prime Minister) in 2003 served as the appropriate end to this dissertation. In his speech, it was clear Patterson, as well as his audience, acknowledged that the diaspora had become so economically powerful that the government was forced to beg for its economic support. Economic support was indeed Martha Gayle's strongest influence on the island. Jamaica always had a remittance-oriented economy. Like others within the diaspora, Gayle's frequent return to the island provided a sustainable boost to the Jamaican economy. The chapter culminates with the ways in which Jamaican politicians try to partake in diaspora dollars.

In essence, this project serves as a comprehensive exploration of how the United States economic and political interests in the Caribbean have shaped Jamaican migration

to New York from 1924 to 2003. Central themes encompassed within the study include the forces driving emigration, the impact of US immigration laws, the complexities of Black diversity, the phenomenon of transnationalism, and the dynamics of diasporas. The process of Jamaican emigration provides valuable insights into the intricate mechanisms of immigration, shedding light on how individuals organize themselves around the pursuit of perceived better opportunities elsewhere. Furthermore, the evolving field of Black diversity challenges the monolithic view of blackness in the United States, highlighting the diverse experiences and identities within the Black community, particularly among foreign-born individuals. Transnationalism underscores the ongoing exchange between Jamaican immigrants in New York and their counterparts on the island, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these communities across national borders. Lastly, the concept of diaspora delves into the perpetual dispersion of people from their homeland and the spaces they carve out for themselves in their host countries, illuminating the complex processes of adaptation and identity formation within diasporic communities. By delving into these central themes, this project offers a nuanced understanding of Jamaican migration to New York and its broader implications for immigration, identity, and community dynamics in a transnational context.

CHAPTER ONE: MIGRATION AFTER EMANCIPATION

To comprehend Jamaican migration to New York, it is imperative to first unravel the factors that compelled individuals to leave the island. These developments can be traced back to the British colonial legacy, particularly the aftermath of emancipation. When Britain abolished slavery throughout the empire in 1834, slaveholders received pecuniary reparation for what the Crown deemed to be "lost property," while the formerly enslaved people received nothing but their liberty. Lacking resources, capital, and legal representation, the formerly enslaved were forced to squat on lands outside of the plantations because they lacked the capital to acquire ownership. These conditions forced migrants to seek opportunities outside of the island.

Their first opportunity came in Central America during the mid-1800s when some Central American countries received foreign investment in agriculture and infrastructure. The investment came from American companies such as the United Fruit Company and the Isthmus Canal Commission (ICC). Historian Winston James notes that around 170,000 Jamaicans migrated to Panama, and another 60,000 to Costa Rica and Honduras to take advantage of the employment opportunities that these investments created.[1] Since work was generally controlled by American businesses, maximizing profits were the companies' primary goal. Workers' rights, safety concerns, and race were always secondary. The secondary issues triggered debate over the exploitation of migrant workers at the expense of business interest. Despite these issues, the Jamaica Gleaner and other archival sources revealed that the monetary gains from American businesses inevitable led to Jamaican immigration.

[1] Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 2020), 26.

Given that their migration to Central America was triggered by American commercial interest in the area, it is worth noting the British response. When the Americans began pumping their dollars into the newly independent Central American countries, Britain maintained its political dominion over Jamaica. However, as the agricultural economy on the island declined after emancipation, British economic support waned. Britain, nonetheless, tried to regulate the emigration to Central America. For instance, migrants traveling independently to the Isthmus (Panama Canal) were required to pay £1 5s to the colonial government. Additionally, recruiting agents were required to pay £2 for every laborer hired on the island. Similar preventive measures were enforced in other West Indian territories, such as Barbados, where colonial officials tried to tie peasants to their parishes in a system akin to the medieval feudal system.[2] Given their British-Christian roots, rather than states or provinces, West Indian countries use parishes to define areal boundaries. Tying peasants to parishes were basically a "departure tax" implemented to discourage emigration from a particular area. Nonetheless, the Americans' continuous expansion in Latin America created such an acute demand for cheap labor that the preventive measures eventually faltered under the weight of the almighty American dollar. The American business expansion can also be viewed as a "changing of the guard" between the United States and Great Britain in the West Indies regarding who exerted the most influence on these islands.

Women were also quite influential in the Jamaican immigrant experiences abroad. Therefore, how women pursued opportunities and how they fared abroad requires special

[2] In Barbados, the Masters and Servants Act of 1840 was designed to tie freed persons to their former place of employment. See Sharon Milagro Marshall, *Tell My Mother I Gone to Cuba: Stories of Early Twentieth-Century Migration from Barbados* (Kingston: The University of The West Indies Press, 2016), 29-30, Kindle.

attention. As such, the story of Martha Gayle offers an opportunity to elaborate on how women traveled abroad, contrary to the wishes of both British colonial authorities and Jamaican men. Not only did women leave, but those who migrated were exposed to more sophisticated means of empowerment. At the turn of the 20th century, Jamaican women migrated to Central America and the United States and took on roles akin to their male counterparts. Many became financial remitters and facilitators for others to join them in their host countries. Hence, it is worth examining the struggle and successes of women in this movement, comparing their migration experiences with those of their male counterparts.

To what extent did Jamaican experiences in the United States create new worldviews among the diasporic community? An analysis of some key figures in New York highlights how their confrontations with American racism radicalized them as political agitators. Unlike those who went to Central America on seasonal work, the Jamaicans who arrived in New York stayed. While many viewed themselves as sojourners, the longer they remained in the United States, the more they became resentful of American racism. Though the experiences of these few do not speak for all Jamaicans, their stance was held by many Jamaicans who came from an island where Black people were the majority, and Black identity was celebrated rather than condemned. Their experiences speak to issues concerning labor migration and race relations in the United States.

Emancipation Marginalization and Emigration in Jamaica

The developments that sparked Jamaican emigration stemmed from emancipation and British neglect. When Britain abolished slavery throughout its empire, its focus was on how to compensate the enslavers with no regard on how to rehabilitate the formerly enslaved. Britain implemented a six-year apprenticeship system, which was merely an extension of slavery since the formerly enslaved were forced to continue working on plantations without pay. The contentious apprenticeship was abandoned after four years with full emancipation in 1838. Even after the apprenticeship was terminated, the formerly enslaved could not negotiate for meaningful wages because the plantocracy successfully argued for the introduction of contract laborers from British colonies in Asia, who competed with Jamaicans for work. For example, the colonial government imported 2,438 Indian laborers in 1847 and 53,811 Chinese contract workers in 1877.[3] Their arrival brought the island (and the planters) some limited economic success in that the production of export crops, especially sugar, had the chance to rebound after a brief post-emancipation decline. However, the arrival of so many indentured workers angered the peasantry since the government used taxes to subsidize Asian migration, and plantation owners used immigrants to drive down wages.[4] British colonizers cared little about such concerns because, from the onset, they had designed the island as an agricultural colony to extract slave-produced resources.

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[3] On Jamaican ethnicity see Edward Seaga, "The Critical Role of Jamaican Migration," *The Jamaica Observer*, February 11, 2018; Edward Seaga, *My Life and Leadership* (Kingston: MacMillan Education, 2009); Jacqueline Bishop, *My Mother Who is Me: Life Stories of Jamaican Women In New York* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006); Lee Tom Yin, *The Chinese in Jamaica* (Ann Harbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963); Kate Phillips, *Bought and Sold: Slavery, Scotland and Jamaica* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 2022); and Ian Thomson, *The Dead Yard: A Story of Modern Jamaica* (New York: Nation Books, 2011).

[4] Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 349-353.

Given that the island was a slave colony, Britain did not make any long-term infrastructure investment beyond what it could produce. There were only a handful of church-funded primary schools and even fewer secondary schools. Though the importation of Asian indentures put a band-aid on the labor situation, competition from Brazil, Cuba, and European beet sugar drastically decreased the price of the commodity and subsequently reduced Jamaica's significance to the Crown. As a result, the island declined into a degree of self-governance with nominal London oversight.[5]

Although Jamaica was never an autonomy, it always enjoyed varying degrees of managing its own internal affairs. This became more enunciated after emancipation. In fact, emancipation was the last nail in the coffin. It was the last act in which Britain felt the need to intervene directly.[6] With the seismic rise of Cuban and Brazilian sugar production in the 1820s, coupled with the abolition of the slave trade and slavery itself in 1834, Jamaica was no longer profitable to the Crown. Having been reduced to an afterthought, the island exercised self-governance with its own legislature. Jamaica was, in essence, ran by a white minority with their own self-interests and complete disregard for the welfare of the Black majority around them.

What the white Jamaican minority failed to realize was that the disregard for Black lives was creating a simmering angst towards them. Rather than reforming and

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[5] For more on the history of Jamaica see: *Edward Long, The History of Jamaica or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of that Island: With Reflections On Its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government* (London: T. Lowndes, 1774); Thibault Ethrengardt, *The History of Jamaica from 1494 to 1838* (n.p.: Jamaica Insula Series, 2015), Kindle; Tom Zollner, *Island on Fire: The Revolt That Ended Slavery in the British Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020); Orlando Patterson, *The Confounding Island: Jamaica and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); and Phillips, *Bought and Sold*.

[6] See Rex A. Hudson and Daniel J. Seyler, "Jamaica," in *Islands of the Commonwealth Caribbean: A Regional Study*, ed. Dennis Michael Hanratty and Sandra W. Meditz (Washington, D.C: Library of Congress, 1987), 50-72.

making concessions for the formerly enslaved to better themselves, they governed emancipated Jamaica in the same manner as enslaved Jamaica. In the mid-1800s, some mixed-race individuals, known as mulattos, managed to enter the Jamaican legislative body. They could have advocated for the Black majority. However, they found themselves grappling with the dilemma of either supporting Black rights or preserving their own privileged status amongst the white minority. A few mulattos did sympathize with the plight of the Black population, but most were content with their position as superior to Blacks, though not on par with whites. The contempt of the elite towards the welfare of the Black population, coupled with the mulattos' desire to maintain their status at the expense of the Black majority, created an environment ripe for a revolution.

To make matters worse, the latter half of the nineteenth century brought additional problems for the island's peasantry. An epidemic of smallpox devastated Jamaica from 1850-1851, wiping out an estimated eight percent of the population.[7] In 1865, floods and droughts decimated crops, leading to food and clothing shortages and high prices. In addition, employment opportunities outside of the plantations were scarce, and the formerly enslaved people had to compete with indentured servants who were brought in around the same time. Compounding these challenges were government-imposed taxes that disproportionately affected the poor. Rather than acknowledging that the combination of economic depression, heavy taxation, and lack of opportunities was leading to social unrest, poverty, and crime, the plantocracy attributed the difficulties of the poor to their supposed laziness, barbarity, and immorality.[8]

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[7] Mary Elizabeth Thomas, "Quarantine in Old Jamaica," *Caribbean Studies* 4, no. 4 (January 1965); 91.
[8] Gad Heuman, *The Killing Time: The Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 44-48.

The festering internal economic decay eventually erupted into the Morant Bay Rebellion on October 11, 1865, in the parish of St. Thomas, located at the southeastern end of the island.[9] The economic hardships impelled rebellion leader Paul Bogle to march on Morant Bay, the provincial capital of St. Thomas, thereby demanding that the regional governor address the predicament of the Black populace. Upon the local governor's refusal to heed their demands, the loosely organized mob embarked on a spree of devastation, pillaging the courthouse, assassinating the regional leadership, and wreaking havoc on estates and stores owned by whites and mulattos. When news of the rebellion finally got to Kingston, a counteroffensive was sent in, and the Colonial Governor, Edward Eyre, led a barbaric suppression.[10] Eyre was dismissed for his cruel mistreatment of the rebels, but the Crown's response to the situation was less than satisfactory. Britain failed to initiate reforms that could address the critical issue of unemployment, lack of resources, and over-taxation of the poor. In the words of Queen Victoria, "it was from their own efforts and wisdom that they must look for an improvement in their condition."[11] Yet still, rather than initiating reforms to help the freed Blacks, she returned Jamaica to direct Crown rule.

On the surface, Eyre's cruelty was veneered as the reason for Jamaica's return to Crown rule. Underneath the surface, however, was an attempt to curtail the growing pro-Black influence in the Jamaican legislature. The story of George William Gordon, a wealthy mulatto assemblyman for the Morant Bay region and a staunch Eyre critic, was

[9] For more on the Morant Bay Rebellion and its aftermath see: Heuman, *The Killing Time*; Horane Smith, *Morant Bay: Based on the Jamaican Rebellion* (Kingston: Yardley Books, 2017); and "The Late Rebellion in Jamaica: The History of the 1865 Morant Bay, Jamaica, Rebellion," *The Ohio Statesman* correspondent for *New York News*, December 6, 1865.
[10] "The Late Rebellion in Jamaica;" and Heuman, *The Killing Time,* 43.
[11] Seaga, "The Critical Role of Jamaican Migration."

indicative of the situation. Predictably, he was found guilty of being a rebellion sympathizer and hanged for treason. Emancipated Jamaicans could, in theory, join the assembly if they accumulated enough wealth and land.[12] The likelihood of such a scenario, i.e., a few more Gordons in the assembly, meant the threat of an independently Black Jamaica was quite real. The Queen's message and Jamaica's return to direct Crown rule were clear signals that Britain took this threat very seriously and was not interested in the freed Blacks' complaints. Many Jamaicans interpreted the Queen's message as validation that neither the colonial government nor the Crown wanted to improve their situation. Therefore, it was up to them to create their own opportunities, and with no real prospects at home, overseas employment became a viable alternative. Thus, the lack of resources at home and Britain's complicit failure to address the situation compelled many Jamaicans to seek opportunities abroad.

Was immigration the only alternative? When a society's existing social conditions cannot meet its citizens' needs, at least at a minimal level, they will naturally consider emigrating to a foreign land to satisfy their unmet needs and overcome deprivation. This sentiment resonated deeply with the situation in post-emancipation Jamaica. The Black majority could not successfully overthrow the government through either legislative or revolutionary means. When the Queen returned the island to Crown rule, it closed the window for mulattos or a Black gentry to overpower the colonial government through legislative means. In addition, any threat of rebellion would have been rapidly suppressed by the Royal Navy and military regiments deployed to the island following the Morant Bay Rebellion.[13] Given that it was a small island with limited resources, there were no

[12] Heuman, *The Killing Time,* 44-48.
[13] Heuman, *The Killing Time,* 120.

migratory alternatives within Jamaica itself either. Fortunately, agricultural work was readily available in Latin America, and Jamaicans responded with a *carpe diem* attitude. Although this was not the intended outcome of Bogle's rebellion, its aftermath triggered a perpetual path of emigration that compelled Jamaicans to seek employment abroad. Over time, this strategy became an expected aspect of the adult life cycle, akin to a rite of passage.[14]

Migration to Central America

A recurring theme throughout Caribbean history is the propensity for American interests to fill the void left by Britain's diminishing presence. This pattern was exemplified by instances such as when British attention waned following the decline of the sugar industry, prompting American corporations like the United Fruit Company (UFC) to seize the opportunity to capitalize on the surplus of Jamaican labor by investing in the island. The UFC, founded by Lorenzo Dow Baker, first ventured into the sale of Jamaican bananas in Jersey City, New Jersey in 1870. Baker sold the bananas for $2.25 per bunch and made $1,368.00. Subsequently, recognizing the potential for huge profits, Baker expanded the company's footprint across the island.[15] Given the abundance of labor available, the UFC quickly became one of the largest employers, with a greater output and influence than the sugar factories that were still in operation after the sugar bust. The British colonial government welcomed the presence of the UFC on the island, viewing the American company as an ally that could alleviate the widespread

[14] Terry-Ann Jones, *Jamaican Immigrants in the United States and Canada: Race, Transnationalism, and Social Capital* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2008), 5.
[15] Dan Koeppel, *Banana, The Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World* (New York: Hudson Press, 2008), 52-56.

unemployment crisis by creating job opportunities for the local population. This alliance underscored the symbiotic relationship between American corporate interests and British colonial authorities, further solidifying the United States' growing influence in the Caribbean region during this period.

Baker established his headquarters in Port Antonio, in Portland parish, dispatching ships there to transport cargo and passengers from Jamaica to Central America, where the company also acquired estates.[16] Thus, the UFC served a dual purpose: it employed people on the island; and it transported laborers to the newly acquired American estates in Central America. As a result, it was Central America, not the United States, that Jamaicans first started to emigrate. Though other shipping vessels transported migrant workers to Central America, the dual role of the UFC makes it particularly noteworthy.

Work in Central America was primarily centered around the Panama Canal. Unskilled laborers working on the canal earned between $1.50 and $2.00 daily, which was four times the prevailing rate for agricultural work in Jamaica at the time. Men working through contracting firms could opt to work on a piece-rate basis and earn 20 cents for each cartload of soil removed from the canal. Consequently, some unskilled workers earned more than $5.00 daily if they worked diligently. Skilled workers, primarily artisans and carpenters, earned between $2.00 and $5.00 per day, depending on the rate paid to unskilled laborers and whether the individual worker signed up directly through a contracting firm. As news of these wages spread throughout Jamaica, tens of thousands of people were eager to go to Panama despite the disease-ridden environment,

[16] Barbara A. Fuller, "A History of Portland Parish, Jamaica, 1723-1990s" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1999), 69.

high mortality rates, and Jim Crow-style racism that came with working for Americans. Their eagerness to leave the island in spite of these difficulties speaks volumes about the state of the Jamaican economy rather than the unpleasant conditions of working in Panama.[17]

While other West Indians also answered the call for labor on the Panama Canal and the United Fruit Company's banana estates, Jamaicans were the largest group by far. In his book, *Holding Aloft The Banner of Ethiopia*, historian Winston James notes that although Jamaica only accounted for forty percent of the West Indian population, it had more than fifty percent of the foreign laborers in Panama. By the turn of the 20th century, over 170,000 Jamaicans had come to the shores of Panama for work. These figures would have been higher had the colonial authorities granted the Isthmus Canal Commission unrestricted authority to recruit laborers from the island. Hiring laborers were mainly carried out by recruiting agents. These agents were often West Indian businessmen and representatives of the Isthmus Canal companies who were paid according to the number of workers they supplied. The agents typically placed ads in newspapers, posters and hired scouts to round up laborers.[18]

An additional 60,000 Jamaican workers ventured to Costa Rica and Honduras in the early 1900s to work on banana estates and railroad projects. These laborers were

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[17] Beginning in the late 19th century, Jim Crow laws were state and local laws that enforced racial segregation and black disenfranchisement, primarily in the Southern United States, until they were abolished in 1965. See also Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Irma Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and The Harlem Community, 1900-1930* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1996), 14-16; "The Conditions That Are Now Prevailing on The Isthmus of Panama," *The Jamaica Gleaner*, February 10, 1906; and Herbert G. deLisser, "The Question of a Protector for Jamaican People Abroad," *The Jamaica Gleaner*, June 9, 1913.

[18] "Recruitment, Colon Man and the Panama Experience," National Library of Jamaica Digital Collection, accessed May 15, 2024, https://nljdigital.nlj.gov.jm/exhibits/show/colon-man-panama-experience/recruitment.

recruited by agents, much like those who traveled to Panama, with little mention of the harsh conditions they would encounter or any formal contracts signed prior to departure. After the fittest were selected for employment, the companies had the benefit of negotiating wages as they saw fit.[19] The Jamaicans who went to these Central American countries were an integral part of the Jamaican immigration history to New York as there was a direct linkage between Martha Gayle and her uncle in Costa Rica. However, the demand for labor to undertake the grand canal project meant that Jamaican migration to Panama overshadowed these other regions.

After the Panama Canal was completed, many Jamaicans were happy to learn that Cuba was offering competitive wages on plantations backed by American financiers. The remittances sent home by those in Cuba boosted Jamaica's economy, much like those who went to Central America. Remittances were commonly sent through letters via mail and with family members on return visits, which allowed migrants to maintain connections to their homeland. An estimated 83,805 Jamaicans migrated to work on Cuban plantations, with some migrants directly financing their relatives' travel to New York. The story of David C. Hurd illustrates the impact of Jamaican migrant workers in Cuba. At twenty-two years old, Hurd was fortunate enough to finance his emigration to Brooklyn in 1907. In 1914, he befriended and eventually married his pen pal, Avril Cato. Cato was the daughter of a Jamaican migrant worker from Cuba. After endorsing Hurd's courtship, her father was kind enough to assist her with her passage to New York. Their

[19] "Recruitment, Colon Man and the Panama Experience."

union served as a compelling testament to the influence of Jamaican migrant workers from Cuba.[20]

To accentuate the significance of the laborers who went to Central America and their significance in later migration to New York it is worth highlighting their entrepreneurship, investments, and job creation on the island. A few of those who return from Panama, for example, became shopkeepers who employed people as clerks. A few individuals who worked for Colon Men (as they were often called by Jamaicans at home) saved for their own passage aboard vessels bound for New York.[21] Thus by reinvesting their Panama money in the island, the Colon Men created capital for those who also sought their own fortunes overseas.

In a Gleaner article dated June 9, 1913, the editor, Herbert G. de Lisser, postulated that Jamaicans who resided abroad were predisposed to remit substantial amounts of money to their homeland. He expounded on this idea, disclosing that a Jamaican gentleman in Costa Rica confided in him that he had facilitated the transfer of thousands of dollars back home for Jamaican laborers who desired to assist their relatives.[22] In 1912, the Jamaica Gleaner reported that more than 60,000 pounds per annum were sent to Jamaica from Central America by workers who sought to aid their kin back home.[23] It is conceivable that family members used these funds to finance their migrations to New York. These remittances flowed primarily from Panama, Costa Rica,

[20] David C. Hurd letter to Avril Cato, May 26, 1914, David C. Hurd Papers, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library.
[21] The term 'Colón Man' is the general name given to men who emigrated to Panama in the 1800s in search of work opportunities on the Panama Canal. Colón is the name of a town on the Atlantic end of the canal and was the main port of call for ships from the West Indies. See "Colon Man, and The Panama Experience."
[22] "The Question of a Protector for Jamaican People Abroad."
[23] Ibid.

and Cuba. A Jamaica Gleaner article dated April 10, 1919, summed up the occurrence best:

> We owe something to the Jamaican workers in foreign counties, Jamaica with her underdeveloped industries had no work to offer them: had they remained here they must further have depressed the labor market and possibly helped to swell the ranks of the praedial thieves. They have emigrated to Costa Rica, Panama, and Cuba, but they have never forgotten their native land. They have not neglected their relatives. Year by year in the past large sums of money came from Central America to parents from connections of men in Central America, and today large remittances are coming from Cuba.[24]

For Jamaican migrant laborers, the call for work in Central America appeared to be divine intervention following the aftermath of the Morant Bay Rebellion. However, they were not the only West Indians to converge on the area for employment. In *Brown Girl Brownstone*, Bajan American Paule Marshall declared that her mother had journeyed to the United States using money inherited from an older brother who had passed away while working on the canal. "Panama Money, as it was often referred to when I was a child, was spoken of with great respect," Marshall added.[25] These West Indians were flocking to Panama for the same reasons as were their Jamaican counterparts. Chronic unemployment was rampant throughout the islands due to British neglect after slavery was abolished. West Indians across the Caribbean Sea were underpaid, unfairly taxed, and systematically exploited without adequate legislative representation in their colonial governments to bring about any significant change. Therefore, their decision to seek employment overseas was relatively uncomplicated.

Jamaicans in Latin America shaped migration to New York not only monetarily but also by returning to the island with new customs and experiences from their travels, which they shared with their fellow compatriots upon their return. From 1882 to 1915, an

[24] "Opening the Question."
[25] Paule Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (New York: Dover Publications, 2009), 18.

estimated 119,407 Jamaicans returned home out of the 168,888 who had left the island to work in Panama.[26] These returnees were perceived as more worldly and experienced by those at home, building up expectations through their acquisition of new clothes, jewelry, and habits. Their newfound wealth and success earned them the respect of their neighbors, who admired their conspicuous consumption and apparent socioeconomic status. As a result, a new fascination with material consumption and status enamored the island, prompting many to turn their sights to the United States, the origin of this material wealth and a means of upward mobility.

The United States was undeniably the source of their material wealth, as American money was always involved wherever Jamaican migrants went. Americans provided employment opportunities for projects such as the Panama Canal, the United Fruit Company's estates in Central America, and American-financed plantations in Cuba. Given the strong American influence, it was fitting that these migrants eventually turned their attention to the United States itself. New York City, in particular, was the ideal destination because of its flourishing economy, cultural diversity, and established reputation as a haven for immigrants.

Early Migration to The United States

On Wednesday, April 16, 1924, Martha Gayle boarded the UFC's SS Alegria in Portland, Jamaica, bound for the opportunities that awaited her in New York. Six days later, Gayle was one of many Jamaican immigrants who disembarked in New York

[26] James, *Holding Aloft The Banner*, 29.

amidst the euphoric Black migration to the city.[27] Although their arrival was noticeable to Americans, Jamaican migration was not new. The SS Alegria's pointed journey to New York symbolized a shift in Jamaican migration from Central American to New York. Gayle's arrival and movements in the city allow us to assess the micro-social networks Jamaican immigrants used to relay information between the island and New York. Maintaining homeland ties not only helped separated family members maintain contact, but they would also play a pivotal role in later migrations.

Gayle, the second eldest of five children, was born on October 22, 1902, to Olivia and Richard Gayle, who were of modest means. Her father was a laborer, and her mother was a housewife.[28] Nevertheless, Martha was well-educated and ambitious. Like most young Jamaicans, she believed education was the key to success. Should that fail, emigration was the next natural path. With her family having already encouraged her elder sibling to emigrate in search of better opportunities, it was routine for Martha to also exercise her rite of passage.

She accordingly made the trek from her rural village of Lewis Town in St. Elizabeth parish to Port Antonio, Portland parish, some 147 miles away, to board the *SS Alegria*, bound for New York. That the SS Alegria was owned and operated by the UFC further compounded Jamaica's economic predicament and solidified the UFC's place in the island's immigration history.

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[27] The Marth Gayle Collection showed that Gayle departed Jamaica at Port Antonio on April 16, 1924 and arrived in New York on April 22, 1924. See document showing Martha Gayle's arrival at Ellis Island on April 16, 1924, Box 1, Folder 1, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.

[28] Martha Gayle Birth Certificate, November 22, 1902, Box 1, Folder 1, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.

Jamaican migration to the United States can be understood in two great waves: 1900 – 1930s and 1965 – present. Gayle's story can be situated in the context of both migration waves from Jamaica to the United States. Her story commenced with the first cohort of Jamaican immigrants. Their legacy is imperative because they have irrefutably set the foundation for the post-1965 cohort. It was the systems that the first wave had put in place, mainly establishing themselves in New York and maintaining transnational ties with the island, from which the second wave benefited. Consequently, Gayle and the first wave were trailblazers for their compatriots and the West Indian community at large.

How did Gayle and the first wave of immigrants find themselves in New York? Jamaicans had strong perceptions of New York which influenced their decision to emigrate. Despite being British subjects, the United States held significant cultural influence for Jamaicans due to the pervasive presence of American news and popular culture on the island. Most believed the US was a "land of opportunity" for those striving to elevate their social standing. Given Jamaica's minimal employment opportunities, most of the island's workforce relied on low-paying agricultural jobs or menial service sector employment. Those with access to tertiary education could plausibly have resuscitated the economy, but such opportunities required state-sponsored scholarships to Britain. The island's limited education opportunities and lack of a well-developed industrial and economic infrastructure helps put into perspective why Jamaicans perceived the United States as the promised land. Emigration to the United States signaled an impulse to attain greater education and economic and social standing.[29]

[29] On West Indian immigration to the United States see: Nancy Foner, *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Irma Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations*; Mary C. Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities*

Migration was not new to some of those who left for New York. Many were veteran laborers from Central America who refused to remain on an island with chronic unemployment and underemployment. Debatably, the argument can be made that the migrants would have gone straight to the United States had there not been a demand for their labor by American companies in Latin America. Once the Americans finished their projects, Latin American governments curtailed imported labor to safeguard their domestic workforce. This made return migrants' departure to New York relatively straightforward. Moreover, Jamaica was a frequent port of call on the Panama to New York route for steam liners, such as the United Fruit Company fleet, the Hamburg-Amerika Line, Elders and Fyffe's Limited, and the Pickford and Black Limited. Even the chief engineer of the Panama Canal, General Goethals, stopped in Kingston on his way back to New York after completing the canal. When asked about the future of the Jamaicans in Panama, an unconcerned Goethals stated that he did not believe they would remain in Panama or return to Jamaica. Notwithstanding, many Jamaican laborers followed Goethals's path, stopping briefly in Jamaica before moving on to New York.[30]

The six-day journey from Jamaica to New York was short but expensive. When Gayle boarded the S.S. Alegria in 1924, a ticket from Kingston could sell for as much as sixty-five dollars. Accounting for inflation, this would be roughly $1,147.33 in 2023. Given that her parents were of modest means, it was highly probable that Gayle's uncle,

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(Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999); Phillip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Tammy L. Brown, *City of Islands: Caribbean Intellectuals in New York* (University of Mississippi Press, 2015); and James, *Holding Aloft the Banner*.

[30] General George Washington Goethals was a Brooklyn born United States Army General and civil engineer. He was charged with the supervision and construction of the Panama Canal. See: "General Goethals Interviewed During Short Visit to Kingston on way to New York," *The Daily Gleaner,* May 29, 1916; and "Jamaicans Returning from Panama," *The Daily Gleaner*, February 16, 1916.

who went to Costa Rica, used remittances to help offset the cost of her passage.[31] To put things into perspective, it would take an unskilled laborer in Panama roughly six weeks to earn that amount. An agricultural worker on the island needed half a year to do the same. Being that Gayle was unemployed, and no evidence exists to suggest that she self-financed her passage, the role of those who went to Central America in aiding the inaugural wave of Jamaican migration to New York cannot be overstated.

New York was not the sole urban destination first-wave Jamaican immigrants pursued in the United States. For instance, political activist Wilfred Domingo first migrated to Boston in 1910 before moving down to Harlem two years later. Likewise, Luther Powell, the father of US Army General Colin Powell, emigrated to Philadelphia in 1920, then moved up to New York three years later, where he met Powell's mother in Harlem. Regardless of their initial port of entry, immigrants like Domingo and Powell Sr. were drawn to New York for a particular reason. The city's considerable Black population provided a sense of identification and offered some protection against the racial backlash they would have experienced elsewhere in the United States.

Although no official record exists regarding the number of Jamaicans who migrated to New York during the first wave, it is estimated that 85,000 West Indians entered the United States between 1900 and 1930, with over 55,000 residing in New York.[32] Jamaica's population averaged over 800,000 in the 1920s. That figure was 60% greater than second-placed Trinidad. Hence, it is logical to conclude that Jamaicans

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[31] In her interview, Shirley Miller (also called Petal - Gayle's grandniece) stated that Gayle had an uncle who went to Costa Rica in the early 1900s. She also stated that the family still has relatives in Costa Rica. It is highly likely this uncle helped paid her passage to New York. See Miller, Shirley, interview by author, Queens, NY, March 25, 2023.

[32] Adapted from US Department of Labor, Bureau of Immigration, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of General of Immigration to the Secretary of Labor*, 1899-1937.

accounted for at least 40% of the first wave of West Indian immigrants who resettled in New York.[33] A conservative estimate would suggest that at least 22,000 persons.

When Jamaicans and West Indians began migrating to New York in the early 1900s, they were not the only Black immigrants who gravitated towards the city. African Americans, eager to escape the oppressive Jim Crow South, also embarked on the journey northwards in search of better opportunities. For African Americans, the densely populated city offered job opportunities and insulation from Jim Crow racism. For Jamaicans, the decision to migrate to New York was purely economic. As will be discussed later, racism was something they had to learn to endure. The convergence of African Americans and West Indians in one place fashioned in a unique blend of immigrants, unrivaled elsewhere in the United States. At a time when the city was becoming a sanctuary for European immigrants, it was concurrently providing refuge for Black immigrants, both foreign and domestic. Hence, the city became a beacon not only for foreigners but also for Black domestic immigrants.[34]

The vast majority of Black immigrants that came to the city in the early 20th century went to Harlem. As a result, most of the literature focuses on Harlem when discussing early West Indian migration to the United States. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the city evolved into an overcrowded metropolis, with predominantly European tenements on the Lower East Side of Manhattan juxtaposed with the towering skyscrapers downtown. Historian Richard Plunz observed that "by

[33] G. E Cumper, "Population Movements in Jamaica, 1830-1950," *Social and Economic Studies* 5, no. 3 (1956): 261–80, accessed February 10, 2023, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27851071.
[34] See: Ira de Augustine Reid, *The Negro Immigrant: His Background, Characteristics, and Social Adjustment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969); Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations*; and James, *Holding Aloft the Banner*.

1900, more than 80,000 tenements were constructed in greater New York City, housing a population of 2.3 million out of a total city population of 3,369,898."[35] Amidst it all, the Empire State Building was erected in 1931, standing tall at 1,250 feet. It symbolized New York's emergence as a modern, industrial, and capitalist city with a diverse population. Amidst all this modernity, white residents began vacating Harlem for Brooklyn and Long Island, leaving real estate opportunities for Black entrepreneurs. Consequently, Harlem transformed into a predominantly Black neighborhood, home to the "New Negroes" and the "Negro Metropolis."[36]

Amidst the prevalent focus on Black Harlem during the early 20th century, it is often overlooked that Blacks were also migrating to Brooklyn. Figures such as Martha Gayle, her sister, and David Hurd embody a contrasting narrative, illustrating the influx of Jamaican immigrants into Brooklyn during this period. Additionally, archival records provide evidence of Black Carolinians resettling in the borough around the same time.[37] These Black migrants served as trailblazers, laying the groundwork for the burgeoning Black community in Brooklyn. Chapter three will delve into the significance of this historical context, emphasizing its enduring importance in shaping the trajectory of Brooklyn's Black population in the years to come.

It is difficult to determine exactly how many Black people resided in Manhattan during what became known as the Harlem Renaissance, as estimates vary depending on

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[35] Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 30.

[36] See: Claude McKay, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1940) Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928); Alain Locke, *The New Negro: Voices of The Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1925); Reid, *The Negro Immigrant*; and Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations*.

[37] See I. A Newby, *Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1895 to 1968,* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973).

the source. However, most researchers concur that there were roughly 100,000 to 150,000 by 1916, with hundreds more arriving each month from the West Indies and the southern United States.[38] The ever-increasing population transformed the area east of 8th Avenue, between 130th and 145th streets, into Black Harlem. Overcrowding was undoubtedly an issue due to the concentration of so many people in such a small space, but the migrants had limited options. While New York City was more racially tolerant than the southern United States, white New Yorkers habitually practiced segregation. Thus, Black immigrants were typically confined to this area in Harlem, even if they possessed the financial means to reside in better parts of the city.[39]

In contrast to Black Americans, Europeans, or even their compatriots who migrated to Latin America, a significant portion of the early Jamaican migrants who settled in New York were skilled and educated. According to historian Winston James, the "most remarkable feature of the social and economic profile of the early [West Indian] migrants is the high proportion who, in their country of origin, held professional, white-collar, and skilled jobs."[40] Again, the Martha Gayle experience helps elucidate this notion. Even though there was no record of her having a profession before leaving Jamaica, the articulate composition in her writings showed she was an educated woman. Harlem journalist Roi Ottley made similar observations of other West Indians in the 1930s. He wrote, "many of them were skilled workers—carpenters, masons, bricklayers, tailors, printers—in trades which American Negroes lost when the race was excluded

[38] Michael Jones-Correa, "The Origins and Diffusion of Racial Restrictive Covenants," *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 4 (2000): 541–68, accessed February 10, 2023, https://doi.org/10.2307/2657609.
[39] Jones-Correa, "The Origins and Diffusion of Racial Restrictive Covenants."
[40] Brown, *City of Islands,* 226.

from the trade unions in the last century."[41] As a result, they were over-represented in the professions partially because they came from a society where Blacks were the dominant race. They did not endure the same racial handicap faced by Black Americans. There were no laws or barriers that restricted them from professional jobs. Although not all Jamaicans had unrestricted access to primary education, they came from a society where people who looked like them were police officers, judges, lawyers, and politicians.

Given their background, the first wave arrived in New York expecting good-paying jobs that complemented their skills, but instead, they learned quickly about American racism. For example, Unitarian minister, Ethelred Brown, came to New York from Trelawny, Jamaica, in 1921, hoping to put his theological training into practice. However, after an all-white leadership of the American Unitarian Association denied him funding to run his ministry, Brown had to settle for a job as an elevator operator to pay his bills.[42] Stories like Brown's were repetitive in the literature on Jamaican immigrants because employers seldom awarded Blacks middle-class jobs. Hence, it is reasonable to declare that their encounter with American racism reflected a differed American dream. Nevertheless, some immigrants happily accepted low-paying jobs such as elevator operators, doormen, shoe cleaners, and domestic workers because the pay was still better than most employment in Jamaica. Moreover, their families back home relied on them to find work quickly. Their attitude towards their employment led many white observers to consider them hardworking "good blacks."

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[41] Brown, *City of Islands*, 25.
[42] "Harlem Pastor Founder of Community Church Works Seven Days a Week as Elevator Boy," *New York Home News,* October 1, 1922.

Due to this racial reckoning, some Jamaican intellectuals evolved into political radicals and vehemently advocated for civil rights within New York's Black community. Some gave impassioned speeches challenging American racism, which turned the corner of Harlem's 135th Street and Lenox Avenue into a thriving soapbox hotspot.[43] Moreover, their immigrant zeal and refusal to conform to American racism spurred some to become political agitators and economic leaders as they strived to enact change in their new environment. As Sociologist Edwin Lewinson articulately puts it:

> In New York, West Indians not only formed a percentage of the black professionals far out of proportion to their numbers, but also became labor leaders and businessmen. Yet, the role of West Indians has largely been limited to that of leadership within the black caste. They have become doctors, lawyers, labor leaders, politicians, and businessmen within the black ghetto… They have played leadership roles within the black community, but in general have not held jobs which have not also been held by native born members of the race.[44]

Before moving on, it is worth addressing stereotyping West Indians as good Blacks in comparison to African Americans. While some scholars disagree with this term, the view has, nonetheless, guided the conversation on West Indian immigrants of the era for quite some time. Sure, there was some meritocracy to Jamaicans being hardworking immigrants, but stereotyping them as "good blacks" does not tell the whole story. Within the underbelly of these positive stereotypes lay a clash of cultures between foreign-born and American-born Blacks. Favorable views of Jamaican immigrants often implied to white America, and to a degree, Black America, that American-born Blacks were intellectually and culturally inferior. It signaled the wrong message that Black Americans' inability to climb the social ladder was their own doing. The reality was that Jamaicans were more capable of turning a blind eye to blatant racism because they did

[43] A soapbox (in relations to the Harlem Renaissance) is a makeshift stand placed on street corners and used by orators to make impromptu speeches most often on a political topic.
[44] Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York,* 52.

not see themselves as Americans. If they did, they would be labeled as Black Americans and placed at the bottom of America's social milieu. Rather than accept a low self-esteem based on some arbitrary racial characteristics, they rejected the host's ascribed identity and claimed exemption based on their foreign origin. The first wave of Jamaican migrants certainly suffered discrimination just as much as American-born Blacks. Still, they did not have the same deep-rooted connection or history in the United States. The first Jamaican settlers were working toward returning home with their pot of gold, just as they did in Latin America and the Caribbean; Black Americans did not have that option. Furthermore, Jamaican immigrants compared their earnings in terms of what it was worth back home, whereas Black Americans compared it to what White Americans made. Some immigrants willingly accepted low-paying jobs because, in their minds, they were getting paid more than what they would on the island. These actions inadvertently bolstered the biased "good blacks" narrative, while conveniently overlooking the fundamental issue of income disparities. This assertion only addressed the first wave of Jamaican immigrants. A more thorough analysis of how post-1965 Jamaicans react to race and being Black in New York will follow in chapter four.

Key Figures in Early Jamaican Migration to New York

To further expound on the Jamaican immigrant experience in New York, it is worth highlighting selected key figures and their responses to the challenges they encountered abroad. To effectively tell this story, it is necessary to take a shift from Martha Gayle. Besides the fact that she migrated to her sister in Brooklyn, there is little record of how Gayle spent her life in New York before 1945. Furthermore, narrating the

experiences of every Jamaican immigrant in the early twentieth century would be an overwhelming task. Therefore, the experience of pioneering figures such as Claude McKay, Wilfred Domingo, Ethelred Brown, and Marcus Garvey will be utilized to provide a representative snapshot of the overall pre-1965 Jamaican immigrant experience in New York. These individuals encapsulated the prevailing thoughts of the community and underscored how the Jamaican immigrant experience agitated change within the broader Black community. For instance, Domingo, McKay, and Brown labored relentlessly toward Black empowerment within New York, while Garvey spearheaded a radical Pan-Africanist movement.[45] With the exception of Garvey, these figures are seldom mentioned in the history books. Yet, through their experience, we can see how the process of immigration brings about a clash of cultures. In this case, American restrictive racism and Jamaican Black empowerment.

Wilfred Domingo was a Jamaican tailor who arrived in Boston in 1910 with high hopes of becoming a doctor. However, disheartened by his encounter with racism, he abandoned that idea and journeyed south to Harlem in 1912. Domingo enjoyed a lucrative stint in Harlem as a West Indian import-export businessman. Particularly because Harlem provided him with a better shelter to strive as a Black man than Boston. Yet, even after living in Harlem for nine years, he remained shocked and dismayed by the extent in which American racism could distort the fundamental human instincts of both whites and Blacks alike. He wrote:

> They both become indifferent to the sufferings of each other and fail to recognize that most of what they suffer is both preventable and of common origin. So marked is this attitude that it is next to impossible to rouse a white audience of workingmen to the enormity of the crimes committed against society and the black race when the latter is denied elementary justice and fair play. Equally difficult is it to awaken in the breast of negroes any resentment against a vicious

[45] Brown, *City of Islands,* 44; and Colin Grant, *Negro With A Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 10.

> system that thrives on the labor of children, the sweating of adults and the robbery of one class by another.[46]

Domingo was not only concerned with racism in New York, for he viewed it as a detriment to Jamaican society as well. With the help of compatriot Walter Adolphe Roberts, he founded the Jamaica Progressive League (JPL) in 1936. Together, they plotted to end British colonialism in Jamaica. Although the JPL did not attract a large following in New York, it eventually fused with Jamaica's People's National Party (PNP) in the 1940s.[47] In essence, the JPL served as a transnational entity that became the overseas wing of the PNP in which expatriates could actively participate in Jamaica's independence movement. Domingo's migration to New York allowed him to become a political activist for Blacks there and created a platform to end centuries of colonial oppression in Jamaica. Henceforth, through his experiences with racism in New York, he recognized the necessity to provoke political change on two fronts: advocating for Black empowerment in New York and an independent Jamaica.[48]

Like Domingo, writer and poet Claude McKay was deeply moved by the racial injustices he encountered in the US, a reality that significantly influenced his literary output. McKay arrived in the United States in 1912, intending to study at the Tuskegee

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[46] Extracted from Senate of the State of New York, Report of the Joint Legislative Committee Investigating Seditious Activities, Revolutionary Radicalism: Its History, Purpose and Tactics with an Exposition and Discussion of the Steps Being Taken and Required to Curb It, filed Apr. 24, 1920, 4 vols (Albany: J. B. Lyon Company Printers 1920), part I, vol. II, p. 1495.

[47] The JPL fostered the creation of the PNP in the 1940s as a political party devoted to universal suffrage and self-government in Jamaica. It was through the PNP that the JPL was able promulgate Jamaica's independence. See Birte Timm, *Nationalist Abroad: The Jamaica Progressive League and the Foundations of Jamaican Independence* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2018).

[48] Wilfred Domingo letter to W. E. B. Du Bois, November 28, 1956. W. E. B. Box 146, Folder 1, Du Bois Papers 1877-1963,, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, MA; and "Comments on a possible West Indies Federation," Box 146, Folder 21, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers 1877-1963, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, MA.

Institute. However, the culture shock he experienced upon arriving in Alabama, coupled with the harsh realities of the Jim Crow South, led him to abandon his studies in agronomics and relocate to New York. It was this racial reckoning that prompted McKay to produce his most celebrated poem, "If We Must Die." In this piece, McKay argued, "if we must die, O Let us nobly die… pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!" This call to resistance was an instant hit in the Black community. In other works, like "Home to Harlem," McKay depicted Harlem and the United States from the perspective of a reverent immigrant. Despite the pervasive racism in America, he portrayed Harlem as a place where Jamaicans could thrive and often find themselves in a better financial position than they had back home. This was the general sentiment shared by most Jamaican immigrants. McKay's perspectives depict an oxymoron. In his view, and perhaps that of most Jamaicans, New York was a racist place where they could strive better than their home country.

Unitarian minister Egbert Ethelred Brown was another key figure who embodied the Jamaican immigrant experience in the early twentieth century. As a religious figure, Brown came to Harlem hoping to start a unifying church, only to find out that churchgoers in New York were not as united as he envisioned. To his surprise, the white congregation worshiped separately and exclusively by themselves. As a result, Brown founded the first Black Unitarian Church in Harlem. There was a tangible public interest in his church at 149 West 136th Street.[49] However, due to a small congregation and inadequate funds, he had to take on an odd job as an elevator operator. Brown felt this job was beneath him as a minister, and through this setback, he became a radical socialist

[49] Documents for Harlem Unitarian Church, Box 2, Folder 2, Ethelred Brown Papers 1914-1956, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, NY.

dabbling religion with politics. In fact, his church services were more political than religious. Hence, like Domingo and McKay, Brown became radicalized through their experience with American racism, and, as a result, they never fully integrated into American society. Instead, they maintained homeland ties and retained their foreign identity to shield them from their American reality. In offering more than just religious services, Brown's Unitarian Church became a place of refuge for both Jamaicans and African Americans. Through his acquaintance with Domingo, Brown became the First Secretary of the Jamaica Progressive League and represented the JPL before the West Indies Royal Commission on the feasibility of Jamaica's independence in the 1940s.[50] This clearly indicated that he had abandoned his religious roots to take on a political position that challenged the establishment.

Marcus Garvey was by far the most radical of all the key figures in early Jamaican immigration to New York in the early 20th century. His influence on the broader Black community was profound. However, given that this study is primarily concerned with Jamaican immigration history and not Garvey himself, he will only be mentioned to show how American racism created a fervent breeding ground for radical immigrants to strive. Moreover, the literature on Garvey is quite extensive for anyone interested in his place in Black history.[51] In emphasizing Garvey's impact, Robert Minor stated:

> As it turned out, it was a Jamaican who became the most widely-known Negro in America of the present day, in the role of mass leadership. Better-known Negroes there are in books, and in

[50] See Ethelred Brown Papers, 1914-1956.

[51] Marcus Garvey was a Jamaican political activist, publisher, journalist, entrepreneur, and orator. He was the founder and President of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and the African Communities League. See Grant, *Negro With a Hat*; Adam Ewing, *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); and Amy Jacque Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism* (Black Classic Press, 2014).

> literary and artistic circles, but the best-known among the toiling, unliterary masses is a man from Jamaica: Marcus Garvey.[52]

Garvey was always a stern civil rights activist from his youthful days in Jamaica. Like most Jamaican immigrants, emigration to New York was an opportunity to pursue greater socioeconomic status. Not long after arriving in New York, however, his American dream morphed into launching a Pan-Africanist back-to-Africa movement for all Blacks of the diaspora not living in Africa. Once there, Garvey argued, the "negros of the world" would build their own success story. He first launched this initiative through the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Kingston. However, it was in Harlem that it truly captured the public imagination, as Harlem offered opportunities that Kingston could not. At its peak, his organization boasted over three million followers worldwide, with 1,100 chapters spread across 40 countries.[53] It was, in essence, the largest Black organization in the world - a feat yet to be surpassed. Owing to his extensive UNIA following, Garvey became the most renowned Black figure during the first half of the 20th century, thus symbolizing a true testament to Jamaica's outsized global impact.

He first became a Black "messiah" of sorts in Jamaica, having witnessed the economic conditions of Black Jamaicans, but it was in New York where he fully endorsed the notion that Blacks cannot become successful living with whites, having experienced racism there. With his cosmic rise in the Black community, Garvey, expectedly, earned himself some powerful enemies. His charismatic charm in mobilizing

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[52] Robert Minor, unpublished and untitled essay, which begins "Eighty Miles Southward from Cuba," box 12, "Negro 1924–25," Robert Minor Collection, Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.
[53] Universal Negro Improvement Association Miscellaneous Collection 1918-1948, call number Sc MG Box 1, Manuscripts and Archives, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Harlem, NY.

the Black community led FBI head J. Edgar Hoover to label him one of America's most dangerous Black men.[54] Hoover went as far as saying, "he [Garvey] has been particularly active among radical elements in New York City in agitating the Negro movement. Unfortunately, however, he has not yet violated any federal law whereby they could be proceeded against on the grounds of being an undesirable alien."[55] Not surprisingly, Garvey was under constant surveillance. After narrowly escaping an assassination attempt, he became even more radical. He cunningly used these incidents as evidence of white suppression.

White authorities were not Garvey's only opponents. Opposition loomed within the Black community from influencers such as W.E.B. Dubois and even compatriots Claude McKay and Wilfred Domingo. DuBois once disgracefully described Garvey as "a little fat Black man, ugly, but with intelligent eyes and a big head."[56] His insult reflected a broader class conflict within the Black community in which the dark-skinned Garvey was perceived to be unequal to the light-skinned and elitist DuBois. This was not an unusual incident either, as Jamaican immigrants occasionally endured insults and internal racism from American Blacks. Despite the insult, even Dubois admired Garvey's tenacity, which explains his remark, "intelligent with hungry eyes." What Dubois mainly opposed was Garvey's pan-Africanist methodology. He preferred a strategy working for racial equality within the United States. Here, cultural background played a factor. Clearly, the American-born DuBois did not share the same worldview as Garvey. While

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[54] Grant, *Negro With A Hat,* 2.
[55] Ibid., 155.
[56] Document showing Du Bois opinion on Marcus Garvey, 1923, Box 21, Folder 3, W.E.B. Dubois Papers 1877-1963, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, MA; See also Dubois on Marcus Garvey, "Back to Africa," *Century Magazine*, 1923, in *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America,* ed. Winston James (New York: Verso, 2020), 26.

immigrants have the advantage of seeing the world beyond their shores, natives tend to be inward-looking.

Despite the opposition, Marcus Garvey held the Black community in New York in high esteem. In one of his speeches in Harlem, he proclaimed, "If the movement comes to anything, it is due to the stalwart, loyal, and race-loving American Negro who allows nothing to divide him from the truth. It is such a Negro that has helped me to make the [UNIA], and if I live and my name lives in history, this will be due to the help of my American brothers."[57] Clearly, Garvey acknowledged that African Americans played a crucial role in advancing his Pan-Africanist agenda. It is important to emphasize that while the UNIA originated in Jamaica, it was largely an African American movement. Jamaicans only made up only a small fraction of New York's Black population. The movement also had the largest membership in the American South, with around sixty percent of its branches in areas with no Jamaican or West Indian presence. It was also in the South where Blacks endured the most oppression in the United States. Though it might be a stretch, one cannot help but acknowledge the striking parallel of how an immigrant outsider came and rallied the grievance of an oppressed group similar to Hitler in Germany and Stalin in Russia.

Collectively, these men portrayed a prevailing view of foreign nationals who found themselves at odds with the sociocultural fabric of the host country. In this case, their Jamaican upbringing was at odds with the racial norms of the United States. As a result, they created their own means of resistance. Through their experiences, it was obvious that immigrant communities were likely to become hostile when the host country

[57] James, *Holding Aloft the Banner*, 135.

did not welcome its guests with open arms. The big takeaway from their experience is that host countries ought to be more tolerant of the people they are inviting; otherwise, they risk alienating a group of people, which can become problematic for the larger society.

Women in Early Jamaican Migration to New York

The role of women migrants is one of the most overlooked perspectives in West Indian immigration partially because deportable labor is structured around male migrant workers. Nevertheless, Jamaican women were active participants in labor migration, and addressing their participation furthers the broader conversation on women's migration network as a global phenomenon. Investigating migrant networks – and the specific conditions affecting women – begin the recovery of hidden histories previously ignored and allows for an educational re-engagement with the more extensive record of Black immigrants in the first half of the twentieth century. Race, color, class, and gender all greatly impacted Jamaican women's migration, settlement, and work life. These are recurring themes with their male counterparts, except gender makes their experience quite different.

According to the 1930 census, there were around 55,000 foreign-born Black immigrants in New York City, and roughly ninety percent were from the West Indies.[58] Though it is difficult to know the exact number of Jamaican women in New York at that time, within the West Indian community, an estimated forty-five percent

[58] "Immigration by Region and Selected Country of Last Residence Fiscal Years 1820-1998," *1998 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (U.S. Department of Justice, 1998); and Foner, *Islands in The City*, 29.

were female. According to this estimate, foreign-born Black females comprised almost half of the Black immigrant community. Yet, the significance of their migration was not as enthralling when compared to their male counterparts. This was partially because West Indian women's migration threatened patriarchal conventions about the matrilineal role of women in colonial societies. As a result, their stories are not well documented. Martha Gayle's story, for example, has come to fruition because she defied the gender bias of her time.

Jamaican publications of the time vexingly tried to dissuade women from migrating by warning that they would find obtaining visas to the United States harder than their male counterparts. Not to be deterred, many successfully pursued New York and became facilitators for others. For instance, Domingo's arrival in Boston was made possible by his sister, who was already living there and could offer him a place to stay. Likewise, Martha Gayle's migration was made possible by her sister, whom she reunited with in Brooklyn. This chapter cannot voice the opinion of all Jamaican female migrants, but by looking at a few examples, it can at least illuminate their general experience.

When considering female migrants, leadership roles may not intuitively spring to mind. Yet, Jamaican migrant women proved exceptional in both business and civic engagements. For instance, during her time in New York, Amy Jacques Garvey (Marcus Garvey's wife) played a critical role in advancing the UNIA's mission. She also assumed considerable power and became the organization's de facto leader while her husband was incarcerated in an Atlanta penitentiary.[59] The efficacy of women in civic engagement was so pronounced that Wilfred Domingo stated they demonstrated "persistence and

[59] James, *Holding Aloft The Banner,* 138.

doggedness in fighting white labor, pioneers and shock troops to open a way for Negroes into new fields of employment."[60] He further added:

> This freedom from spiritual inertia characterizes the women no less than the men, for it is largely through them that the occupational field has been broadened for colored women in New York. By their determination, sometimes reinforced by the dexterous use of their hatpins, these women have made it possible for members of their race to enter the needle trades freely.[61]

While surveying the position of Black women in the garment and textile industry and their relationship with the trade union movement in 1931, one observer cited that "the West Indians in New York are perhaps the most active of all the Negro groups." This was congealed in the fact that a Black woman from Jamaica led the membership in the sought-after New York Dressmaker's Union executive committee.[62] Robert Minot added:

> A surprisingly large proportion of Jamaicans is found among the men and women who have become prominent in American Negro organizations which profess more or less to recognize the class line in the social struggle. Find a Negro speaker on a soapbox in a New York street who is talking something else than the white ruling class philosophy of the Republican party, and very frequently you will recognize the English accent of the Jamaican.[63]

African American women, who arrived in New York around the same time from the Jim Crow South, were well versed in racial codes and norms. As such, they were not in a hurry to break social conventions, march into factories, and demand employment. It took the "over-confident," "aggressive," and "arrogant" – adjectives Black Americans used to describe Jamaicans and West Indians – to agitate change. Of course, factory owners could have easily called the police to intervene, a request the police would have been more than willing to comply with.[64] The fact that this did not occur has led some

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[60] James, *Holding Aloft The Banner,* 138.
[61] Ibid., 84.
[62] Foner, *Islands in The City*, 31.
[63] Minor, "Eighty miles southward from Cuba,"
[64] James, *Holding Aloft The Banner*, 58; and Grant, *Negro With A Hat*, 58.

scholars to believe that their labor was in demand. Whether that was the case or not, there is no denying these women's actions in breaking racial barriers for themselves and the Black community. The increasing number of women challenging the status quo in the 1920s stemmed from their growth of self-confidence in organizations such as the Black Cross Nurses and the Universal African Motor Corps, which were relatively small units within the UNIA hierarchy.[65]

Alongside the right to employment, issues related to reproduction significantly shaped women's decisions to migrate. Contrary to the entrenched expectations of women serving primarily as caregivers within the confines of colonial society, numerous individuals rejected this parental domination, seeking increased control over their reproductive choices abroad. New York, in comparison to the restrictive patriarchal norms of colonial Jamaica, demonstrated greater progressiveness towards women's rights. Despite confronting racial barriers, the city represented a liberation from traditional gender roles. It offered women an opportunity to realize dreams beyond the stereotypical confines of childrearing and housekeeping. While sometimes these dreams were deferred, the city remained a sanctuary for second chances and redemption – a concept largely alien to the society of colonial Jamaica at the time. Take, for instance, the story of Roseanna H., a Jamaican migrant who came to New York in the 1920s, as told by Sociologist Ruth Reed:

> Roseanna H. was sent to [an] agency for guidance by the social service department of the hospital where her child had been born. The young woman, aged 23 was born in Jamaica and has been in New York City three years. She was a member of the Protestant Episcopal Church and a regular attendant. She had three years of high-school work and had been a teacher in Jamaica. She had come to New York hoping to [earn money to pay for singing lessons]. Unable to secure employment until her savings were used up, she finally secured a position doing general housework. The work was physically taxing, and she became ill and lost her job. She lived in an inexpensive but not very respectable lodging house because she was unable to afford better

[65] James, *Holding Aloft The Banner*, 242; and Grant, *Negro With A Hat*, 242.

> quarters. She stated that the man whose room adjoined hers offered to loan her money during the time she was out of employment. On one occasion she asserted that he forced himself into her room and that after that occasion she had continued terms of intimacy with him for several months and that he had given her money and presents. When the man learned that she was pregnant he wished to marry her, but she refused. She said the man was of 'unquestionable ideals and low standards of life and that she did not wish to be associated with him. When she refused to marry him, he called on her several times and was abusive. She wished the agency to assist her to secure another situation, away from the man where she would never see him again.[66]

The agency found a job for Roseanna outside of New York City, where she could keep her child with her. This was a contrasting difference from colonial Jamaica. Though it would be precipitous to conclude how Roseanna's life turned out, it undoubtedly highlighted the significance of reproductive issues, strategies, and second chances in the lives of migrant women in New York.

The allure of independence was a significant factor that drove Martha Gayle to venture across the tumultuous Caribbean Sea, aboard a ship teeming with strangers, all in pursuit of the illustrious American Dream. Gayle, who was single and child-free when she left Jamaica, made a decision that spoke volumes about her independence and courage. The society of colonial Jamaica was deeply patriarchal, and due to resource scarcity, many women found themselves relying on a male breadwinner, often marrying for financial security. It remains unclear why Gayle chose not to marry from her collection of letters. Nevertheless, her grandniece, Petal, confirmed that she remained unmarried. Regardless of her marital status, Gayle discovered that she did not have to rely on a breadwinner in New York. As Roseanna's experience demonstrated, New York was not just a place where women could find employment; it also served as a platform for

[66] Reed's 1926 study was in the tradition of the mother's aid reformers who applied moral testing and background investigations before granting eligibility. The agency in Reed's study included the Katy Ferguson Home for unwed mothers, Sloane Maternity Hospital, the Department of Public Welfare, and the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor. See Ruth Reed, *Negro Illegitimacy in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926).

second chances. While racial dynamics did influence the type of work available to Gayle, New York still offered vastly more opportunities than what was accessible to a childless, unwed woman in Jamaica.

Conclusion

As it appeared, pre-1965 Jamaican migration tend to follow American commercial interest. They first followed American business ventures in Central America and Cuba, and it was by no coincidence that they oriented themselves to New York after work seized-up in Latin America. After all, New York was the commercial hub of the United States. Their decision to go to the source of the wealth strikes an alarming parallel with recent phenomena in migration. For instance, many African migrants who clamored the shores of Europe emigrated from areas where Europeans have had a controversial history of harvesting their natural resources. Like Jamaicans, they sought to go to the source of the money. Hence, the history of Jamaican migration is a narrative that scholars and policymakers can utilize to comprehend current trends in migration.

Overall, two common themes guided the Jamaican immigrant community in New York. In one view, the United States was the land of opportunities, and New York was the gateway to those opportunities. In the second view, the immigrants' encounter with American racism led them to hold steadfast to their foreign identity as a defense mechanism. However, the longer they stayed in New York, the more they became racialized along American color lines. Americanized racism pushed some towards Black nationalist movements such as the UNIA and the JPL. It had even forced some to literally kick down doors and demand employment. As a result of these experiences, many soured

on the notion that the United States was a benevolent country. Yet, their migration continued because Jamaica offered little hope. Female migrants were also essential in maintaining transnational ties and expanding the diaspora. Their role as remitters, managing boarding houses and other lodgings, not only further the notion of transnationalism, but also influenced the development of the Jamaican diaspora in New York well beyond the 1900s. The following chapters will explore how the post-1965 wave navigated the complexities of American life and how their experience correlates or differ from other immigrant groups.

CHAPTER 2: THE HART-CELLER ACT AND ITS IMPACT ON JAMAICAN MIGRATION TO NEW YORK

> *"The bosom of America is open to receive not only the Opulent and Respectable Stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations and Religions; whom we shall welcome to a participation of all our rights and privileges, if by decency and propriety of conduct they appear to merit the enjoyment."*[1]

On the autumnal morning of October 3, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson affixed his signature to the Immigration Reform Act, fittingly, on the grounds of Liberty Island.[2] The Hart-Celler Act, as it became known, heralded a momentous change in the ethnic makeup of the United States by opening-up a legal avenue for non-white immigrants. However, the legislation's proponents neglected to consider the potential for an exponential increase in the number of non-white immigrants. The bill was passed during the euphoria of the Civil Rights movement to dismantle racial discrimination in US law. The goodwill spirit manifested in expanding the immigration quota from 100 to 20,000 persons per annum for non-western European states.[3] As a result, an influx of over 300,000 Jamaicans emigrated to New York between 1965-2003. Through the Hart-Celler Act, the tiny island of Jamaica, with a population of fewer than three million people, contributed to the largest diaspora of Black immigrants in New York.

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[1] "From George Washington to Joshua Holmes, 2 December 1783," *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 28, 2022, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-12127.
[2] Jennifer Luden, "1965 Immigration Law Changed Face of America," National Public Radio, New York, NY, May 9, 2006, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5391395.
[3] "An Act to Amend the Immigration and Nationality Act, and For Other Purposes, Pub. L. No. 89-236, 79 Stat. 911 (1965)."

Immigration Reforms on Jamaican Migration Before The Hart-Celler Act

To understand how the Hart-Celler Act created the largest diaspora of Black immigrants in New York, it is important to first assess US immigration laws' influence on Jamaican migrants. In order of significance, the Immigration Act of 1924, also known as the Johnson-Reed Act, was the first US immigration law to bear any substance on Jamaican immigration to the United States. It established immigration quotas based on nationality, aiming to restrict the number of immigrants entering the country, particularly from Asian, Southern and Eastern European countries. Through this act, the United States provided a quota of two percent the total number of people of each nationality in the United States as of the 1890 national census.[4] However, the 1924 Act did not impose quotas on immigration from the Western Hemisphere.

The Johnson-Reed Act was a racially charged immigration law that targeted non-white Western European immigrants. Given that they were British citizens, Jamaicans were able to backdoor the system by coming in under Great Britain's quota.[5] As a matter of fact, Jamaica's net migration was over five percent of its population throughout the 1920s.[6] Yet, despite not having formal quotas, Jamaicans still faced challenges in the form of racial discrimination and limitations on opportunities for migration to the United States. It was part of a broader context of racially restrictive immigration policies that affected immigrants from various regions, including the Caribbean.

[4] "The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act)," Milestones: 1921-1936, Office of The Historian, Department of State, access March 15, 2024, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act.
[5] Jamaica did not gain independence until August 6, 1962. Britain's quota was hardly being used by migrants from the metropole. Source: US Department of Homeland Security, Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 1900-1949.
[6] "Fewer Jamaicans Going to America in Search of Work," *The Jamaica Gleaner*, August 22, 1934.

Noteworthy, in 1933, the United States imposed a requirement that Jamaican applicants needed to show means of support for an indefinite period if admitted to the United States. The requirement was not because there were any legal changes to US immigration law, per se. According to the *Jamaica Gleaner* "unless an applicant can establish possession of such resources, he is, in view of the exceptional economic and employment conditions still existing in the United States, likely to become a public charge and accordingly inadmissible under Section 3 of the Immigration Act of 1917."[7] Given the agrarian state of the island, the *Gleaner* rightfully pointed out that "not many [were] able to comply with existing regulations with regard to personal resources."[8] The special imposition for migrants seeking entry to the United States was in keeping with the economic crisis of the Great Depression during the 1930s. Perhaps not surprising then that an influx of Jamaicans returned to the island during this time.

The Immigration Nationality Act of 1952, commonly known as Walter-McCarran Act, was the next significant immigration law that had a profound effect on Jamaican immigration. It was introduced by Senator Pat McCarran (D-Nevada) and Congressman Francis Walter (D-Pennsylvania). The McCarren-Walter Act became law under the guise of national security, as its drafters claimed it was necessary to safeguard the United States from communism. However, the bill's true intent was to prevent the entry of undesirable aliens, specifically non-white immigrants, into the United States. Immigration quotas from desirable Western-European countries, where the threat of communism was rife, remained largely untapped. In fact, the Library of Congress data showed 580,000

[7] "Fewer Jamaicans Going to America in Search of Work."
[8] Ibid.

Germans migrated to the United States between 1951 and 1960.[9] Similarly, more than 200,000 Cubans were allowed entry into the United States between 1953-1962.[10] Germany was comprised of social democratic West Germany, and communist East Germany, and Cuba was a fully communist state.

Opposingly, the Act, restricted migration from colonies and protectorates that could bypass the National Origins Quota system since they belonged to Western European powers. It was discernably supported by southern legislators even though they were less likely to be impacted by a surge in immigration because their constituents did not provide the same opportunities as big cities like New York, Boston, Chicago, or Los Angeles. Perceptually, the McCarren-Walter Act was in line with their history of implementing racist laws. While making no restriction on European colonizers, the bill expressly stated that "not more than one hundred persons born in any colony could enter the United States."[11] Moreover, "colonies" could easily be substituted for darker nations, as only formidable European powers had colonies. Under this new law, only a tiny quota of one hundred Jamaicans per year was allowed entry into the United States.[12]

The Walter-McCarren Act did have some positive effect on Jamaican migration as it laid the groundwork for temporary worker programs, such as the H-2 visa program. These programs allowed for the recruitment of temporary laborers from developing countries, such as Jamaica, to meet specific labor demands in the United States. The

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[9] "The Germans in America," Chronology, European Reading Room, Library of Congress, accessed March 14, 2023, https://guides.loc.gov/germans-in-america/chronology.
[10] "Crossing The Straights," Puerto Rican/Cuban Immigration and Relocation in U.S. History, Library of Congress, accessed March 14, 2023, https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/puerto-rican-cuban/crossing-the-straits/#:~:text=In%20the%201980s%20and%201990s,cheap%20plywood%20rafts%2C%20or%20balsos.
[11] "An Act to Revise The Laws Relating to Immigration, Naturalization, and Nationality; and for other purposes, Pub L. No. 414,176 Stat. 66 (1952)."
[12] Pub. L. 414,176, Stat. 66, (1952).

recruitment of temporary laborers was commonly known as the farm work program on the island because recipients of these visas typically went to work on farms in the United States. Cindy Hahamovitch, *In No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* highlights the deplorable conditions that the farm workers endured and the exploitative practices of contractors. Mark Torres made similar discoveries in *Long Island Migrant Labor Camps: Dust for Blood*. However, Torres took it a step further by noting that many farm workers deserted the program and became some of the first Black residents in some Long Island hamlets.[13] This will become a significant factor in the years to come as explained in chapter three. Hence, while the Walter-McCarran Act shut the backdoor on Jamaican immigration it also indirectly lent a hand to Jamaican migration to New York.

The McCarren-Walter Act was an unpopular piece of legislation, and its fallout was as swift as it was immediate. President Harry Truman led the charge by vetoing the bill when it was presented for his signature. However, an undeterred Congress overrode his veto with a two-thirds majority vote.[14] Opposition to the bill continued, with Secretary of State Dean Acheson and other leading consultants on immigration arguing in a report to President Truman that the McCarran-Walter Act was detrimental to US foreign policy interests because it deteriorated US relations in the Caribbean, an area close to America, close to the Panama Canal, and the sites of critical wartime bases.[15] Acheson's report revealed that the racial undertone was the most poignant of the many

[13] See Cindy Hahamovitch, *In No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); and Mark A. Torres, *Long Island Migrant Labor Camps: Dust for Blood*, (Charleston: The History Press, 2021).
[14] Philip B. Perlman et al., *Whom We Shall Welcome; Report from United States President's Commission on Immigration and Naturalization* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Govt Print Office, 1953), 54.
[15] Ibid; and "U.S. Gives Up Jamaican Site," *New York Times*, May 22, 1964.

issues with the bill. His argument was vindicated in the fact that Southern Democrats, whose party had a long history of implementing racist laws, zealously endorsed it. Acheson further advised that:

> "Immigration, like most important facets of our national life in these times, is closely linked to our foreign policy and objectives. Our immigration policy with respect to particular national or racial groups, will inevitably be taken as an indication of our general attitude toward them, especially as an invitation of our appraisal of their standing in the world. It will, therefore, shape their attitude toward us and toward many of our other policies."[16]

The Hart-Celler Moment

After years of turbulence with the McCarran-Walter Act, the United States underwent a momentous shift in its immigration policy in the 1960s. The widely unpopular bill's inevitable downfall was triggered by various factors, with decolonization in the West Indies standing out as a significant catalyst. As the colonial dominoes fell, the US recognized an opportunity to establish direct influence on its southern neighbors. In Acheson's view, easing immigration restrictions was the simplest way to exert control over them, given that these microstates had sluggish economies. Thus, reversing the Walter-McCarran Act was also a profoundly diplomatic strategy under the disguise of altruism.

Jamaica's leaders had lobbied the US to increase its immigration quota years before the Hart-Celler Act was implemented. For instance, in June 1962, Jamaican Premiere Alexander Bustamante approached President Kennedy to raise Jamaica's quota from 100 persons to something more substantial. Kennedy reiterated that the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 only allowed non-quota status to people born in independent

[16] Perlman et al., *Commission on Immigration and Naturalization,* 47.

countries within the Western Hemisphere.[17] In July 1962, Bustamante and Jamaica's Opposition Leader, Norman Manley, staged another meeting with President Kennedy to discuss raising Jamaica's quota, and the outcome was the same as the first. After the island gained independence, Minister of Finance Donald Sangster once more urged President Kennedy to expand Jamaica's quota. This time Kennedy indicated that he made his proposal to Congress, and the matter was now in their hands. Although he doubted that there would be a favorable outcome, Kennedy expressed hope for continued friendly relations between the US and Jamaica.[18]

With the Civil Rights euphoria of the 1960s, a new immigration bill, The Hart-Celler Act received an astounding 320 to 70 vote in the House of Representatives and a 76 to 18 vote in the Senate. The Hart-Celler bill, which sought to abolish the National Origins Formula that restricted non-Western European immigration to the United States, was ardently advocated for by two Democratic leaders in the 89th Congress: Senator Philip Hart (D-Michigan) and Congressman Emanuel Celler (D-New York). Congressman Celler's abhorrence for the National Origins Formula was likely driven by his own background as the son of German-Jewish immigrants and as a representative of a district in Brooklyn, a borough renowned for its cultural diversity. Yet despite their liberal views, Senator Hart and Representative Celler could not have foreseen the dramatic surge in immigration to the United States that their bill would promote. While

[17] Memorandum of conversation between President Kennedy and Premier Bustamante, and other U.S. and Jamaican officials, June 27, 1962, extracted from Foreign Relations of The United States 1961-1963,American Republics; Cuba 1961-1962;Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath, VolumesX/XI/XII, Microfiche Supplement, Office of the Historian, Department of State, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v10-12mSupp/d173; and "Jamaica's Leader Urges U.S. to End Immigration Curbs," *The New York Times,* June 12, 1963.

[18] President Kennedy Letter to Donald Sangster, 1963, Cabinet Submission – Non-Quota Immigration into the USA, Location 1B/31/489, The Jamaica Archives and Records Department, Spanish Town, Jamaica.

they aimed to eliminate the National Origins Quota system established in the 1920s and reaffirmed under the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952, they did not anticipate the enormous influx of non-white immigrants that would result from their legislation.[19] Despite this unintended consequence, the Hart-Celler Act would serve as the foundation for the Jamaican diaspora in New York, as their population would dramatically increase after 1965.

When the Hart-Celler bill was enacted, it established uniform limits of 20,000 individuals per year per country for the eastern hemisphere, with an overall hemispheric limit of 70,000. A threshold of 120,000 immigrants was initially set for the western hemisphere, with no quotas per country. However, Congress revised this to 20,000 immigrants per country per year for the western hemisphere in 1976.[20] The new immigration reform was especially advantageous for West Indian microstates like Jamaica. Within the first 15 years after the bill was passed, Jamaican immigration to the US exceeded the total number of Jamaicans who immigrated in the first half of the 20th century with an annual average of 13,000. By the 1980s, Jamaica had already reached its quota limit of 20,000 individuals per year. In the broader context of American immigration, Jamaica has been a top 10 sending country and the leading sender of predominantly Black individuals since the Hart-Celler Act's inception.[21]

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[19] Luden, "1965 Immigration Law."
[20] Philip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and The Politics of Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 26.
[21] "Here Are The 10 Countries with The Most Immigrants to The United States," US Immigration by Country 2022, World Population Review, accessed April 10, 2022, https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/us-immigration-by-country.

Table 1 West Indian Immigration by Country or Region of Birth 1960 - 1984

Country/region of birth	1960-1965	1966-1970	1971-1975	1976-1980	1981-1984
Antigua	n/a	n/a	1,969	4,131	7,124
Barbados	2,377	7,312	7,878	13,070	7,781
Dominica	n/a	n/a	1,182	3,399	2,278
Grenada	n/a	n/a	2,388	5,377	3,210
Guyana	1,434	5,760	14,320	33,211	34,194
Jamaica	9,675	62,676	61,445	80,550	81,637
Montserrat	n/a	n/a	932	1,007	583
St. Kitts-Nevis	n/a	n/a	1,960	4,474	6,327
St. Lucia	n/a	n/a	1,305	3,642	2,465
St. Vincent	n/a	n/a	1,613	3,122	2,984
Trinidad-Tobago	2,598	22,367	33,278	28,498	14,187
Other	11,343	16,806	8,489	14,125	11,186

Source: US Department of Justice, Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1960-1984.

Table 2 Caribbean Immigration From The Four Largest Countries or Regions of Birth 1900 - 1949

Country/region of birth	1900-1909	1910-1919	1920-1929	1930-1939	1940-1949
Cuba	n/a	n/a	12,769	10,641	25,976
Dominican Rep.	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,165	4,802
Haiti	n/a	n/a	n/a	207	823
West Indies	100,960	120,860	70,713	6,039	14,684

Source: US Department of Homeland Security, Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 1900-1949.

Table 3 Caribbean Immigration From The Four Largest Countries or Regions of Birth 1950 - 1999

Country/region of birth	1950-1959	1960-1969	1970-1979	1980-1989	1990-1999
Cuba	73,221	202,030	256,497	132,552	159,037
Dominican Rep.	10,219	83,552	139,249	221,552	359,818
Haiti	3,787	28,992	55,166	121,406	177,446
Jamaica	7,397	62,218	130,226	193,874	177,143

Source: US Department of Homeland Security, Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 1950-1999.

It could be contended that the Hart-Celler Act's advocates displayed a remarkable degree of candor that inadvertently exposed America's racial insularity. Indeed, the bill's backers, including President Johnson, did not foresee that it would substantially alter the ethnic makeup of new immigrants. One of the bill's most ardent supporters, Robert Kennedy (D-New York), assured critics that the number of newcomers would only slightly increase. He did acknowledge that immigration from places like Jamaica might exceed the annual limit of one hundred, but he predicted that it would stabilize at around 5,000 to 7,000 per year for the entire Caribbean.[22] Similarly, Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Massachusetts), who managed the bill on the Senate floor, reassured opponents that "the bill will not flood our cities with immigrants. It will not upset the ethnic mix of our society. It will not relax the standards of admission. It will not cause American workers to lose their jobs."[23] Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach also asserted that "this bill is

[22] Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York,* 27.
[23] Bryan Griffith, "The Legacy of the 1965 Immigration Act," Center for Immigration Studies, September 1, 1995, https://cis.org/Report/Legacy-1965-Immigration-Act.

not designed to increase or accelerate the numbers of newcomers permitted to come to America. Indeed, this measure provides for an increase of only a small fraction in permissible immigration."[24] Even President Johnson himself declared, "it will not reshape the structure of our daily lives or add importantly to either our wealth or our power."[25] They all failed to realize that by providing a legal framework for 20,000 immigrants per country, they effectively invited 20,000 immigrants from each country.

To grasp this oversight, one must consider the political climate of the 1960s. Three months before Congress passed the Hart-Celler bill, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) visited Jamaica. In his speech at the National Stadium in Kingston, King proclaimed, "I am a Jamaican, and in Jamaica, I feel like a human being."[26] Many Jamaicans were puzzled by King's statement. Little did they know about his Civil Rights movement and how it catalyzed the discourse on immigration reform for Black immigrants. Some of the very things Black Americans were fighting for, such as the right to vote and equal protection under the law, were already enshrined in Jamaica's laws. Consequently, King's struggle for Black power and equality against white oppression did not resonate with Jamaica's predominantly Black society. Although they were not immune to racism, they did not have to endure the Jim Crow-type of racism that Black Americans faced. Yet, it was King and his Civil Rights leaders' appeal for racial justice from which Jamaicans benefited when Congress passed the Hart-Celler Act amidst the Civil Rights exuberance.[27]

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[24] Griffith, "The Legacy of the 1965 Immigration Act."
[25] Ibid.
[26] Milton Vickerman, *Crosscurrents: West Indian Immigrants and Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 23.
[27] The Civil Rights Movement was a decades-long campaign that marked a major political milestone in American history. Through the work of Martin Luther King and others, it defied segregation and granted equal rights under the law to minorities.

While signing the bill into law, at the foot of Lady Liberty, President Johnson declared:

> Men of needed skill and talent were denied entrance because they came from southern or eastern Europe or from one of the developing continents. This system violated the basic principle of American democracy--the principle that values and rewards each man on the basis of his merit as a man. It has been un-American in the highest sense because it has been untrue to the faith that brought thousands to these shores even before we were a country. Today, with my signature, this system is abolished.[28]

Johnson's statement further led many scholars to assert that the demise of the National Origin Quotas was indeed propelled by the U.S. Civil Rights movement, which endeavored to eradicate racial segregation and discrimination in the United States. Some policymakers explicitly linked the passage of the Hart-Celler bill to the Civil Rights narrative. In 1964, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy affirmed, "everywhere else in our national life, we have eliminated discrimination based on one's place of birth. Yet this system is still the foundation of our immigration law."[29] Congressman Philip Burton (D-California) told the House, "just as we sought to eliminate discrimination in our land through the Civil Rights Act, today we seek by phasing out the National Origins Quota system to eliminate discrimination in immigration to this nation composed of the descendants of immigrants."[30] As one can observe, the Hart-Celler bill echoed the ethos of the Civil Rights Movement, as it squarely addressed the issue of racism in immigration.

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[28] *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965*, Volume II, entry 546, pp. 1037-1040. Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1966.
[29] "New Alien Quotas Urged by Kennedy; He Ask Congress to Erase 'Cruel' Discriminations," *New York Times,* July 23, 1964.
[30] Gabriel J. Chin. The Civil Rights Revolution Comes to Immigration Law: A New Look at the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. *North Carolina Law Review* 75: 302.

After its inception, the Hart-Celler Act was used as a diplomatic tool to placate Caribbean states from communism. Nonetheless, its concept overlaps with the ideology of the Civil Rights movement. Robert Kennedy's argument that every immigrant should be evaluated as an individual, irrespective of where they came from, was a carbon copy of Martin Luther King's vision.[31] Indeed, the idea that people should be valued based on their merits, regardless of their place of origin, was the fundamental principle of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.[32] Without the Civil Rights movement, the immigration reform bill would have undoubtedly encountered stiffer opposition in Congress, and the ensuing Jamaican migration would not have burgeoned. However, as the communists took over Cuba and sought ways to expand, the new immigration bill would be used to exert a counter-offensive across the Caribbean basin.

It is worth mentioning that although the Hart-Celler Act was passed on the coattail of the Civil Rights movement, Civil Rights leaders did not actively campaign for immigration reform. Instead, they focused on advancing Black empowerment within the United States, as the movement was primarily framed in a black-white dichotomy. Matters concerning immigration were more of a contentious issue within the Hispanic and Asian communities, and their level of support varied with each group. Some white Americans were also interested in immigration reform allowing more southern and eastern Europeans, mainly Italians and Slavic peoples, to enter the United States. Black Americans, however, were chiefly preoccupied with improving their own conditions. The Hart-Celler Act, therefore, was a byproduct of the Civil Rights movement.

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[31] "New Alien Quotas Urged by Kennedy."
[32] See Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (New York: Harvard University Press, 2006).

How The Hart-Celler Act and The 1960s Created and Impending Exodus

Outside of the Hart-Celler Act being the driver in expanding Jamaican immigration to New York, there were two other factors that accelerated its trajectory. The first was the British Commonwealth Immigration Act, and the second was Jamaica's turbulent start to independence. British lawmakers passed the Commonwealth Immigrants Act on July 1, 1962, which severely curtailed immigration from the West Indies. A month later, Jamaica was awarded independence from Great Britain on August 6, 1962.[33] As British subjects, Jamaicans were entitled to free access to the metropole. Accordingly, from 1954 to 1961, an enormous wave of 250,000 West Indians migrated there. In the year before the Commonwealth Immigration Act, a recorded 74,591 West Indians migrated to Britain. In the year of the impending law, 31,810 West Indians hastened to the metropole before it became effective on July 1st. In the latter half of that year, net migration from the West Indies dwindled to 3,241.[34]

Britain's tumultuous relationship with labor migration from its West Indian colonies can be best comprehended through the repercussions of World War II. The West Indian influx, brought in to reconstruct the metropole, produced a culture clash that the British authorities were neither equipped to handle nor willing to confront. Unlike the United States, which had a prolonged history of addressing race relations, albeit oppressively, Britain lacked an assimilating native Black population before the massive

[33] The term West Indian is used loosely here, West Indian Migration to Great Britain was mostly Jamaicans. As with other bouts of West Indian migration, Jamaicans were the most prevalent because they came from the most populous island. In fact, the Windrush Generation as they became known, was a name given after the first ship, the Empire Windrush, that took 492 Jamaicans to Great Britain in 1948. See Peter Fryer, *The Politics of Windrush* (London: Index Books, 1999), 5; and Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), 3.

[34] G. C. K Peach, "West Indian Migration to Britain," *The International Migration Review* 1, no. 2 (1967): 34–45. https://doi.org/10.2307/3002807.

influx of West Indians arrived in the late 1940s. The latter's arrival inevitably resulted in conflicts with whites who opposed their presence because they not only altered Britain's ethnic composition but also challenged white authority over them. Over time, these confrontations escalated into violent clashes, exemplified by the 1958 Notting Hill race riots.[35] As the demand for labor in post-war Britain decreased, British legislators hastily passed the Commonwealth Immigration Act to shut off the immigration valve from the West Indies, while simultaneously granting independence to these colonies.

It was clear from the outset that the island nation would need external assistance after independence. Jamaica's leaders harbored aspirations of industrialization, but it was difficult to envision that without foreign aid. In a 1963 letter, Gayle's nephew Clifford Lewis poignantly pointed out this fact declaring that "I read of the fight with your President and his Congress over the foreign aid program. Jamaica is one of the countries hoping to eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table."[36] The island was primarily agricultural, with only one natural resource (bauxite), which was privately owned, and its tourism industry relied on favorable weather conditions (i.e., hurricane-free season) and a stable political climate. Immigration, however, had always been the backbone of Jamaica's economy. It served the crucial function of remittances, providing income for much of the island's unemployed and even employed individuals.[37] Therefore, the Commonwealth Immigration Act had a deleterious effect on the Jamaican economy. Like

[35] The Notting Hill Race Riots, that occurred in Notting Hill England, were a series of racially motivated riots between August 29, 1958 and September 5, 1958. See Donald Hinds, *Journey to An Illusion: The West Indian in Britain* (London: Heinemann, 1966); Ruth Glass, *London's Newcomers: The West Indian Migrants* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961); and Pilkington, Edward. *Beyond the Mother Country: West Indians and the Notting Hill White Riots*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1988.
[36] Clifford Lewis Letter to Arnold Austin, November 13, 1963, Box 2, Folder 13, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-200, Brooklyn Historical Society, Brooklyn Public Library.
[37] "Lucky Jamaicans Have Jobs," *The New York Times,* January 22,1968.

those before them who migrated to Latin America and the United States in the early 1900s, Jamaicans in Britain consistently remitted funds to their relatives back home. Consequently, the abrupt move to curb immigration while simultaneously granting independence was a calamitous decision by Great Britain.[38]

The second factor that needs to be considered when discussing the post-1965 migration of Jamaicans to New York is the island's turbulent start to independence. The island nation had always struggled with the issue of rural-to-urban migration, but this problem escalated after gaining independence from Britain. The British departure left Jamaica's agricultural industry in a vulnerable state since it no longer had access to a readily available market to sell its goods. Consequently, many people from rural areas flocked to Kingston for work, which exacerbated the city's lack of resources, and led to shantytown development. This constant influx of migrants impeded the island's development, and progress seemed futile as the situation worsened. Moreover, given Jamaica was no longer a colony, it could not seek financial assistance from a metropole, leaving the islanders with no choice but to, once again, explore alternatives outside their borders.

Despite its new leaders' good intentions, independent Jamaica lacked the necessary infrastructure, industry, and resources to build a nation and prevent an impending brain drain. The country's weak industrial base and economic stagnation meant that it had to borrow money to finance capital investments that could expand its industrial base. However, these loans were secured at high-interest rates, leading to further borrowing to pay the interest on loans. The International Monetary Fund

[38] "A New Nation: Jamaica," *The New York Times,* August 6, 1962; and "Jamaica's Election," *The New York Times,* February 23, 1967.

attempted to help by providing a balance of payment support, but this increased Jamaica's foreign debt.[39] With the stagnant economy, the prospect of raising capital to pay off the debt seemed bleak. Consequently, the prices of goods and essential commodities inflated, leading to further economic hardships. These conditions eventually led to the need for outmigration. When the Hart-Celler Act was passed, allowing the Caribbean basin access to the United States, it inevitably created an exodus of Jamaicans seeking better economic prospects abroad.

Britain's waning influence in Jamaica and the West Indies meant that the United States not only played an increasingly important role in immigration but also in foreign policy and politics. One could even argue that Jamaica's current relationship with the US is a classic example of neocolonialism. Changing colonial hands was not a new predicament for Jamaica. It became a Spanish colony in 1494 and was later seized by Britain in 1655. Decolonization concluded with Britain's departure in 1962, and neocolonialism commenced when the US stepped in to fill the colonial vacuum. Neocolonialism, however, was a relatively new phenomenon for Jamaica in the sense that the US could exert economic, political, and cultural influence over the island without colonizing it. The US already had a significant influence on the island prior to independence. For example, the American-owned United Fruit Company was one of the leading employers on the island in the 1900s. However, the US did not need to make an official foreign policy strategy regarding Jamaica as long as its British ally was in charge.

[39] "Lucky Jamaicans Have Jobs;" and "A New Nation: Jamaica."

When Britain released its key West Indian islands, the US used the Hart-Celler Act to reel them in, and any island that resisted risked the CIA's mischief.[40]

Many Caribbean scholars have argued that the region is a site of much migratory activity, and as such, West Indians have partaken in voluntary and involuntary migration for centuries. Chapter one highlighted that, in the case of Jamaicans, it has become an expected life experience. It was exemplified when Gayle exercised her right of passage, traveling from her rural village to the port city of Port Antonio and then to New York in 1924. In a similar vein, Winnifred Miller wrote to her aunt Martha, "Can I go ahead and take out my passport because I am leaving school in July of next year?"[41] By her statement, Miller clearly believed that migration was the next step after completing high school. Before the Hart-Celler Act, opportunities abroad were created by US financiers' investments in large-scale agricultural or construction projects that required unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled labor, to which Jamaicans responded enthusiastically.[42] Even after Congress passed the Hart-Celler Act, US companies continued to play a significant role in Jamaican labor migration by employing seasonal workers. The Hart-Celler Act also made exceptions for companies to hire migrants in areas where it was difficult to find native labor. These were usually minimum-wage jobs. Much to Miller's delight, she

[40] For more on US foreign policy and the CIA in the West Indies, see Euclid Rose, *Dependency and Socialism in the Modern Caribbean: Superpower Intervention in Guyana, Jamaica and Grenada, 1970-1985* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002); Casey Gane-McCalla, *Inside The CIA's Secret War In Jamaica* (New York: Over The Edge Books, 2016); David Dusty Cupples, *Stir It Up: The CIA Targets Jamaica, Bob Marley and the Progressive Manley Government* (Create Space Independent Publishing, 2012); and Marlon James, *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (New York: Penguin, 2014).
[41] Winnifred Miller letter to Martha Gayle, October 6, 1980, Box 3, Folder 3, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library.
[42] Dawn Marshall, "A History of West Indian Migrations: Overseas Opportunities and "Safety-Valve" Policies," in *The Caribbean Exodus*, ed. Barry L. Levine (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), 20-21.

was able to travel to the United States on a seasonal work visa in the hotel industry. These seasonal opportunities were mainly on the east coast seaboard.[43]

Correspondence between Martha Gayle and her family provided a window into the opulence of New York, which inevitably fueled the desire for migration. However, the Walter-McCarren Act, which imposed restrictions on movement, hindered the aspirations of many Jamaicans. The Colonial Secretary records at the National Archives in Spanish Town, Jamaica, revealed that Jamaicans mounted significant pressure on the colonial government to secure entry into the United States. There are over two dozen letters in the archives from citizens who wrote the Colonial Secretary for assistance in obtaining entry into the United States. The colonial government's common response was that permission to enter the US rested entirely with the United States government. Applicants were advised to communicate directly with the US Consul in Kingston.[44] Despite this, Gayle sponsored her niece, Daisy Purnell, to accompany her in 1945. However, sponsorship for additional family members was unsuccessful until after 1965.[45]

American popular culture also played a significant role in influencing Jamaican emigration to the United States. It had penetrated Jamaican media and airwaves long before the British left and had been a staple of the island's culture since its independence. Spaghetti Westerns were particularly popular among Jamaican moviegoers due to their sinister bravado. Actors such as Clint Eastwood and John Wayne were admired as demigods among Jamaican movie lovers. Country ballads, disco, and rhythm and blues

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[43] For more on Jamaican farm workers, see Hahamovitch, *In No Man's Land*; and Orlando Patterson, *The Confounding Island: Jamaica and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

[44] "Emigration to the USA – Individual Inquiries from 1939 to 1962," Location 1B/5/77/24, Jamaica Archives and Records Department, Spanish Town, Jamaica.

[45] Documents Showing Martha Gayle's Affidavit of Support for family members, Box 3, Folder 14, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.

were also prevalent on Jamaican radio stations. In addition, rumors of Jamaica's picturesque beauty had brought thousands of American tourists to the island, and many ventured to the island's remotest corners.[46] As a result, American popular culture further spread throughout the island by curious tourist encounters with locals. Their inadvertent advertising of extravagance and raunchy behavior solidified the idea that the United States was a land of the free and opulent. Thus, when the Hart-Celler Act eased restrictions on immigration, Jamaicans were excited at the prospect of pursuing their aspirations in the land of Hollywood, rhythm and blues, and free-spending tourists.

In the initial twenty years following the implementation of the Hart-Celler Act, most Jamaican migrants who left the island were skilled or semi-skilled professionals.[47] This can be attributed to three factors. Firstly, the US immigration process was selective and required a certain degree of literacy. Skilled professionals, who had the necessary knowledge to navigate these policies, were also the ones with the financial resources to embark on the journey. Moreover, they were the primary targets of the new immigration law. Section six of the Act clearly states that "visas shall next be made available to qualified immigrants who are capable of performing specified skilled or unskilled labor, not of a temporary or seasonal nature, for which a shortage of employable and willing persons exists in the United States."[48] The primary labor shortage in New York was in the healthcare industry. Consequently, agencies like the Jamaica Nurses Group of New York

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[46] Ian Thomson, *The Dead Yard: A Story of Modern Jamaica* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2011) 122.
[47] See Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York,* 1992; Jacqueline Bishop, *My Mother Who is Me: Life Stories of Jamaican Women In New York* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006); Nancy Foner, *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Mary C. Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999); and Tammy L. Brown, *City of Islands: Caribbean Intellectuals in New York* (University of Mississippi Press, 2015).
[48] "Pub. L. 89-236, 79 Stat. 913 (1965)."

recruited nurses directly from the island, knowing the Hart-Celler Act postulated employment opportunities for qualified individuals.[49]

Secondly, skilled professionals were aware that migrating to the United States could potentially double or even triple their earnings, and they actively sought out opportunities to do so. For instance, a case study conducted by Marteen Nicholson on 140 Jamaican nurses who emigrated to New York City between 1950 and 1980 found that most of them had left Jamaica in search of higher incomes and better career prospects. Knowing that the Hart-Celler Act provided legal standing, American employers found it easy to recruit immigrants with skills, because New York working conditions were far superior to Jamaica. For instance, the introduction of the Medicare and Medicaid legislation increased the demand for nurses from 50,000 registered nurses in 1910 to 700,000 in 1970. Nursing services had to naturally expand to accommodate the growing number of patients. Anglophone Jamaicans were ideal candidates, and many of them answered the call, knowing that they could earn more money and work with better equipment in New York.[50]

Thirdly, Jamaica's urban decay and scarcity of resources after independence led to political instability, which the CIA exploited by manipulating the frailties of a politically unstable Jamaica. Casey Gane-McCall's work, *Inside The CIA's Secret War In Jamaica*, highlighted this phenomenon by revealing the CIA's role in creating a political turf war between Jamaica's two main political parties in Kingston. The turf war set a

[49] "Shortage in Both Private and Municipal Institutions in the City is Called Critical – Major Recruiting Drive Started Registered Nurse Shortage Found Critical in 21 City Hospitals," *New York Times*, August 1, 1966; Marteen Nicholson, "Migration of Caribbean Women In The Health Care Field: A Case Study of Jamaican Nurses," (Ph.D. Diss. City University of New York, 1985), 79; and "Jamaica Nurses Group of New York," Jamaican Nurses Group Inc, accessed June 1, 2021, https://jamaicanursesgroup.com.
[50] Nicholson, "A Case Study of Jamaican Nurses 1985," 64-83.

standard for Jamaican politics in which both parties used violent intimidation to influence election outcomes. Marlon James's *A Brief History of Seven Killings* further demonstrated the impact of this political turf war on the development of Jamaica's youth and the unfortunate urban decay. Similarly, David Cupples' *Stir It Up* illuminated how the CIA's clandestine foreign policy contributed to the island's political instability and economic collapse. The CIA's incursion was triggered by Prime Minister Michael Manley's cordial relations with communist Cuba and his move toward social democracy. Matters escalated when Kissinger flew to Jamaica and demanded that Manley publicly denounce Cuba, but Manley stood firm and decided not to do so, stating that Jamaica needed to determine its own path. As a result, the CIA launched a campaign to destabilize his government, which further exacerbated the instability in Kingston, the country's cultural center.[51] The CIA's mischief led to a panicked middle class looking for an exit.

In the 1970s, several family members wrote to Gayle about the situation on the island. In a 1971 letter, her nephew Cliff wrote, "post office robbery and bank robbery is taking place in broad daylight." He lamented, "we have to be fretting the rising cost of living but without success. The US devaluation of the dollar has forced the devaluation of the Jamaican dollar, and this had sent the prices of things up to the moon."[52] In another letter in March 1979, her nephew Julius Reynolds bemoaned, "my dear the country mash up… you have your money and you cannot get the things to buy… the place close down

[51] See "The President's Daily Brief," Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency, September 17, 1976, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0006466848.pdf; See also Gane-McCalla, *Inside The CIA's Secret War In Jamaica,* 2016; Cupples, *Stir It Up,* 2012; James, *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, 2014.

[52] Clifford Letter to Arnold Austin, July 22, 1971, Box 2, Folder 13, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY; and Clifford Letter to Arnold Austin, April 16, 1973, Box 2, Folder 13, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.

cannot get the goods to buy, everyday strike."[53] When the Jamaican middle class started to feel the impact of the CIA's mischiefs, they decried Manley's policies. He responded with, "if you do not like my policies, there are five flights a day to Miami for anyone who wants to leave."[54] Some took his advice and frantically fled to Miami, but most flew to New York, where readily available employment was easier to find.

Interestingly, the island experienced its largest outmigration during the tenure of Harvard-educated and pro-American Prime Minister Edward Seaga, who held capitalist ideals that contrasted sharply with Manley's democratic socialism. This occurrence can be understood through America's use of the Hart-Celler Act as a foreign policy to pacify a friendly regime. Dominican immigration scholar Jesse Hoffnung-Garskoff made similar revelations in his research on Dominican migration to New York. Hoffnung-Garskoff argued that whenever the United States felt threatened by Cuba getting too close to the Dominican Republic, it relaxed its visa policy to let in more Dominicans.[55] In that same manner, when Seaga became Prime Minister, more Jamaicans were let in to deter Cuba's influence.

Seaga was the first foreign leader to visit Reagan as President, and during his tenure, Jamaica's relationship with the United States far exceeded its importance to America. Reagan even paid Seaga a return visit on April 7, 1982.[56] The relationship was beneficial to America's interests, as it prevented the island from turning into a communist

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[53] Julius Reynolds letter to Martha Gayle, March 15, 1979, Box 3, Folder 5, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[54] Ramesh Sujanani, "Manley's Policies: Good or Evil," *The Jamaica Gleaner*, July 31, 2012.
[55] For more on Dominican migration to New York see Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities Santo Domingo and New York After 1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2008).
[56] "Ronald Regan Official Visit to Jamaica; met with Prime Minister Seage," Travels of The Presidents: Jamaica, Office of the Historian, Department of State, April 7-8, 1982, https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/president/jamaica.

state, and it made Jamaica more conducive to America's economic interests. This relationship was strengthened by Seaga's visits to Reagan and the liberal immigration policies and annual financial aid package that Jamaica received. The island's rejuvenated relationship with the US prompted Regan to state, "Jamaica is making freedom work."[57] However, one should not lose sight of the fact that despite the cordial relationship and economic aid, Jamaica still experienced a significant outmigration to the United States during Seaga's time in office. This suggests that even when the island's economy was freer and receiving support from the US, Jamaicans were still seeking better opportunities abroad. In fact, the argument can be made that the island's special relations with the United States under Seaga allowed it to occasionally exceed the 20,000 per year threshold in 1987 (23,148), 1988 (20,966), and 1989 (24,523). From 1980 to 1989, a record 193,874 Jamaicans migrated to the United States. Migration to the US remained relatively high when Seaga left office, but it rescinded below 20,000 in the 1990s.[58]

When Miller reached out to her aunt, inquiring about securing a passport to travel to New York, it was amidst the political violence of the 1980 election and the ensuing uncertainty. She failed to secure sponsorship through her grandaunt, but managed to acquire a 'work and travel' student visa in September 1985 through the JOYST program.[59] JOYST (also known as work and travel) was yet another program established under the Hart-Celler Act. It offered full-time college students the opportunity to take up summer jobs in the United States. Although the specific reasons behind Gayle's decision

[57] Speech by President Ronald Reagan to the Organization of American States. Washington D.C., February 24, 1982. Extracted from "The U.S. Message for Jamaica's Seaga: It's Time to Keep Your Promise," The Heritage Foundation, September 2, 1986.
[58] "Immigration by Region and Selected Country of Last Residence Fiscal Years 1986-1996," *1996 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (U.S. Department of Justice, 1996), 33.
[59] Winnifred Miller, interview by author, Clarendon, Jamaica, February 28,2023.

not to sponsor Miller remain unknown, Gayle still provided support in the form of financial assistance. Miller ultimately established her own permanent residence in New York. Nonetheless, Gayle still played a role in her transition to life in the city.[60]

While the Hart-Celler Act facilitated a wave of migration from the island, the substantial relocation of the diaspora to New York was not merely coincidental. As explored in the first chapter, the initial influx of immigrants was drawn to New York due to the availability of job opportunities and a significant Black population with whom they could readily identify. This was particularly true for the third wave of immigrants (from 1965 to the present), who had access to not only a large Black population but also a supportive network of family members and compatriots who could provide housing and employment, as exemplified by Winnifred Miller's correspondence with Martha Gayle. It is evident that the expansion of the Jamaican diaspora in New York was largely due to the endeavors of those who immigrated before 1965. These immigrants maintained strong connections to their homeland, even while undergoing the process of Americanization. Martha Gayle's interwoven narrative underscores that maintaining ties to the homeland remains a critical aspect of the Jamaican immigrant experience. For example, in a letter dated January 30, 1948, her niece Luc wrote:

> I would be more than glad if I could be so lucky as to come to America, the land of opportunities. Could you be so kind as to send for me at some early date. If you would only say yes, I would be more than glad. I am awaiting a very early and favorable reply from you.[61]

[60] Winnifred Miller letter to Martha Gayle, October 6, 1980, Box 3, Folder 3, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY; and Winnifred Miller letter to Marth Gayle, September 7, 1985, Box 3, Folder 3, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[61] Daisey Parnell letter to Martha Gayle, January 30, 1948, Box 1, Folder 3, The Martha Gayle Collection 1926-2000, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.

Luc's case also serves as an example of how the Hart-Celler Act, which aimed to ensure that the new immigrant population in the United States reflected the country's current ethnic composition, gave preference to immigrants with relatives already residing in the country. As a result, many Jamaican immigrants who arrived in New York after the Hart-Celler Act was sponsored by relatives already living there.[62] However, as the number of Jamaican immigrants in the United States increased, so did the number of Jamaicans eligible for sponsorship, leading to a foreseeable chain migration. Pre-1965 Jamaican immigrants like Gayle, who maintained their ties to their homeland, helped make this possible.

The growth of the Jamaican diaspora after 1965 also increased the number of undocumented immigrants who relied on family and friends for housing and employment. It was common to find US citizens, permanent residents, student visa holders, tourist visa holders, and undocumented immigrants within the same families.[63] For example, a head of household who was a US citizen could have a permanent resident spouse, a niece on a student visa, and a cousin who overstayed a tourist visa. Over time, the niece and cousin would adjust their statuses and become legal immigrants through communal networks. Overstaying on a visitor's visa is a massive problem across all immigrant groups. However, the largest sample of these Jamaican migrants is in the New York area, not only because New York has a large population of Jamaicans but also because it is a sanctuary city. As such, New York offered a degree of protection against prosecution, and its extensive public transportation network enabled undocumented immigrants to navigate the city undetected.

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[62] Milton Vickerman, *West Indian Immigrants and Race*, 64.
[63] Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York*, 30.

Quantifying the number of undocumented Jamaicans in the city presented a considerable challenge. Their population varied based on the source, and sources were viewed cautiously due to the secretiveness of undocumented immigrants. Their numbers also fluctuated because being undocumented was not a fixed status. In fact, many new Jamaican immigrants between 1965-2003 were not necessarily new to the United States. The Department of Homeland Security yearbook of immigration statistics showed that some were undocumented immigrants who filed for a change in their immigration status (typically through marriage to a U.S. citizen) after living in the United States for some time.[64] Therefore, the Hart-Celler Act's emphasis on family reunification had resulted in a number of undocumented immigrants adjusting their statuses after living in the United States for a while.[65] Thus, the Act also provided cover for undocumented immigrants in the US who overstayed their visitor visas, knowing there was a plethora of people who could assist in various ways.

New York, often referred to as 'the gateway to America,' has historically served as a major entry point for numerous immigrant groups. Nearly forty percent of its population is foreign-born, establishing it as the prototypical immigrant city and a vibrant cultural mosaic. Ellis Island, notably, processed twelve million immigrants between 1892 and 1954.[66] While the initial wave of Jamaican immigrants arriving in the city was relatively small—amounting to fewer than 50,000—many would have passed through Ellis Island. Significantly, under the influence of the Hart-Celler Act, Jamaica

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[64] For more on the Jamaican undocumented population, see *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 1996 to 1999*, U.S. Department of Homeland Security; see also Foner, *Islands in the City*; Foner, *In a New Land*; Mary C. Waters, *Black Identities*; Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York*; and Hector R. Cordero-Guzman et al, *Migration Transnationalization and Race in a Changing New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

[65] Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York*, 31.

[66] Nancy Foner, *In a New Land*, 210.

transitioned from a minor source of immigrants to one of the top ten sending countries in less than forty years. As a result, the island became the key contributor to New York's Black immigrants. Given the city's remarkable diversity, understanding how Jamaicans evolved into the most prominent group of Black immigrants in New York is of vital importance.

When Charles Lindbergh flew the first commercial flight from Miami to Kingston in 1931, ships were still the prevailing mode of transportation to the United States.[67] By the time the island gained independence, direct flights from Kingston and Montego Bay to New York reduced travel time from one week to just a few hours. Moreover, a single airline could transport as many passengers daily as a ship could in a week. The rise of budget airlines and increased air traffic from Jamaica to New York predictably facilitated rapid migration. Before the Hart-Celler Act, the British West Indies Airline (BWIA) had a near-monopoly over Jamaica's airspace. However, in 1960, Pan-American (Pan Am) successfully lobbied for flights from Montego Bay to New York. By 1965, BWIA, Delta, Pan Am, and Air Canada all had direct flights from Kingston and Montego Bay to New York. Even the Jamaican government sought to capitalize on the increased air travel by launching its Air Jamaica fleet in 1966, with a maiden voyage from Kingston to New York on May 1 of that year.[68] The competition for passengers resulted in reduced ticket prices and improved travel accessibility for immigrants. Such competition would not

[67] Dr. Rebecca Tortello, "History of Aviation in Jamaica: Part I - Take To The Skies," *The Jamaica Gleaner,* December 5, 2005.
[68] "A Storm Brews in The Caribbean," *The New York Times,* January 3, 1960; and "Air Jamaica Gets Permit," *The New York Times,* February 28, 1966.

have been possible without the Hart-Celler Act, as there would not have been that many people leaving the island.[69]

Based on her passport, it was evident that Gayle had made a laborious journey back to Jamaica in the 1940s via boat. For Jamaicans working in New York, spending at least two weeks of their vacation time at sea was no small feat, but their love for the island kept drawing them back. With the advent of air travel, Jamaica experienced increased return visits, further cementing the bond between the homeland and the diaspora. In a 1979 letter, Gayle expressed relief and satisfaction with the short flight from New York to Jamaica and her preference for the Montego Bay airport instead of Kingston. Her letter also demonstrated the positive impact of commercial air travel and its role in promoting travel and tourism between the two destinations.[70] Perhaps not surprising then that the island experienced an increase in return visits with the commercialization of air travel. Gayle also sought opportunities for others to join her in New York and her endeavors were made easier thanks to the Hart-Celler Act and commercial air travel.

It was inevitable that Jamaica, a sought-after tourist destination in the Caribbean, and New York, the primary destination for immigrants in the United States, would align after the passage of the Hart-Celler Act. What deserves highlighting is the speed at which it occurred and how it contributed to the literature on Black immigration to the United

[69] In 1971 a roundtrip ticket from Kingston to New York was $119, $120 in 1972, and $140 in 1973. Extracted from Cabinet Submission – Air Fares, 1973, Location 1B/31/28, The Jamaica Archives and Records Department, Spanish Town, Jamaica.

[70] D letter to Martha Gayle, November 26, 1979, Box 3, Folder 10, The Martha Gayle Collection 1926-2000, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY; Leslie Inez letter to Marth Gayle, April 28, 1961, Box 3, Folder 1, The Martha Gayle Collection 1926-2000, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY; and Leslie Inez letter to Marth Gayle, undated, Box 3, Folder 1, The Martha Gayle Collection 1926-2000, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.

States. The combination of commercial aircraft, the Hart-Celler Act, the support of family members, and the proximity of the island to New York acted synchronously to increase the number of Jamaicans in New York. The direct flights between the two destinations accelerated and increased the frequency of travel. The Hart-Celler Act boosted the number of Jamaicans allowed entry into the United States by an astonishing 19,900 percent. The support of family members enabled housing and employment. The island's proximity to the US facilitated easier maintenance of homeland ties and lessened the burden of travel. All these factors combined resulted in Jamaicans being the largest diaspora of Black immigrants in New York.

Conclusion

Chapter one elucidated how the dearth of opportunities, stemming from the failure of British colonizers to provide for their Jamaican subjects following the Morant Bay Rebellion, compelled many to seek better prospects abroad. Similarly, the inability of an autonomous Jamaica to foster economic growth and create employment opportunities led to a surge in emigration after independence. The Commonwealth Immigration Act, which curtailed immigration to Britain, and the Hart-Celler Act, which opened the doors to the United States, made America an appealing destination for Jamaicans. While the American government had not intended to take in large numbers of immigrants, they recognized the importance of the Hart-Celler Act in preventing the spread of Communism to Jamaica. Moreover, as transnationalism is deeply ingrained in Jamaicans culture, their immigration to New York helped raise the standard of living on the island. Return migrants, having been exposed to a different way of life, often had higher

expectations for their homeland and invested in its development. Nevertheless, immigration continues to be a pervasive aspect of Jamaican life, with many jokingly asserting that there are more Jamaicans in the US than in Jamaica itself. If this was true, then New York City, which boasts the largest Jamaican diaspora, would be the capital. The next chapter will delve into the formal and informal channels used by the migrants, explore the role of family members in soliciting, supporting, or encouraging migration, and examine how these networks interacted with the push and pull factors that contributed to the expansion of the Jamaican diaspora in New York.

CHAPTER 3: POST HART-CELLER EMIGRATION AND ADJUSTMENT TO LIFE IN NEW YORK

Considering most post-1965 Jamaican immigrants were sponsored by family members and employers, it is essential to look at the role these networks played in their migration to New York. Sponsorship formed the core of the immigration process, and housing was central to the immigrants' assimilation. Post-1965 Jamaican immigrants arrived in the city at the end of legal segregation and the beginning of liberal immigration reforms. As a result, they were greater in number than the first wave in the 1900s and had more agency in choosing where to live. Yet, the Martha Gayle collection supports the premise that they bonded together in mostly Black neighborhoods and created their own niche. These immigrants were pushed to emigrate because of conditions on the ground in Jamaica, but more importantly, they were pulled by employers who offered jobs and family members who provided housing. These push and pull factors contributed to the creation of a discernable Jamaican niche in New York.

Before delving into the push and pull factors that influenced emigration, it is imperative to disclose that the term adjustment, rather than assimilation, will be used to describe the Jamaican immigrant experience in New York. Adjustment in this context refers to their process of adapting or becoming used to a new situation. Assimilation would infer they were fully absorbed into the wider American society or culture. In *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction*, Kevin Kenny argues that a diaspora "adjusts" to new places, and this concept can be applied to Jamaican immigrants. In his work on "Psycho-Social Aspects of Migration" in *Economics of International Migration*, Alfred Sauvy writes that assimilation is attained "when a former immigrant or his descendants

can no longer be distinguished from nationals and are no longer conscious of their original characteristics."[1] Viewed from these perspectives, Jamaican immigrants in New York are an emblem of an ethnic diaspora. As this chapter will demonstrate, they refused to give up their identity and rarely assimilated into American culture.

Most Jamaican immigrants maintained their island identity even after becoming American citizens, and the vast majority organized their lives around the infatuation of returning to the island. Their self-identification persisted regardless of the length of time they spent in the United States, and they continued to practice their customs and traditions, or adapt American ones to align with their Jamaican identity. For example, they might replace Thanksgiving turkey with jerk chicken, Christmas eggnog with sorrel, and Easter eggs with bun and cheese.[2] Even banking as a different outlook with Jamaican immigrants. In an article titled "Jamaican Emigres Bring Thrift Clubs to New York," *The New York Times* reported that when interviewee Monica Foster arrived in Brooklyn in 1968, she started saving to buy a home, but she did not open a bank account. She utilized a communal partnership savings that the immigrants carried over from the island. Foster professed, "when I get my paycheck, the first money I take out is my hand."[3] Foster declared it was instilled in her from a young age in rural Jamaica. The times also highlighted that when West Indians began entering the middle class in the 1960s, neighborhood partnership was still the preferred method of saving, even though banks

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[1] Kevin Kenny, *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13-14; and Alfred Sauvy, "Pyscho-Social Aspects of Migration", *Economics of International Migration: Proceedings of a Conference Held by the International Economics Association*, ed. Thomas Brinely (London: Macmillan, 1958), 299.

[2] Alexia Arthurs, *How to Love a Jamaican: Stories* (Ballentine Books, 2018); Elsa Brenner, "West Indians in Pursuit of the American Dream," *The New York Times*, November 28, 1993. "Jamaican Emigres Bring Thrift Clubs to New York," *The New York Times,* June 19, 1988.

[3] "Jamaican Emigres Bring Thrift Clubs to New York."

were safer. *The New York Times* article supports the claim that Jamaicans do not assimilate, rather they adjust.

To elaborate on the Jamaican dissonance to assimilation, Martha Gayle's experience certainly adds value. By the 1960s, Gayle had already donned an American accent and could easily passed for an American by anyone she spoke to. Yet, in her mind, she was still Jamaican and Jamaica was home. Whenever she returned to visit, Gayle spent months on the island.[4] Her frequent visit to Jamaica was emblematic of her enduring connection to her homeland. Despite her physical residence in Brooklyn, Gayle's compass remained firmly tethered to Jamaica, illustrating a profound dissonance between external acculturation and internal cultural allegiance.

Debra Lee, a second-generation Jamaican, shared a similar experience about her father, who came to New York in the late 1960s. Her father spent a significant portion of his American earnings in Jamaica, running businesses, building homes, and doing philanthropic work. Debra proclaimed that even though she was born in Brooklyn, she felt a deep-rooted connection to the island through her parents who always emphasized their Jamaican identity as something different from American. Debra's father was a businessman, and she explained that his inner-circle was entirely Jamaican. She further added that even when the family moved to Long Island, her father traveled back to his Jamaican circle in Brooklyn almost every day.[5]

Jamaican adjustment, rather than assimilation, to life in New York is a compelling topic as it challenges the prevailing assumption that immigrant groups eventually adopt

[4] Martha Gayle's letter to Etta and Arnold, June 4, 1966, Box 1, Folder 2, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[5] Debra Lee, interview by author, Amityville, NY, March 23, 2023.

the dominant culture's identity after living in the host country for an extended period.[6] Contrary to the conventional narrative of eventual cultural convergence with the host society, Jamaican immigrant experiences underscore a distinct resistance to assimilation, rooted in two fundamental principles. Firstly, majority of Jamaica's immigrants were driven by economic motivations, embarking on their migration with the aim of accruing financial resources to eventually return to their homeland. Their "sojourner" mentality inherently impeded full assimilation into American culture, while their ultimate allegiance remained tied to Jamaica. Secondly, assimilation into mainstream American culture entailed the adoption of a Black American identity, often synonymous with social marginalization and relegation to the lowest rung of American society (see Chapter Four). Consequently, their reluctance to assimilate reflected a strategic choice informed by both economic imperatives and a desire to preserve their distinct cultural identity within the American social landscape.

Emigration Push and Pull Factors

Most studies on immigration have focused more on the arrival rather than emigration, which resulted in limited research on the emigration process. However, it is essential to look at the emigration process because it naturally feeds into the immigration and ultimately assimilation or in the case of Jamaicans, adjustment. Emigration gives semblance to the migrants' background and provides reasons for them leaving their home

[6] Mary C. Waters and Tomás R. Jiménez, "Assessing Immigrant Assimilation: New Empirical and Theoretical Challenges," *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 (2005): 105–25; See also Nancy Foner, "The Immigrant Family: Cultural Legacies and Cultural Changes," *The International Migration Review* 31, no. 4 (1997): 961–74; and Mary L. Grant, "Evidence of New Immigrant Assimilation in Canada," *The Canadian Journal of Economics / Revue Canadienne d'Economique* 32, no. 4 (1999): 930–55.

country. When there is an understanding of where the migrants are coming from, it not only gives reason for them leaving, but it also creates an understanding of who they are as people, what motivates them, their goals, and dreams. Furthermore, an understanding of the migrants' background can foster an understanding of why they seldom assimilate.[7]

As previously mentioned, most Jamaicans emigrated for economic reasons. These reasons intensified after independence. In the late 1960s, the island's structural economic crisis and deteriorating living standards, with no clear corrective strategy, set the stage for the impending exodus. Due to inadequate fiscal policies, the country's deficit increased from $101.5 million (Jamaican dollars) in 1972 to $275.2 million in 1976. Government expenditure also ascended from $471.1 million in the fiscal year 1973-74 to $974.7 million in 1975-76. By the 1980s, it averaged an unprecedented $2,365.3 million.[8]

It is worth mentioning too that the CIA's clandestine policies to counter Manley's democratic socialism in the 1970s also played a pivotal role in the post-independence emigration. The agency's underhanded policies were rife in the political violence that plagued the island's 1976 and 1980 elections. In *A Confounding Island*, Orlando Patterson made the argument that "nearly all scholars who study the dangers of elections point to Jamaica as the most extreme case: in per capita terms Jamaica leads the world in the violence of its elections – the 844 persons killed in October election of 1980."[9] After rogue agent Phillip Agee came to the island and unmasked some CIA operatives, the evidence was clear as day that the CIA was active in those elections. Additionally,

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[7] Monica H. Gordon, "Identification and Adaptation: A Study of Two Groups of Jamaican Immigrants in New York City," (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1979), 14.
[8] Henke, Holger W, *Between Self-Determination and Dependency: Jamaica's Foreign Relations, 1972-1989* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2000), Location 493, Kindle.
[9] Orlando Patterson, *The Confounding Island: Jamaica and The Postcolonial Predicament* (Harvard University Press), 135.

Manley's public outburst that anyone who does not like his policies were free to leave only served to worsen the emigration crisis. All of these influences were glaring push factors in the emigration process.[10]

Understanding The Shift in Gender Migration

The above mentioned were some of the root causes for emigration (push factors). However, in order to draw a wholistic view for the cause-and-effect of post-1965 Jamaican migration to New York, it is worth revisiting the societal changes that took place in post-World War II America. After the war, an increased number of middle-class women sought employment outside their homes, creating a burgeoning market for domestic helpers and nannies. This period represented a significant liberation for both domestic and migrant female labor. It was during this time Jamaican migrant women, in particular, began dominating home healthcare in New York. This could be attributed to the cultural norms in Jamaica, where mothers traditionally cared for their children. Many also tend to aging parents due to a lack of social security and a dearth of nursing homes on the island. Accordingly, these migrant women had firsthand experience not only in childcare but in elderly care as well. Furthermore, these homecare services required a degree of English proficiency, which gave Jamaican women a competitive edge over

[10] "The President's Daily Brief: For The President Only," Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency, September 17, 1976, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0006466848.pdf; "Foreign Relations of The United States, 1969–1976, Volume E–11, Part 1, Documents on Mexico; Central America; And The Caribbean, 1973–1976," Office of The Historian, U.S. Department of State, accessed May 6, 2023, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve11p1/d470; and Laurie Gunst, *Born Fi Dead: A Journey Through the Yardie Underworld* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2003), 111.

other migrant groups in the field.[11] As a result, in the years following the enactment of the Hart-Celler Act, there was a notable shift in the gender composition of Jamaican immigrants. Unlike the first wave of migration, which was predominantly male, women began to migrate at a significantly higher rate.

The demographic shift in Jamaican emigration held significant importance as it underscored the gender dynamics at play. Women were more likely than men to seek-out ways for family unification, especially if they left children behind. Women also demonstrated a higher propensity for return visit, particularly if they left aging parents behind.[12] Paradoxically, the nature of employment that led them to leave Jamaica was the same impetus that drove their efforts towards family unification in New York and fostered continued connection with Jamaica. Women were, therefore, the focal point of the emigration process, and they were targeted for three specific professions: nursing, teaching, and domestic help. Since women have historically dominated these professions on the island, they were also more likely to secure these visas to the United States.

Nursing was one of the many pathways through which Jamaican women emigrated to New York as they were actively recruited to fill labor shortage in the city. In a 1966 article, *The New York Times* reported that there was a 25% to 60% shortage of nurses in New York's hospitals. According to the article, of the 8,015 registered nursing positions in 21 municipal hospitals, only 3,206 were filled. Fordham Hospital, for example, only had 26 nurses for 136 positions available. Similarly, Bird S. Coler Memorial Hospital in

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[11] Cordero-Guzmán, Hector R., Robert C. Smith, and Ramon Grosfoguel, ed. *Migration, Transnationalization, and Race in a Changing New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 193–94.

[12] Irma Watkins-Owens, "Early Twentieth Century Caribbean Women: Migration and Social Networks in New York City," in *Islands in The City: West Indian Migration to New York,* ed. Nancy Foner (Berkely: University of California Press, 2001), 30–39.

Harlem had only 60 nurse positions filled out of 300.[13] Perhaps not surprising then that Jamaican nurses were targeted as a backfill. So dire was the demand for Jamaican nurses that in 1968 Arnold D. Miller, a public relations officer, and Barbara Johnson, a registered nurse with the Department of Hospitals in New York City, were arrested in Kingston for breaching the 'Aliens Law' by illegally recruiting nurses from the island.[14]

New York was not the only city that pursued Jamaican nurses; the demand for their expertise also extended to other major cities. For instance, the Cook County School of Nursing in Chicago, which staffed the Cook County Hospitals, also attempted to recruit Jamaican nurses in the 1960s. After being denied by Jamaican immigration authorities, the school declared it would remain resolute in its bid to attract 70 Jamaican nurses to fill existing vacancies. The school's impetus for targeting Jamaican nurses echoed the rationale of the New York City Hospital Department: their Anglophone background meant potentially immediate integration into the workforce. However, New York was more appealing to Jamaican nurses because it already had a Jamaican population in place which fostered a stronger sense of community. Perhaps not surprising then that Jamaican expats created a Jamaican Nurses Group in Brooklyn to help new recruits navigate the nuances of relocating to New York.[15]

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[13] "Pair Seeking Nurses Seized in Jamaica," *The New York Times*, August 26, 1968; and "25 to 60% of Nurses Jobs in Hospitals Here Vacant," *The New York Times*, August 1, 1966.

[14] Miller and Johnson arrived on tourists and were found to be in breach of Jamaica's Aliens Laws because they illegally placed recruitment adds in the local newspapers. In accordance with the Aliens Law: an alien landing in contravention of this Act, or of being about to act in contravention of this Act may, notwithstanding any intervening prosecution, be detained in such manner as the Minister may direct, until dealt with under subsection (5), or otherwise in accordance with the provisions of this Act, and whilst so detained shall be deemed to be in legal custody. An Act to Impose Restrictions on the Landing of Aliens and to Provide for the Supervision and Deportation of Aliens, and for Other Purposes Connected Thereto, The Aliens Act Law of Jamaica, Ministry of Justice, Jamaica, February 28, 1946 – amended January 1, 1988. https://laws.moj.gov.jm/library/statute/the-aliens-act.

[15] "Chicago Seeks Nurses," *The New York Times*, February 28, 1966; and "Caring at Home and Abroad," Jamaica Nurses Group of New York Inc., accessed August 5, 2020, https://jamaicanursesgroup.com.

Like nurses, teachers were also directly recruited from the island to fill labor shortages in the city. In a 1967 article, the *Jamaica Gleaner* reported that the island needed 700 teachers to fill vacancies left behind by those who migrated to the United States.[16] In a detailed study on Jamaican teachers in New York City, Tricia Francis found that Jamaican teachers were strategically recruited for school districts with a high proportion of Black students from Afro-Caribbean descent. The fact that the recruitment of Jamaican teachers coincided with the influx of Jamaican migrants was not a mere coincidence. It was a credible response from the New York City Department of Education, acknowledging the need of its West Indian community. Francis further elucidated that the New York Chapter of "The Mico Old Students Association" helped facilitate the recruitment process. Mico Teachers College, one of Jamaica's oldest institutions, has an extensive network of alum chapters across the United States. Unsurprisingly, the New York City chapter was pivotal in recruiting and supporting new teachers as they acclimate to life in city.[17] While the teachers college New York chapter found it necessary to create opportunities for past students, the broader implication shows how the lack of opportunities in Jamaica, juxtaposed with the allure of higher wages abroad, consistently resulted in a significant loss of essential workers to the United States.

Although not an acclaimed profession, the recruitment of domestic helpers was equally important to Jamaican expansion in New York. In 1968, Savoy Employment Agency wrote a letter to Vernice Miller stating, "we have been advised that you are

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[16] "700 Graduate Teachers Needed by 1970 to Cope With Demand in Secondary Schools." *The Jamaica Gleaner*, December 16, 1967.
[17] Tricia A. Francis, "Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Migrant Jamaican Teachers in New York," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2006), 65; and Petal Miller, interview by author, Queens, NY, March 25, 2023.

interested in immigrating to the U.S. for employment as a live-in general household domestic (including a little plain, simple cooking and helping with the children), and would like us to procure a job offer and sponsor for you."[18] Savoy was the (self-proclaimed) most extensive and oldest licensed recruiter of live-in female domestic workers in the U.S. that specialized in job placements in and around New York. The agency's letter to Miller also delineated the employment criteria for domestic helpers, which comprised an application, proof of at least one year of paid experience in a domestic role, and character references from reputable sources such as clergy, civil servants, physicians, or attorneys. The agency's fee was 3% of the applicant's annual salary, payable after employment, and applicants were expected to defray all costs related to their visa application and air travel.

Testament to the high demand for domestic workers, Miller's letter expressed the agency's desire for applicants to inform others job seekers about available positions. The letter stated, "we would appreciate you spreading the word that we can use many qualified domestic right now. We have available large numbers of excellent jobs and fine sponsors. Any interested female applicant in your country, or her friends or relatives up here, may feel free to contact us at any time."[19] While the exact number of Jamaicans who secured employment through the Savoy agency remains uncertain, based on this excerpt, numerous positions were available. Therefore, it can be reasonably inferred that many Jamaicans applied for these vacancies. The agency's explicit interest in Jamaican applicants in the letter to Miller underscored the competitive advantage that these

[18] Savoy Agency Inc. Letter to Vernice Miller, August 14, 1968, Box 3, Folder 12, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[19] Savoy Agency Inc. Letter to Vernice Miller.

Anglophone migrants had over other immigrant groups as working in host homes meant English was a prerequisite.

Like Savoy, Harold Employment Agency was another recruitment agency that aggressively pursued Jamaican females for domestic work. In its instruction for getting a live-in domestic job in the United States, the agency encouraged applicants to write a letter to Mr. E.A. Harold stating "why you wish to come to the United States, that you love children, you are experienced at baby care, what household skills you excel in, such as cooking, general housecleaning, laundry, ironing and sewing, and that you will do your best to please your new employer."[20] The agency informed applicants that most placements in New York ranged from $50 to $60 per week, including room and board. The agency charged a fee that ranged from $71.50 to $85.80, which could be satisfied in six installments.[21]

To illustrate the disparity between the earnings facilitated by Harold's agency and what the average Jamaican earned on the island, it is informative to contrast the figures. In 1975, unskilled Jamaican laborers typically earned an average of $20 (American dollars) per week, as mandated by the Jamaican Minimum Wage Act of 1975.[22] However, under Harold's agency, domestic workers commanded a substantially higher wage, averaging $60 per week. Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge the disjunction between legislative mandates and the economic realities faced by many Jamaicans. Despite the enactment of laws stipulating a minimum wage of $20 per week, the

[20] Harold Employment Agency Employment Flyer, n.d., Box 3, Folder 12, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[21] Ibid.
[22] *The Minimum Wage Act - The National Minimum Wage Order, 1975,* Laws of Jamaica, Ministry of Justice, Jamaica, January 1, 1975, https://laws.moj.gov.jm/library/subsidiary-legislation/the-minimum-wage-act.

experiences of individuals like Dalareta Peart, who worked as a bus conductor in Kingston, reveal a stark contrast. Peart disclosed earning a mere $15 per week in 1978, significantly below the mandated minimum wage, three years after the legislation was implemented. Given these disparities and the allure of better opportunities abroad, it is no wonder why individuals like Peart eagerly pursued the avenues that recruitment agencies such as Harold created.[23]

While applicants were required to pay their own way to New York, the agency declared that "at no additional cost to you, [we will] prepare all the papers necessary for you to get your work visa."[24] Mirroring Savoy's strategy, Harold Employment Agency urged applicants to "tell your friends about this opportunity for women aged 21 to 50, of good health and character, that wish to come to the United States."[25] The agency's approach further corroborates the targeted recruitment of Anglophone Jamaican women for domestic services. It was through agencies such as these that Jamaican women were able to dominate home healthcare services in New York in the two decades succeeding the Hart-Cellar Act.

Behind these agencies campaign for Jamaican women stood family members like Martha Gayle. They knew firsthand the difficulties unskilled workers faced in securing meaningful employment on the island. Hence, they continuously mailed these notices to their relatives back home, bridging the gap between employers and workers. In this capacity, they were both a push and pull factor. Their actions further highlighted the

[23] Dalareta Peart, interview by author, Amityville, NY, February 20,2023.
[24] Harold Employment Agency Employment Flyer.
[25] Ibid.

various ways in which family members in New York propelled unskilled workers to the United States.

Throughout the 20th century, Jamaican immigrants spanning diverse socioeconomic backgrounds embarked on a steady migration to the United States. However, the confluence of factors including Manley's implementation of democratic socialism and the CIA's interference in Jamaica's tumultuous electoral processes precipitated a notable exodus of the island's middle class to the United States. Consequently, it was predominantly the middle-class stratum of Jamaican society that sought refuge in the U.S. throughout the 1970s. This demographic segment, characterized by comparatively greater financial resources, was uniquely positioned to undertake the costs associated with emigration, further amplifying their representation among the emigrating populace.

After living in the US for a while, the middle-class Jamaican immigrants subsequently utilized the family unification provision of the Hart-Celler Act to sponsor their relatives for immigration. Notably, unskilled migrants exhibited heightened motivation to emigrate compared to their skilled counterparts. In numerous instances, skilled family members actively endeavored to facilitate opportunities for their unskilled relatives that were inaccessible within their homeland.[26] Upon the arrival of unskilled migrants, they, in turn, availed themselves of the family unification pathway to petition for the immigration of even more relatives. Consequently, the demographic composition

[26] Milton Vickerman, *Crosscurrents: West Indian Immigrants and Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 199), 3-4.

of Jamaican immigrants in the United States has notably shifted in the 1980s, with unskilled migrants surpassing their skilled counterparts numerically.[27]

While acknowledging the migrants' eagerness to depart from their resource-stricken island and their family members' readiness to sponsor them, one must not underestimate the importance of air travel in obliging these parties. Where family members constituted the push and pull factors, commercial airlines were the driving force behind the scene. As discussed in chapter two, airlines accelerated the rate at which the influx of post-1965 Jamaicans emigrated to New York from what normally took one week by boat to under four hours by plane. Some emigrants covered their own airfare, but majority relied on financial support from family members overseas. To grasp reliance on family member overseas, the Martha Gayle collection offers a clearer understanding.[28] In 1985, Winnifred Miller wrote a letter to Martha Gayle, beseeching her grandaunt for a plane ticket to New York and asserted that it would not cost much. Although Winifred could not afford the ticket, she pointed out that it was inexpensive for her aunt because she lived in the US.[29] This presumed assumption about their relatives' affluent life in the New York was one of the driving forces behind emigration.

With the convenience and speed of air travel, New York's geographical location, and the absence of a shared border between Jamaica and the United States, one might naturally assume that post-1965 Jamaican immigrants arrived invariably by air. However, a fascinating exception existed via a few imaginative individuals that exploited a

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[27] *1996 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (U.S. Department of Justice, 1996); and Philip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and The Politics of Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 100-104.
[28] Winnifred Miller letter to Martha Gayle, September 7, 1985, Box 2, Folder 20, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[29] Winnifred Miller letter to Martha Gayle, September 7, 1985, Box 3, Folder 3, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Brooklyn Center for History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.

loophole in the cruise industry. In a letter to Martha Gayle, Evelyn Campbell advised on this unorthodox method of aiding relatives. Campbell wrote Gayle that a cruise ticket cost $200 US and confided that she had successfully financed a relative's voyage in 1986. Campbell further implored Gayle to finance one of her relative's passage on the a cruise to Miami. It was evident from the letter that a passport was needed, because she solicited funds from Gayle to assist with the relative's passport expenses.[30] Upon the ship's arrival in Miami, the idea was for the potential immigrant to disembark and swiftly connect with family members in New York. Campbell's letter illustrated another innovative and resourceful means employed by migrants to navigate the complex landscape of immigration to the United States.

Gayle was a documented financial remitter, but it is equally important to recognize her pivotal role as a sponsor for those seeking entry into the United States. In this capacity, she served as a significant pull factor in the emigration process. For instance, when her relative, Leslie Inez, requested an invitation letter and bank statement as part of a visa application at the American embassy in Kingston in 1991, Gayle responded accordingly. Inez's request was typical of sponsorship outside of the family unification process. The first step was for prospective migrants to get an invitation to a significant life event, such as weddings, graduations, or funerals to use as justification for their visit to the United States during the visa interview process. An additional bank statement from the sponsoring relative was necessary to demonstrate their ability to support the migrant, ensuring they would not become a burden on the state.[31]

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[30] Evelyn Campbell letter to Martha Gayle, May 19, 1988, Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[31] Leslie Inez letter to Martha Gayle, November 26, 1990, Box 3, Folder 1, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.

Martha Gayle's records have also shown that transnational remitters of information between home and abroad played an integral part in the Jamaican emigration process. Her homeland ties were maintained by mail, telephonically, and, most importantly, by her frequent travel back and forth between New York and Jamaica.[32] The island's relative proximity to the United States and the direct route between John F. Kennedy Airport and Kingston or Montego Bay made travel between the two destinations a relative breeze. Coincidentally, it was through her return visit that Gayle made the biggest impact on emigration. For example, when relatives returned to visit, they showed up in their best attire or the latest fashion, even if that was not their lifestyle in New York. Relatives at home viewed their flashy attire as evidence that America was "the land of opportunities," especially knowing that the return migrant was of modest means before emigrating. These transitional exchanges served as testimony to potential migrants that they, too, could acquire status if they could get to "the land of opportunities."[33]

To elucidate the point above, when Phyllis Brown (a friend of Gayle) returned to Jamaica from Brooklyn, she gave a firsthand account that was prodigiously positive. She reported that there were beautifully adorned buildings, bustling streets, and charming brownstones. She also told stories of readily available employment, cheap goods, and efficient transportation. Cynthia Beckford, reported that she was similarly awe-struck by Brooklyn's beauty and diversity during a short visit in the 1980s. Both women bemoaned New York's unfamiliar freezing temperatures and limited open spaces.[34] However, on an

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[32] Martha Gayle's Personal Notes, n.d., Box 1, Folder 3, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[33] Terry-Ann Jones, *Jamaican Immigrants in the United States and Canada: Race, Transnationalism, and Social Captial* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2008), 25.
[34] Cynthia Beckford interview by Alex Kelly, March 31, 2010, Call number: 2010.020.004, Oral History Collections, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.

island where employment was viewed as a privilege, the mere mention of job opportunities was enough to gloss over the fact that there were freezing temperatures or congested spaces. Phyllis's story was yet another migrant's account that further solidified the perception of America as "the land of opportunities," which was the primary pull factor. Inspired by Phillis's narrative, Vernice Miller (Gayle's niece) declared that if she had her passport, she would have certainly booked a ticket to New York.[35]

The flow of remittances from New York and return visits from family members in their finish attire created the perception that the city's islanders were better off than those left behind. Hence, for several reasons, New York became a logical and desirable destination for potential emigrants because its economic, educational, and employment opportunities were far more advanced than Jamaica's. Even after independence, the island had a primarily agrarian outlook, and foreign-led corporations dominated the agricultural sector. Additionally, higher education options were limited to two technical universities and a handful of teacher's colleges. Cliff's mother highlighted this reality in a letter penned to Gayle concerning Cliff's options after college.[36] Winnifred Miller (Gayle's grandniece) expressed similar displeasure about the lack of opportunities on the island. Although she found employment as a teacher, she lamented:

> "I am trying to get back into the United States, but it is not easy getting there and life is hard out here. Even if you are willing to work you end up over work and underpaid and malnourished. I am sorry I came back. Aunt Martha please pray for me that I will be successful in coming back."[37]

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[35] Vernice Miller letter to Martha Gayle,n.d. Box 3, Folder 3, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[36] Edith Gayle letter to Martha Gayle, April 30, 1952, Box 2, Folder 3, Box 2, Folder 20, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[37] Winnifred Miller Letter to Martha Gayle, October 6, 1980, Box 2, Folder 20, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.

Anticipating Migration: The Emigration Experience

The process of family unification represented the predominant pathway for Jamaican nationals seeking entry into the United States. Between 1991 and 1995, family reunification provisions under U.S. immigration law accounted for the admission of 90% of the 90,731 Jamaican immigrants that came to the US. This figure encompasses individuals identified as spouses and children of U.S. citizens and permanent residents.[38] Within this legal and procedural context, family members residing in the United States would petition the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) or the Department of Justice (DOJ), often in cooperation with the Department of State's (DOS) American embassy in Kingston, to facilitate the migration of their relatives to the United States.

With family networks constituting the fundamental pillar for the socioeconomic advancement of the Jamaican immigrant, having at least one family member in the States gave hope to the possibility of that advancement. Children fortunate enough to have one or both parents established in the United States were regarded as most fortunate, as prevailing sentiments suggested an inevitable reunification. The narrative encapsulated by Rob's experience serves as a poignant exemplification: notwithstanding the adversities characterizing his upbringing in rural Jamaica, a preeminent sense of optimism prevailed, underscored by the imminent sponsorship from his New York-based father. Rob's rural upbringing, replete with challenges such as outdoor cooking due to the absence of a stove and the obligatory task of water retrieval at a standpipe, highlights the arduous nature of his circumstances. Nevertheless, these adversities were endured with a forward-looking perspective, buoyed by the prospect of familial sponsorship and the anticipated

[38] *1996 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (U.S. Department of Justice, 1996).

amelioration in circumstances it heralded. It took Rob five years to join his father who had to save enough money to prove to immigration authorities that he could support his son. Nonetheless, Rob did, indeed, consider himself one of the fortunate ones to gain an opportunity for a better life in New York. He even viewed himself better off than well-to-do Jamaicans who stayed on the island. According to Rob:

> In Jamaica, we always look at America as a land of opportunity where the streets are paved with gold, and everything is cheap. I was excited to come here because even people who are not bright in Jamaica can come here and go to college. I wanted to do that and help myself and my family.[39]

Even children from middle-class families viewed the opportunity to emigrate to the United States in a similar fashion. For example, Sam, who was from an upper-middle-class family, gave an account of her anticipated move to New York as such:

> I was so excited when my father said that my mother had filed the papers for residency in America. Even though life was good in Jamaica for us, I wanted to live in America and be like the kids on T.V. who had cool toys and the latest things. I did not see any reason to work hard in school anymore because my grades in Jamaica would not affect my grades in America. It was a good time for me because everybody wanted to be my friend since I was going to America and would talk "nice" like Americans when I come back to visit.[40]

Sam further elaborated that although she yearned for her mother's presence, she felt fortunate to have a "prosperous" mother in America who could provide her with desirable things. Despite having their material needs met, mainly through remittances from their immigrant parents, children temporarily left behind in Jamaica sometimes developed emotional difficulties. In extreme cases, these issues manifested as promiscuousness or even suicide; however, as journalist Knolly Moses observed, feelings of loneliness and

[39] Rob interview with Juliet Campbell-Farrell, February 2010, in "Understanding the Factors That Have Contributed to the Maintenance of a Jamaican Identity despite Assimilation Pressures faced by Jamaican Immigrants Living in the United States of America" (PhD diss., Bryn Mawr College, 2010), 131.
[40] Sam interview with Juliet Campbell-Farrell, 130.

abandonment appeared to be more commonplace.[41] In contrast to some Jamaican children in similar situations, it seemed Sam did not experience emotional detachment. Not only did her mother render monetary support, but she also maintained frequent contact through phone calls and regular visits. Still, Sam admitted that although her mother paid for her to attend an esteemed private school, her mind was preoccupied with her imminent departure. She revealed that even her father exhibited a nonchalant attitude towards his employers, knowing he would leave soon. From her perspective, they were simply biding their time while anticipating an improved life in New York.[42]

Spousal sponsorship was another prevalent occurrence during the emigration phase, but the attitudes of spouses toward emigrating contrasted significantly with those of children. The immigrant spouse residing in the US generally influenced the decision of the home-based spouse to emigrate. Some spouses held professional jobs before relocating to the U.S., and as a result, they were hesitant to relinquish their privileged Jamaican status for an American uncertainty. However, low-income spouses were always motivated to emigrate. To illustrate this further, consider the experiences of Kent and Greg, who arrived in New York under different circumstances. Kent's wife traveled to the United States to pursue her studies and ultimately decided against returning to Jamaica. According to Kent, he was not enthusiastic about relocating, as he enjoyed a relatively comfortable life on the island. He stated the following:

> Like my male friends, I did not want to come because America is a woman country, and your freedom is limited. You are locked up in the house and you and your wife seldom see each other because of working all the time. You do not have your wife at home to cook your meals and stuff like that. For those reasons I did not want to come. When the papers came through, I push it off as

[41] Knolly Moses, "The 'Barrel Children'" *Newsweek*, February 19, 1996; see also Claudette Crawford-Brown, *Who Will Save Our Children: The Plight of the Jamaican Child in the Nineties* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1999).
[42] Sam interview with Campbell-Farrell, 130.

> long as possible before leaving and kept on working at the insurance company. I only decided to migrate when the political upheaval started in Jamaica.[43]

Greg, who worked as a juice vendor on the island, had a very different attitude toward emigrating. He stated the following:

> It is something everyone it seems wanted. You have to come here. Under the circumstances, everyone talks about America, and it sound like paradise. I think anybody at all who get the opportunity, no matter what you are doing there would come. People who really have fantastic jobs are satisfied in Jamaica and only have to visit here (USA) and not come to live. They have the best of both worlds but for other Jamaicans it is not. If you can dream it, you can realize it here. I was excited to migrate.[44]

Although Greg had a job, his earnings were meager, and opportunities for advancement beyond his current position were scarce due to his high school-level education and lack of opportunities for even people with college degrees. Jamaica's economic hardship was particularly unforgiving for those who lacked the education necessary to access the limited professional opportunities that existed. Therefore, Greg naturally viewed emigration as a step towards improving himself academically and financially.

As evidence in these testimonies, the family unification clause within the Hart-Celler Act, served as a paradigmatic illustration of chain migration. To elucidate, a middle-aged woman who became a U.S. citizen would naturally petition for her children to join her in the US. Her children could petition for their spouses. Their spouses would then sponsor their parents. This hierarchical progression was underpinned by the Hart-Celler Act's prioritization of immediate family members, such as spouses, parents, and children of U.S. citizens. In theory, a Jamaican immigrant who attained U.S. citizenship could file for siblings or other lateral family members (cousins, aunts, uncles, and the

[43] Kent interview with Campbell-Farrell, 135.
[44] Greg interview with Campbell-Farrell, 136.

likes), but the ensuing immigration process typically entailed a more protracted wait time compared to the streamlined prioritization.

Adjustment to Life in New York

Having shed light on the diverse ways in which Jamaican immigrants arrived in New York, it is now meaningful to transition to their settlement patterns and adaptational strategies when they arrived in the city. The varying ways in which Jamaicans adjusted to life in New York were unique to the individuals who experienced it. Henceforth, this section is not an all-encompassing account on how every Jamaican immigrant adjusted to life in New York. Instead, it touches on some of the more frequent scenarios to illuminate how Jamaicans immigrants adjust to life in New York. These experiences and settlement pattern would eventually lead to the creation of a Jamaican niche in the city.

To comprehend the integration and niche formation of post-1965 Jamaican immigrants, it is pertinent to revisit the significant outmigration of Black residents from Harlem, primarily to Brooklyn and the Bronx. As discussed in the first chapter, Harlem held great significance for the initial wave of Jamaican immigrants to New York pre-1965. Historically, restrictive covenants, which legally prevented people of color from purchasing or leasing homes in specific neighborhoods, effectively quarantined Black residents to Harlem. As a result, Harlem was also the locale for the West Indian community in the city. Despite the Supreme Court declaring these restrictive covenants unconstitutional in 1948, the law's legacy had a lasting impact on the Harlem's housing patterns.[45] A rich body of literature and cinematic work encapsulates Harlem's

[45] Milton Vickerman, *Crosscurrents,* 132-4.

experience with redlining and its subsequent transformation into a symbolic "Black Mecca" within New York City.[46]

With the Great Depression paralyzing America's economy, Harlem evolved into an urban ghetto. As a result, middle-class Black American families began expanding to Brooklyn and the Bronx in search of better housing in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The extension of the subway system in the 1950s, which facilitated more affordable and convenient travel, further expedite the influx of Black families into these boroughs. The wave of newcomers began acquiring the much-coveted brownstones in neighborhoods such as Bedford-Stuyvesant (commonly known as Bed-Stuy), Canarsie, Crown Heights in Brooklyn, and Morrisania, Tremont, Crotona Park in the Bronx. Their arrival triggered an anticipated white flight, which resulted in more housing for additional Black families. By the 1970s, the demographic composition of these areas had been radically transformed, with Black residents forming the majority. [47] Their relocation to these boroughs unavoidably became the predetermined destination for post-1965 Jamaican migrants for two key reasons. One, these were the places where they had family members who could provide shelter. Two, given the US history with housing segregation, these were reserved Black spaces where they were most likely to resettle even if they had no family members to provide shelter.

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[46] For more on Harlem's black history as it relates to Jamaicans, see Irma Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Tammy L. Brown, *City of Islands: Caribbean Intellectuals in New York* (University of Mississippi Press, 2015); Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Ira Reid, *The Negro Immigrant: His Background Characteristics, and Social Adjustment, 1899-1937* (New York: Columbia University Press 1939).

[47] Karen Olwig, "New York as a Locality in a Global Family Network," in *Islands in the City*, ed. Nancy Foner (Berkley: University of California Press, 2001) 150–151; and Mark Naison and Bob Gumbs, *Before the Fires: An Oral History of African American Life in the Bronx from the 1930s to the 1960s* (Bronx: Fordham University Press, 2016), Location 102, Kindle.

An often overlooked aspect in the annals of Jamaican migration to New York City is the existence of a Jamaican presence in Brooklyn preceding the exodus from Harlem. It is, indeed, remarkable that the dominant scholarly discourse on the early influx of Jamaican and West Indian immigrants in New York City largely overlooks the early Jamaican presence in Brooklyn. One of the principal aims of this chapter is to insert that omission in the literature on West Indian immigrants in New York. As delineated in Chapter One, Martha Gayle, her sister, and David C. Hurd all migrated from Jamaica directly to Brooklyn during the early 1900s. Paule Marshall's coming of age story of a Barbadian American girl between the Great Depression and the Second World War in *Brown Girl Brownstone* substantiated that there were other West Indians who also went directly from their island to that borough.[48]

Despite their existence, early Jamaican immigrants in Brooklyn did not attain a critical mass to establish a distinct socio-cultural enclave, nor did the broader West Indian population in Brooklyn rival the magnitude of its counterpart in Harlem. The transformative catalyst came with the enactment of the Hart-Celler Act and the subsequent demographic shifts succeeding the migration out of Harlem. While it is worth acknowledging the first Jamaican presence in Brooklyn, the Hart-Celler Act, coupled with evolving socio-economic dynamics, precipitated a significant reconfiguration of the Jamaican and West Indian presence in Brooklyn, thereby altering the socio-cultural landscape of the borough.

After the passage of the Hart-Celler Act, majority of the new Jamaican immigrants expectedly settled in Brooklyn and the Bronx, drawn by the presence of

[48] Paule Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (New York: Dover Publications, 2009), 8.

family members who had moved there earlier. The consequent chain migration ultimately led Brooklyn to surpass Harlem as the vibrant heart of the West Indian community in the United States and the new "Black Mecca" in New York. By the 1970s, Jamaicans were scarce in Harlem, a shift likely influenced by the area's stigmatized status as an urban ghetto with deteriorating housing. By 1980, the transformation of Brooklyn was complete to the point that Blacks became the largest population in the borough. The Bronx evolved along a similar trajectory to Brooklyn with regards to Jamaican immigrants. However, the influx of Puerto Ricans that went to that borough within the same timeframe meant that its Black demography developed differently from Brooklyn.[49]

Considering the notable concentration of Jamaican immigrants in Brooklyn and The Bronx, it is imperative to examine their presence in these areas to gain insights into their adaptation to life in New York. In the case of Brooklyn, Martha Gayle's experiences serve as a significant reference point, given her prominent role within the Jamaican community. Conversely, in exploring the Jamaican presence in The Bronx, it is beneficial to incorporate the experiences of various other Jamaican immigrants who have settled there. By drawing upon a diverse array of immigrant experiences in both boroughs, the narrative can be enriched with additional perspectives that elucidate the factors motivating Jamaican migrants to relocate to the city. These insights will not only supplement an understanding of the pull factors attracting Jamaican migrants to New York but also provide valuable context for their experiences of assimilation and adjustment within these specific urban environments.

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[49] See Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York,* 1992; Christina M. Greer, *Black Ethnics: Race, Immigration, and the Pursuit of the American Dream* (New York: Oxford University Press 2013); and *The Newest New Yorkers 2000: Immigrant New York in the New Millennium*, New York City Department of City Planning, 2005.

For post-1965 immigrants, Brooklyn held the mystique of a surreal American dream. Bill, who moved to there in the 1970s, recalled his Crown Heights neighborhood being "pristine and beautiful." He shared, "We lived in a brownstone owned by my wife's mother. The area was immaculately maintained. When I walked home, I met the policeman who patrolled the area. The block was inhabited mostly by professionals – doctors, lawyers, dentists."[50] Unlike Harlem, Brooklyn was untouched by the urban decay that had spurred migration out of north Manhattan. It lured immigrants who had already experienced life in America and were eager for more, as well as those arriving from Jamaica in pursuit of their American dream.

Like Bill, who lived in a brownstone owned by his mother-in-law, had an obvious family attachment to Brooklyn. In a similar vein, Gayle's niece, Lucille A. Smith, and her family initially relied on Gayle for support until they attained sufficient independence. Their transition represented the prevalent mode of adaptation among Jamaican immigrants in New York City. It was the norm for a family member or friend to offer temporary accommodation until the newcomer acquired the necessary skills and resources to establish themselves independently. Although the duration of Gayle's niece and her family's stay is unknown, it is plausible to infer that it lasted only a few months, considering the limited recorded information about their time together. Perhaps the family's discernible departure was motivated by a desire to avoid overstaying their welcome. Nevertheless, their arrival epitomized Gayle's role as both a pull factor and a starting point for newly arrived Jamaican immigrants in the city. The examples of Bill

[50] Olwig, "New York as a Locality," 150.

and Lucille illustrated the pivotal role of family in determining the initial settlement of newly arrived immigrants in the United States.

There existed a subset of migrants who embarked on their journey impulsively, with hopes of securing accommodation and employment upon their arrival in the city. Gayle's rental record concerning a Jamaican immigrant named Donovan serves as an example. He was directed to Gayle by other acquaintances within the immigrant community.[51] Notably, there existed no formal record of Gayle advertising rental vacancies. As was characteristic of many immigrant communities, housing opportunities were disseminated through informal channels, predominantly by word of mouth within the community network. For migrants like Junior, the risk was worth taking knowing that there existed a community of immigrants in which they could network.

Gayle's collection showed a man named Devon owed her $60 in unpaid rent for a room he rented on a weekly basis.[52] While the rationale behind Gayle's decision to rent individual rooms rather than apartment units remains unclear, it can be inferred that this approach afforded her a degree of flexibility. By renting out individual rooms, Gayle could potentially generate higher revenue from her properties, and the financial impact of a single delinquent tenant, such as Junior, would be mitigated by the collective income from other tenants. This rental practice was not exclusive to Jamaicans nor West Indians. It was a practice echoed by Marshall's sentiment in *Brown Girl Brownstone* that "every West Indian out here taking a lesson from the Jew[ish] landlord and converting these old

[51] Donovan letter to Martha Gayle, April 19, 1989, Box 3, Folder 11, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[52] Devon letter to Martha Gayle, March 24, 1989 Box 3, Folder 11, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.

houses into rooming houses…. Every Jack-man buying a swell house in 'ditchy' Crown Heights" [53]

One might question why new immigrants would opt to rent through unofficial channels and from landlords like Gayle. Jamaican immigrants often preferred renting from individuals within their own community due to a heightened sense of trust and familiarity, which alleviated concerns about their immigration status. Additionally, renting through official channels typically entailed leasing entire units, where repercussions for delinquent tenants were more severe. The flexibility and perceived security afforded by renting from landlords like Gayle naturally appealed to Jamaican immigrants who found it onerous to obtain the security deposit that official channels generally required. Had it not been for landlords like Gayle, tenants like Junior would have a tougher time taking a risk on New York City.

Gayle's ownership of three units, at least two of which were confirmed rentals according to New York City housing records, sheds light on her ability to sustain herself as a self-employed landlord. Her path diverged from the norm for most Jamaicans in New York. However, she nonetheless, embodied the prototypical Jamaican immigrant spirit of attaining economic prosperity in "the land of opportunity." Throughout her tenure as a landlord, she witnessed a constant stream of tenants coming and going over the decades. If housing is deemed the paramount concern for immigrants, then Gayle's unwavering commitment to her compatriots cannot be overstated, as she provided many with their initial footing in "the land of opportunity."

[53] Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, 148.

It is noteworthy to emphasize that Gayle's accommodation extended beyond Jamaicans to encompass other West Indian immigrants and the larger Black community. Her extension was in keeping with the comradery that besets the West Indian immigrant and the inevitable incorporation of the Black community in New York. Such was the case when a Trinidadian man named Everald Cummings expressed his gratitude to Gayle through a thank-you letter for providing lodging at one of her brownstones. Cummings had returned to Trinidad to experience the birth of his child. In another letter, a Black naval officer named L. Evans wrote his thank you letter to Gayle for her accommodation. Evans was conscripted for active duty service in Panama City, Florida.[54]

As it appeared, Gayle was a fortuitous example of a trend among Jamaican immigrant landlords. For instance, Debra Lee attested that her father, Peter Lee, rented out their Brooklyn apartment after the family's relocated to Long Island in a similar fashion.[55] The proliferation of Jamaican presence throughout Brooklyn was facilitated by landlords like these who were willing to offer robust housing solutions. Typically, this process commenced with an individual fortunate enough to purchase a home, subsequently providing temporary housing for compatriots. These newcomers, in turn, sought out additional dwellings within the neighborhood and continued the trend, thus perpetuating the cycle of community expansion.

To further elucidate the concept of Jamaican immigrants' community expansion in Brooklyn, it is worth highlighting Gayle's property acquisition. Upon purchasing her

[54] Everal Cummings letter to Martha Gayle, n.d., Box 3, Folder 11, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY; and L. Evans letter to Martha Gayle, July 11, 1984, Box 3, Folder 11, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[55] Debra Lee, interview by author.

first brownstone in 1946, Gayle transformed her residence into a boarding house. This strategic move enabled her to accumulate sufficient wealth to acquire another brownstone on the same block as the first. By the 1960s, Gayle's property portfolio expanded to three brownstones, all situated within walking distance of each other.[56] As other Jamaican immigrants replicated Gayle's business scheme, the community expanded throughout the borough. Hence, it is perhaps unsurprising that neighborhoods such as Bed-Stuy, where Gayle resided, and Canarsie, where Lee lived, have witnessed a notable influx of Jamaican immigrants over the past four decades. This organic growth, driven by shared ethos of community support and economic advancement, underscores the enduring legacy of Jamaican immigrants within the fabric of Brooklyn's diverse neighborhoods.

The integration of Jamaican immigrants in the Bronx mirrored that of Brooklyn, albeit with distinct geographical nuances. The first of these migrants followed the path of Black Americans who sought housing opportunities in the Bronx. These opportunities were created in two parts. First by depression hit landlords who were willing to risk renting to "certain coloreds." Second, by the ensuing white flight of Jewish and Italian families retreating northward to neighboring Westchester County. Initially congregating in South Bronx, Jamaican immigrants later gravitated towards the Williamsbridge and Wakefield areas, thereby delineating space for subsequent Jamaican immigrants in the post-1965 era.[57]

The Bronx is certainly not the first place that comes to mind when one reflects on Jamaicans in New York. That honor typically goes to Brooklyn. To be clear, Brooklyn

[56] Martha Gayle Title and Deeds, 1941-2001, Box 6, Folder 3-5, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[57] Naison and Gumbs, *Before the Fires,* Location 102, Kindle.

had the largest population of West Indians living in New York for the period studied, but the Bronx had the highest concentration of Jamaicans in the city. Indeed, Jamaicans ranked second only to Dominicans as the largest foreign-born group that resided in the borough. A *New York Times* article found that the northeast Bronx was the most homogeneous in its composition, with Jamaicans making up more than seventy percent of the total West Indian population there.[58]

It is intriguing to explore the factors that contributed to the significant concentration of Jamaicans in the Bronx. Previous scholarship attributed the concentration to the availability of housing in the Williamsbridge and Wakefield areas. It is a valid assertion, but scholars should also acknowledge that the Bronx's proximity to Harlem is a pivotal factor that shape Jamaican settlement in the borough. The adjacency of these two regions should not be overlooked because it easily facilitated the initial migration of Black American families from Harlem to South Bronx, and wherever they settled, Jamaicans were not far behind. Unlike Brooklyn, which is geographically separated from Harlem, the Bronx offered a less arduous relocation. Moreover, while Brooklyn predominantly featured brownstone residences, the South Bronx boasted tenement walk-ups, which were more accessible to middle-class Black families. Bronx historian, Dr. Mark Naismith made the point that, during the Great Depression, landlords were so desperate to fill apartments they willfully offered tenancy to middle-class Blacks.[59] Though precise statistical data is lacking, the close proximity of Harlem to the Bronx coupled with landlords' openness to Black tenants presents a plausible scenario

[58] Adam Nossiter, "A Jamaican Way Station in the Bronx: Community of Striving Immigrants Middle-Class Values" *New York Times*, October 25, 1995.
[59] Naison and Gumbs, *Before the Fires,* Location 102, Kindle.

where a greater number of Jamaicans migrated from Harlem to the Bronx compared to Harlem to Brooklyn. This influx ensured the presence of established family networks in the Bronx, primed to receive newcomers when the Hart-Celler Act facilitated increased migration from the Caribbean. Thus, the Bronx emerged as a pivotal destination for Jamaican immigrants seeking to establish roots in New York.

The story of Clin Powell, one of the most celebrated U.S. Army general, is a worthy example of the Harlem to the Bronx migration. Powell was born in Harlem and migrated to the Wakefield area with his parents in the 1950s. By the time he came of age, Jamaicans were no longer coming from Harlem. Instead, they were coming from the island itself. Powell was very proud of his Jamaican upbringing in the Bronx and regarded it as the foundation for his later successes in life. Given that the post-1965 wave were more likely to have a staunch Jamaican outlook, it highly probable that they had the most influence on Colin's upbringing. Even though he was viewed as a Black American when he assumed powerful positions both in the military and in his civilian life, Powell maintained that his Jamaican roots set him apart. His steadfast Jamaican-ness prompted Adam Nossiter to reasoned that a "sociable and striving community of Jamaican immigrants in the Bronx nurtured retired Gen. Colin L. Powell and launched him on his [political] career."[60]

Geographically located between Eastchester Road and Williamsbridge Road, the Jamaican enclave in Wakefield started with Black migration out of South Bronx to the more desirable northeast Bronx, and expanded greatly after the Hart-Celler Act. By the 1980s, Wakefield witnessed a substantial influx of Jamaican immigrants, to the extent

[60] Nossiter, "A Jamaican Way Station in the Bronx."

that entire buildings were predominantly occupied by these immigrants. As the decade progressed, the Jamaican presence in Wakefield expanded significantly to include Williamsbridge and stretched from Pelham Parkway, bordering the South Bronx, to 242nd Street, bordering Mount Vernon.[61] Their spatial expansion highlights the rapid influx of Jamaican immigrants after the Hart-Celler Act.

In his piece on Jamaican immigrants in the Bronx, Nossiter wrote that "plain two-story brick buildings, tucked away on a quiet corner in Wakefield, remains their chosen spot: the members are all West Indian, and mostly Jamaican."[62] Nossiter continued, "in Williamsbridge and Wakefield, more than seventy percent of all immigrants are from the island, more than 14,000 Jamaicans in all, and Jamaicans there are wealthier, better educated, more likely to own homes and have more stable families than those in Brooklyn."[63] Immigration scholars, Mary Waters and Philip Kasinitz have contended that this could be attributed to the area being mostly two-story brick houses which attracted buyers rather than renters. Buyers were known to have better pride in home ownership than renters. Kasinitz argued, "the Bronx plays the same role for Jamaicans as it once did for Jews. It is basically stable, middle-class neighborhoods."[64] In his study of ethnicity in the Bronx, Professor William Bosworth of Lehman College found that Jamaicans in the borough had lower poverty rates than Asians, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans. He also reported that they had far greater concentrations of households in upper-income

[61] Mark Naison and Bob Gumbs, *Before the Fires: An Oral History of African American Life in the Bronx from the 1930s to the 1960s* (Bronx: Fordham University Press, 2016), 139, Kindle.
[62] Nossiter, "A Jamaican Way Station in the Bronx."
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

categories and a higher percentage of people reporting a 40–50-hour workweek than even American-born whites.[65]

Undoubtedly, housing served as a significant avenue through which Jamaican immigrants established a substantial presence in the Bronx. A notable mechanism that facilitated this influx was the employment of certain individuals as building superintendents. Beyond the practical advantage of rent exemption, superintendents wielded influence by virtue of their access to information regarding vacant apartments, which they often shared within their social circles. Valerie Washington's Jamaican parents, employed as building superintendents, facilitated housing opportunities for their acquaintances. Initially, upon the Washingtons' arrival, they were the sole Black family in their building. However, as word spread regarding available vacancies, and more Jamaicans secured residency, the demographic composition of the building underwent a swift transformation.[66]

In an interview with Bronx Historian, Dr. Mark Naison, Joan Morgan recounts her childhood as a Jamaican immigrant growing up in the Bronx. Her father was one of the founding members of the Jamaica Labor Party, and it was through her father's connection that her mother came to New York on a domestic workers program. Joan grew up as barrel child with her father during her formative years in Jamaica.[67] Her mother eventually filed for the rest of the family in 1968. Upon arrival, they lived in a family friend's basement apartment on Givans Avenue in the Wakefield area. Joan stated

[65] Nossiter, "A Jamaican Way Station in the Bronx."
[66] Valerie Washington, interview by Mark Naison, March 14, 2005, Bronx African American History Project Digital Archive at Fordham University, Bronx, NY.
[67] Barrel children were those who, while waiting their emigration, received material goods, often in a barrel, from their immigrant parent(s). See Crawford-Brown, *Who Will Save Our Children*, 1999.

"we were like a one-bedroom apartment with two kids." However, the Morgans' story did not end with their successful family reunion in the Bronx as they themselves became facilitators for others leaving the island. It was a cyclical feature that was endemic of the immigrant community. Joan further explained that:

> We had a lot of politicians through our house. Some people came through our house and I knew them by one name and I was told while they are here to call them by another name. I realize now that a lot of people were fleeing. There was a whole network of where to get a passport. Where someone would put you up. And my father because he was politically connected, he was sort of the in-between person here.[68]

Housing and assistance were essential to the immigrants' adjustment in New York. In this case, political transients such as Joan's father were a vital resource for those seeking assistance with their transition in the Bronx. Additionally, the key positioning of individuals such as Valerie's parents as building superintendents were instrumental in transforming buildings with people who share a similar cultural background. Through these transitional networks, Jamaican immigrants became highly concentrated in the Bronx.

This section only highlights the areas outside of the city with a notable Jamaican presence, namely Westchester and the Long Island counties that adjoin the city. Suburban towns, such as Mount Vernon, North Amityville, and Uniondale, serve as Jamaican enclaves with numerical significance, each possessing their own unique stories regarding the origins of their respective Jamaican communities. After working in the city for a

[68] Joan Morgan, interview by Mark Naison, June 26, 2012, Bronx African American History Project Digital Archive at Fordham University, Bronx, NY.

while, some Jamaican immigrants ventured out to the suburbs for the allure of owning detached houses with spacious front yards, backyards, and picket fencing. Others arrived directly from the island, mostly because of family alliance that could provide housing and assist with employment.

Of all the suburbs with pockets of Jamaicans, Mount Vernon was the most noteworthy as it boasted the largest population of Jamaican immigrants. Their migration into Mount Vernon was initially a spillover from the adjacent Wakefield and Williamsbridge area before expanding to include those who came directly from the island. According to city data statistics, 14.4% of Mount Vernon residents were born in Jamaica.[69] The high Jamaican concentration of Jamaicans in Mount Vernon led Lester Hinds to boast, "if you live in Mount Vernon, people in Jamaica know where you are. They know where you are talking about."[70] In a 1995 article, the Herald Statesman also reported, "the Jamaicans in Mount Vernon now make up the largest concentration of any single nationality in any Westchester County."[71]

The migration into Mount Vernon unfolded as a series of events that mirrored the trajectory observed in the Bronx. It commenced with Black families courageously moving into predominantly white spaces, triggering a subsequent exodus of white residents—an occurrence commonly referred to as "white flight." Analogous to developments in the Bronx, this demographic shift in Mount Vernon generated vacancies in housing, thereby facilitating the influx of more Black families into the area. Given the

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[69] Lena Williams, "Man in the News: Milestone for New Mt. Vernon Mayor," *The New York Times,* January 30, 1985; Elsa Brenner, "West Indians in Pursuit of the American Dream," *The New York Times*, November 28, 1993; and "Top 101 Cities With The Most Residents Born in Jamaica," City-Data, accessed December 9, 2019, http://www.city-data.com/top2/h137.html.

[70] At the time of the article, Lester Hinds was the Information Officer for the Jamaican Consulate in New York. See, "Mount Vernon: Where Minorities are in Majority," *The Herald Statesman*, December 5, 1995.

[71] "Mount Vernon: Where Minorities are in Majority."

Bronx's status as the epicenter of Jamaican immigrant communities, it follows that neighboring Mount Vernon inherited a notable concentration of Jamaicans within its suburban landscape. When examining the geographical dynamics, the Bronx to Mount Vernon migration was essentially a copy and paste of the Harlem to the Bronx migration. The replication underscored the role of historical precedent and social dynamics in shaping patterns of urban migration and demographic change within metropolitan areas.

Jamaican emigration to Long Island was not as concentrated as it was in Westchester County. A Hofstra University immigration survey reported that Jamaicans made up only five percent of foreign-born nationals on Long Island. This placed them fifth overall in the top countries of birth for immigrants on Long Island.[72] Nonetheless, their emigration to Long Island is worth mentioning because of the historical context in which it developed. The first to arrive were post-World War II farm workers who had deserted the program. Some of these farm workers worked alongside Black Americans who themselves were migrant workers from the Carolinas. These post- World War II laborers tilled the fields in places like North Amityville and other nearby hamlets on a seasonal basis. After the farm work was over, some of the Jamaican deserters who were lucky enough to marry American citizens gain legal residence.[73] These individuals, in turn, filed for their family members, further expanding the Jamaican presence on the Long Island.

The noticeable Jamaican presence on Long Island also pulled those vying to escape city life. Reinford Evans, who migrated to Brooklyn in the 1980s, testified he

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[72] David Dyssegaard Kallick, "Immigration's Impact on the Long Island Economy," Research Report, Hofstra University 2010, 17.
[73] See, Walter G. Clerk, *North Amityville: A History* (Amityville: Amityville Public Library, 1976); and Mark Torres, *Long Island Migrant Labor Camps: Dust for Blood* (Charleston: The History Press, 2021).

having learned there were Jamaicans lived in Amityville, he subsequently bought a house there to escape city life.[74] Dr. Pauline Collins told a similar story of her family's journey to the area. She stated that her father was the first to migrate to the United States, and like many Jamaicans, he started in Brooklyn. Her father first lived with his sister and moved out after working and saving enough money. She declared that Brooklyn was the place to be, but "as soon as you earn some money, you move to Queens, and when you earn more money there, you move to Long Island." Henceforth, the Jamaican immigrant history on Long Island is unique in the sense that it initially started with seasonal farm workers, then city absconders, and eventually, those who came directly from the island.

Conclusion

Jamaican emigration has historically been characterized by a persistent pursuit of opportunities abroad. However, the dynamic interplay of push and pull factors, particularly underscored by familial ties and the seminal Hart-Celler Act, distinctly precipitated their burgeoning presence in New York. Foremost among these influences were familial connections, serving as compelling pull factors by offering lodging and facilitating employment prospects. A study conducted by West Indian immigration scholar Phillip Kasinitz exemplifies this trend, revealing that a substantial majority (87%) of surveyed West Indians in Brooklyn, post-Hart-Celler Act enactment, initially resided with acquaintances or kin upon arrival in the United States, with 68% securing their initial employment through familial networks.[75] Furthermore, their proficiency in English significantly eased their integration throughout the immigration process and job market

[74] Reinford Evans, interview by author, Amityville, NY, February 21, 2023.
[75] Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York*, 104-110.

upon arrival. Additionally, the Hart-Celler Act, a watershed legislative initiative, exponentially expanded immigration quotas, heralding a transformative shift from a nominal Jamaican presence to a thriving community. Preceding the Act, the collective West Indian populace in New York remained modest, not surpassing 40,000 individuals. However, after its enactment, Jamaican immigration alone surged, averaging 15,000 arrivals annually. Employers also played a pivotal role in incentivizing Jamaican emigration by actively seeking to address labor shortages within the urban landscape. Through the confluence of familial networks, legislative reform, and economic imperatives, Jamaicans emerged as the foremost diaspora of foreign Black immigrants, not solely in New York but across the United States. The amalgam of push and pull factors epitomized the relentless transnational migration from Jamaica.

CHAPTER 4: RACIAL ENCOUNTERS AND RESPONSES

The cultural, social, and political forces that shaped issues of race in Jamaica developed differently from those in the United States. For instance, the Jamaican flag, which featured the colors Black, gold, and green, had traditionally represented the people, sunshine, and land, respectively. This rhetoric has been recently updated to reflect a more inclusive perspective, with Black now symbolizing the struggle of the Jamaican people. Despite Jamaica being a predominantly Black island, the new meaning behind the flag aligns with the country's motto, "out of many one people," as its leaders continue to promote the idea that Jamaica is a multicultural society. Still, though not a homogenously Black country, most Jamaicans are West African descendants. Despite that detail, the grandiose perception is that the islanders are not concerned with race. When drawn into context with the US, race and Blackness mean something quite different in Jamaica and the United States. For Jamaicans, race is based on one's physical appearance. In the United States, however, race is more than skin deep. Many Jamaicans in this study had expressed that they only realized they were Black, not in the phenotypical sense, but as a social construction after they arrived in New York. Henceforth, it is imperative to examine their encounters and responses to American racial construction in New York.

Constructing Race in Jamaica

Jamaicans from the time studied in this work were very proud of their Black identity. However, since their sense of what it means to be Black was quite different from the notion held by Black Americans it is worth looking at Jamaica's historical development to understand the identity differences between Black Jamaicans and Black

Americans. During the slave era, the island's social structure was designed like a pyramid by British colonial administrators. At the top, a small white minority exercised economic, political, and social domination over the whole society. In the middle laid a mixed-race (mulattoes) by-product of miscegenation between domineering whites and despairing Blacks. At the base was a large mass of Blacks – the product of transatlantic slavery. This pyramidic social hierarchy was deemed necessary to govern an island where the enslaved vastly outnumbered whites, and the institution of slavery was used to enforce its doctrine. After full emancipation, the social pyramid endured to ensure white authority remained unchallenged. It was only with the advent of independence that power was officially transferred to Blacks.[1]

Because there was a mix-raced buffer between Blacks and whites, the concept of race was not stringent, nor was it fixed. Mixed-race, for instance, could chose to switch between being Black or white. Internal differentiation based on occupation characterized each segment, and society afforded individuals some latitude in defining their worth regardless of race. Hence, class rather than race defines one's status on the social ladder because Jamaican society defined race to include biological features and wealth. Therefore, Black Jamaicans could be just as wealthy and powerful as mixed-race or white Jamaicans. This is not to say that Jamaica is color blind because racism does exist in Jamaica. Even after independence, some Jamaicans continued to view whiteness as a symbol of success, though there was no evidence that supported being white automatically equals success.[2] As evidenced by their infatuation with skin bleaching,

[1] Milton Vickerman, *Crosscurrents: West Indian Immigrants and Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 27–28; see also Edward, Kamau Braithwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).
[2] Ibid.

some still think that fairer-skin people get an easier pass in life.[3] Some even ridicule their fellow Jamaicans with disparaging remarks about their skin's darkness. It was one of the many psychological effects of slavery in which whites were seen as wealthy, mixed-race as in-betweeners, and Blacks as peasants. Despite it all, the scope of racism in Jamaica is nowhere near the levels of the United States, where it permeates every aspect of life. It is rather a secondary issue. The commonly held belief is that education is the key to success, not racial barriers.[4]

Unlike Black Americans, who always had to endlessly prove they belonged in a country that treated them like second-class citizens, Jamaica's largely Black society awarded their Black population the opportunity to celebrate Black power, pride, and identity openly. Not only were Black Jamaicans the majority on the island, but they also had a deeper connection with Africa than Black Americans. The United States was not entirely dependent on slave labor, whereas Jamaica was completely dependent on slave labor. The unforgiving tropical climate and the brutality of slavery on the island fostered a high mortality rate that perpetuated a constant demand for enslaved labor. Despite the island being roughly the size of Connecticut, an estimated 1 million enslaved people were brought to Jamaica in comparison to the roughly 400,000 brought to the United States between 1522 and 1866.[5] The enslaved, who continuously brought their idioms and

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[3] Ian Thomson, *The Dead Yard: A Story of Modern Jamaica* (New York: Nation Books, 2011), 43. Orlando Patterson, *The Confounding Island: Jamaica and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019), 342. "Skin Bleaching in Jamaica," *The Jamaica Gleaner*, April 11, 2011; Ken Jones, "Bleaching is More Than Skin-deep" *The Jamaica Gleaner*, January 9, 201; and "Campaign to Rid Streets of Illegal Bleaching Products Begins Next Month," Uncategorized, Jamaica Information Service, January 18, 2007, accessed May 1, 2023, https://jis.gov.jm/campaign-to-rid-streets-of-illegal-bleaching-products-begins-next-month-2/.

[4] Vickerman, *Crosscurrents*, 65.

[5] These figures are estimated because it is difficult to determine the exact number due to the loss of documents and the fact that slaves were also imported transnationally across the Americas. See The Slave

customs to the island, transmitted, and reinforced these traditions on the plantations. The overarching result is a closer bond between Jamaica and the continent, so much so that some African traditions are still practiced in Jamaica today.[6]

The statement above does not imply that Black Americans lack pride in their racial identity. Rather, in Jamaica, Blackness tends to be imbued with a sense of pride, with many people affectionately identifying with their African roots. This pride is reflected in the school curriculum, where Black history is taught from the elementary level and reinforced throughout high school.[7] Conversely, in the United States, Black identity is often fraught with a sense of struggle as Black Americans continuously contend with societal acceptance. Black history, particularly the history of slavery, is rarely taught in American schools. Some Black Americans even take offense to being called "African," which may seem paradoxical given the common use of the term "African American" to identify Black Americans. The fundamental Black identity differences between Black Americans and Black Jamaicans lie in the fact that being Black in America often carries political, social, and economic meanings. In contrast, being Black in Jamaica is generally associated with a sense of pride and does not define one's political, social, or economic status.

Trade, A Commemoration of the Abolition of the Slave Trade in the West Indies, Manuscripts and Prints, National Library of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica; and Henry Louis Gates, "How Many Slaves Landed in the U.S.?" 100 Amazing Facts About The Negro, The African Americans, https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/how-many-slaves-landed-in-the-us/.

[6] For more on the carryover from Jamaica's enslave tradition see Martha Gayle's letter on selling produce at the town market in Martha Gayle letter to Sis Etta and Arnold, Box 5, Folder 14, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY; see also, Gad J. Heuman, *The Killing Time: The Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 17–18; Tom Zoellner, *Island on Fire: The Revolt That Ended Slavery in the British Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2020), 25; Thomson, *The Dead Yard,* 43; and Patterson, *The Confounding Island,* 342.

[7] "Teaching of Garveyism Officially Launched in Schools," Education, Jamaica Information Service, August 19, 2012, https://jis.gov.jm/teachings-of-garveyism-officially-launched-in-schools/.

Interestingly, Jamaica's Black power movement on a state level, developed during the same time as the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. For Jamaicans, it ended in independence, for Black Americans, it resulted in equality under the law. Two powerfully distinguishable Black triumph. Yet, when the two cultures meet, rather than uniting some Jamaicans rejected being identified as Black Americans, even though it was from their struggle that many Jamaicans benefited. Martin Luther King's Civil Rights Movement, for example, not only ended legal segregation but also triggered immigration reform that brought an end to immigration discrimination. This was especially beneficial to Jamaican immigrants. Many of them also benefited from affirmative action, which diversified policies in higher education and employment. Yet, their "foreignness" caused them to fail to understand the historical context in which Black struggle and resistance had made so many of their immigrant aspirations, including employment and post-secondary education, possible.

The Jamaican independence and Civil Rights movements were closely tied to the broader Pan-Africanist movement that started with Garvey. Perhaps not surprising then that Garvey became Jamaica's first national hero, and a captivating figure in Black American history.[8] Garvey's vision of Black power and self-governance manifested itself with the island's Blacks reclaiming their cultural heritage, endorsing economic self-sufficiency, and political representation.[9] His vision came to fore in the United States with MLK and others challenging the status quo and forcing the US government to legislate equality for all. Though Garvey had prophesied a United States of Africa, his

[8] Zoellner, *Island on Fire,* 275.
[9] No Compromise Media, "Marcus Garvey Speech," YouTube Video, 17:18, August 7, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=811LSjhE_pU&list=PLZAsfXOd5DNiOgHduLfJGlDGlarC3eqLN&index=16.

prophecy, nonetheless, came to reality in an independent Jamaica and a racially equal United States.

After Jamaica gained independence, balancing the economic interest of the elite and the political and material demands of the massive Black population became the primary goal of public policy. Consequently, Black Jamaicans began overwhelming the social order. In *Crosscurrent: West Indian Immigrants and Race,* Milton Vickerman pointed out that "this period resulted in Blacks moving beyond their traditional power base in politics into the business world."[10] With the elite flight during the Manley years, Blacks began to fill the vacuum they left behind. The last frontier was the prime minister's office. Remarkably, the island did not get its first fully Black Prime Minister until PJ Patterson. By then, however, Black Jamaicans had already successfully penetrated every segment of Jamaican society.[11]

If the challenge of comprehending the significance of race in the United States were merely a matter of abstract comparison between the U.S. and Jamaica, the issue would have been far less complex. However, Jamaicans residing on the island were keenly aware of racial inequities in the United States. As delineated in Chapter One, American news and pop culture heavily influenced the Jamaican media landscape. As a result, Jamaicans were contemporaneously apprised of events unfolding in the United States. For instance, in a 1963 letter to Gayle, Cliff (Gayle's nephew) divulged, "I have been reading all about your race riots over there, and there was even a demonstration in

[10] Vickerman, *Crosscurrents*, 33.
[11] Patterson, Jamaica's longest serving leader (1992-2006), campaigned on a message of returning the country to the hands of its racial majority. All the previous Prime Ministers were of mix-race background. See "Percival Patterson," National Library of Jamaica, February 2, 2005, https://nlj.gov.jm/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/bn_patterson_pj_019.pdf

Kingston too."[12] While the racial unrest did not directly impact Jamaica, it provided invaluable information for prospective migrants about what they ought to anticipate when they travel to the United States. In November of 1964, Cliff wrote to Gayle, "I must write to congratulate you for the part you played in [getting] LBJ elected so magnificently. Jamaicans were very interested in the elections, and we all cheered the victory of Johnson."[13] Again, the election's outcome did not have a direct impact on the island. However, there was a consensus that Johnson's victory would improve race relations in the United States, which, from a Jamaican perspective, implied a reduction in hostility upon their arrival in the United States. In her book, *No Man's Land*, Cindy Hahamovitch arrived at a similar conclusion regarding Jamaican officials who advocated for their farm workers to be employed exclusively in states situated above the Mason-Dixon line. Having only learned about the Jim Crow South through news media, these officials were concerned that Jamaicans, being largely naive about the virulent Jim Crow racism prevalent in the South, would be ill-prepared for such an environment.[14]

In his November 1964 letter to Arnold, Cliff wrote, "Goldwater is vacationing at Montego Bay as also his running mate. We hope he'll learn something about integration while here."[15] Cliff's letter served as an indication that Jamaicans were not only invested in the electoral outcome of America's election. Apparently, they were also in favor of racial integration. The glaring contrast was that the island of majority Black people was

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[12] Clifford Lewis Letter to Arnold Austin, November 13, 1963, Box 2, Folder 13, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[13] Clifford Lewis Letter to Arnold Austin, November 16, 1964, Box 2, Folder 13, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[14] Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor*, *Politics and Society in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 63.
[15] Barry Goldwater was a former US Senator who ran for President against Lyndon B. Johnson in the 1964 presidential election. See Cliff Letter to Arnold, November 16, 1964.

more racially tolerant and inclusive than the United States with its majority white and racially oppressive society.

Constructing Race in The United States

Unlike the racially tolerant Jamaica, Black-and-white racial construction in the United States was fixed to the point that it was enshrined in law until the Civil Rights Act. There was no room for negotiation, regardless of individual status. In fact, the arbitrary one-drop rule ensured that mixed-race was considered Black for all extensive purposes even after the Civil Rights Act.[16] Like Jamaica, American racial construction stemmed from its slave history and carried over to the modern era. However, its development took a distinctively different path compared to Jamaica's. In antebellum America, whites were the dominant race, and they vastly outnumbered Blacks. There was no need to create a mixed-race buffer between Blacks and whites, nor was there a need to recruit the mixed-race as whites, as was the case in Jamaica.

When the northern and southern states went to war, it brought down the institution of slavery, a full 31 years after its cessation in Jamaica. Debatably, the vitriol detestation of slavery endured longer in memory for Black Americans living in a predominantly white country. Furthermore, emancipated Black Americans were considerably more restricted than their Jamaican counterparts. They were liberated from physical bondage yet persistently relegated to the status of second-class citizens. Detestable laws governed where they could socialize, live, and work. It was not until the Civil Rights Movement of

[16] The one-drop (one drop of blood) rule is an American racial construction that states anyone with at least one Black ancestor is considered Black. See, Mary C Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2009), Location 400, Kindle.

the 1960s and the consequent passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 that Black Americans began to legally exercise the same liberties that had been assured to all Jamaicans since their emancipation.[17] Even after the Civil Rights Movement, from governmental forms requiring racial identification to instances where law enforcement was summoned for inconsequential reasons, racial factors continued to permeate every aspect of Black Americans quotidian existence.

Amongst that backdrop, the post-1965 Jamaican immigrants who arrived in New York were in for an experience regardless of how the Jamaican media prepared them. Within the rigid social stratification of American society, those of African heritage occupied the lowest rung. Thus, adopting a "Black" identity entailed accepting a position at the bottom of the ladder. Naturally, no Jamaican immigrant, in pursuit of upward mobility, would deliberately acquiesce to such indignity. As the preponderant demographic group in their native country, Black and colored Jamaicans found that the American model conflicted with their cultivated sense of self-assurance anchored in the belief that education, rather than racial taxonomy, was the cornerstone of success. Their conceptualization of race diverged significantly from that of their American counterparts. Their categorization of individuals as Black, white, or mixed was subject to interpretation, and it did not consign any race to an immutable social standing within society.[18]

[17] Tim Barringer and Wayne Modest, *Victorian Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 9, Kindle.
[18] Vickerman, *Crosscurrents*, 3.

Jamaican Immigrants' Racial Encounters in New York

Since the Jamaican immigrants' conceptual paradigm clashed with the prevailing American conception of race, their acclimatization process was exceptionally challenging. For Black immigrants in general, American racial classification contravened both the immigrant and the quintessential American ethos of "land of opportunities" and "land of the free." Unlike Black Americans, Jamaican immigrants could choose to disengage themselves from the racial contract at any time. Nevertheless, they chose to stay. Given these circumstances, it becomes imperative to examine how Jamaican immigrants navigated the complex landscape of racial construction within the United States, specifically in its most diverse metropolis, New York.

New York was much celebrated for its diversity, yet some Jamaicans immigrants did not find it welcoming. For instance, when Douglas Guthrie (a Jamaican musician) arrived in Brooklyn in the early 1970s, he was shocked to learn that he was confined to either Crown Heights or Flatbush living amongst Black Americans.[19] In *The Negro Immigrant*, a seminal work examining West Indian immigrants in New York, Ira Reid posited that these newcomers were accustomed to a greater degree of nominal freedom than Black Americans. Although they were mostly Black, they did not believe that had any bearing on their social or economic outlook because they were not racially constrained in the societies from which they came.[20] As Guthrie's experience showed, they were confined to specific neighborhoods typically with Black Americans, whom they shared the same social fate. Because restrictive covenants precluded Black

[19] Douglas Guthrie interview by Michelle Hart May 3, 2010, Call number: 2010.020.022, Oral History Collections, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[20] See Ira de Augustine Reid, *The Negro Immigrant: His Background, Characteristics, and Social Adjustment, 1899-1937* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1969).

Americans from purchasing or leasing properties in specific neighborhoods, Jamaicans were likewise excluded from these spaces.[21] Viewed through this lens of systemic racism, Black Americans and Jamaicans were disproportionately segregated from their white counterparts and predominantly confined to crime-ridden, impoverished urban enclaves. It was this particular social milieu that engendered challenges related to individual and collective adaptation for Jamaican immigrants. Although these issues did not manifest quantitatively, they operated with qualitative significance.

In his interview with the Center for Brooklyn History, Guthrie argued that the isolation of Black communities was fermented by structural racism and had systematically developed into an unfortunate negative view of Black Americans.[22] Perhaps born out of stereotypes and later reinforced by the media into the public domain, the general assumption was that Black Americans were lazy no-gooders. The post-1965 comparative literature on West Indian and Black Americans also seemed to uphold the view that Blacks were not hard workers, lacked intellectual capital, and were prone to crime. These flawed assertions shaped white America's negative pre-ordained assumption of what Black Americans were capable of. Not surprising, then, that they were treated less fairly in the criminal justice system, employment, and education.[23] These were only some of the ways in which structural racism worked to uphold a negative view of the Black community. Although these biased assumption did not hold true for Black people in general, if the news reported that one Black person robbed a

[21] Motoko Rich, "Restrictive Covenants Stubbornly Stay on the Books," *The New York Times*, April 21, 2005.
[22] Douglas Guthrie interview by Michelle Hart.
[23] See Stephen Steinberg, Turning *Back: The Retreat from Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

jewelry store, it was enough to convince the general public that Blacks were thieves. In his interview with Sociologist Milton Vickerman, Stanley (a Jamaican immigrant) painted a clearer picture:

> "On my job among the middle-class whites who come in from Long Island or New Jersey or Pennsylvania, or whatever, [complain] that the only reason New York City is not what it used to be is because Blacks are taking over. That's the reason why there is so much crime; that's the reason why you can't park your car; that's the reason why you can't have a radio in your car; It's because the Blacks are here: There is that danger as more of them come to believe that."[24]

Understandably, the racialized encounters that post-1965 Jamaican immigrants faced carried over to and shaped the responses of their offspring. In her study of post-1965 West Indian children in Brooklyn, Waters found, in addition to getting into good schools, West Indian offspring tended to retain their parents' identity insofar as it portrayed them as "good Blacks." Conversely, Jamaicans of lower socioeconomic status, particularly those reliant on state aid, viewed their lives through more polarized, Black-and-white lenses. As a result, their children were more inclined to identify as Black Americans, as they perceived no tangible benefits stemming from retaining their parents' Jamaican identity.[25] Thus, the notion that Jamaicans were generally more successful than Black Americans was not a holistic view of the entire Jamaican immigrant population.

The experience of Jamaican immigrants in New York also highlights the importance of language proficiency and education in achieving success and overcoming racial barriers. As noted in chapter one, Martha Gayle was an exceptionally educated woman despite her background. That certainly played a part in her navigating the nuances of immigration and later homeownership. Correspondence with attorneys showed that she

[24] Vickerman, *Crosscurrents*, 120.
[25] Malcolm Gladwell, "Black Like Them," *The New Yorker*, April 29, 1996.

was quite assertive in her discourse when confronted with disgruntled tenants.[26] Foner added to this education narrative by avowing that Jamaican women who migrated to New York with English language abilities and higher educational levels were able to secure employment at a higher rate than other immigrant groups, such as Dominicans or Haitians.[27] The latter two groups also came from the Caribbean. However, neither were English-speaking nor known to have superior academic standing. By emphasizing cultural over racial identity when necessary and utilizing their educational backgrounds effectively, Jamaican immigrants defied racial stereotypes. Their experiences provide valuable insights into how marginalized groups use language and education to navigate racial discrimination within institutionalized systems. Exploring these different facets more fully through rigorous academic discourse leads to a better understanding that can inform public policy.

Looking back at Martha Gayle as an example, it seemed she conformed to the prevailing narrative of Jamaicans being model immigrants. She did so by exhibiting her industriousness in ascending from a domestic aide to a self-employed landlord and proprietor of multiple properties. Nevertheless, Gayle would presumably assert that she did not subscribe to such flawed conjectures. Her letters indicated that, while identifying as Jamaican, she sympathized with the racial tribulations Black Americans faced. Also, the newspaper articles she preserved addressed both immigration and racial matters.[28] Regrettably, the ostensible success of Black immigrants, often utilized for comparison

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[26] Martha Gayle's Legal Documents, Box 2, Folder 2, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[27] See, Nancy Foner, ed., *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and Suzanne Model, *West Indian Immigrants: A Black Success Story?* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011).
[28] Martha Gayle's Newspaper Clippings in Scrapbook Materials, Box 5, Folder 6, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn NY.

with Black Americans, merely served as another prejudiced stratagem to rationalize the adversities faced by Black Americans as self-inflicted, while conveniently disregarding the structural racism they have endured for centuries. The lacuna in the comparative literature on West Indian immigrants and Black Americans in New York fails to acknowledge the distinct histories of these two demographics and the way their perspectives have been molded by their historical development. The multifaceted nature of Black identity in America is as varied as the various groups of white Americans, yet the comparative literature lacks this diverse outlook. Nevertheless, these works accurately capture the notion that, despite their different backgrounds, race(ism) negatively affects Black people, as evinced in Gayle's letters and newspaper clippings.[29]

The interpretation of Jamaican immigrants' negotiation of American racism that had inadvertently led readers to surmise that they outperformed Black Americans, thereby implying that race was not a significant hindrance for success was myopic and oversimplified. It is paramount to comprehend that Jamaicans who emigrated to the United States during the first two decades following the enactment of the Hart-Celler Act were markedly different from those who remained. They largely mirrored the demographic who arrived during Martha Gayle's era, being predominantly educated and skilled professionals. The parallels between these two waves of Jamaican immigration to New York created a misleading representation of the overall Jamaican immigrant community. Educated and skilled migrants, given their professional competencies, typically fared better in the labor market than their Black American counterparts because

[29] Martha Gayle's Newspaper Clippings; see also Christina M. Greer, *Black Ethnics: Race, Immigration, and the Pursuit of the American Dream* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Tod G. Hamilton, *Immigration and the Remaking of Black America* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2019); and Malcolm Gladwell, "Black Like Them."

they were driven by motivations in their home country and did not necessarily had to contend with their American reality. However, the influx of unskilled Jamaican immigrants, which began to surge in the 1980s, contradicts the notion that Jamaicans generally outperformed Black Americans. In his *New York Times* interview, Kasinitz acknowledged this demographic shift in stating, "nowadays just about everybody comes to New York."[30] When they arrive, unskilled immigrants grappled with the same struggles as their Black American counterparts, racial or indifferent. Sociologist Tod Hamilton succinctly encapsulates the situation here:

> There are three primary reasons why the myth of Black American cultural inferiority has persisted: the enduring influence of inaccurate anecdotal evidence, insufficient attention to how both selective migration and disparate pre- and post-1965 racial contexts shape the social and economic trajectories of Black immigrants and Black Americans; and a failure to fully account for differences in the relative benefits of employment in the United States.[31]

The Jamaican Immigrant Community and Race

Although Jamaicans were profoundly informed about American racism, knowledge only aided their psychological preparation before arriving in New York. A separate Jamaican identity was compulsory whether or not they consciously chose to carve out niches for themselves in defiance of the negative connotations associated with being identified as Black Americans. It was a natural course for immigrant groups that migrated in mass to hold on to their identity in a foreign country. Consider, for instance, the Italian, German, Irish, and Slavic immigrants; they all had their own immigrant communities and assumed an identity other than American when they first arrived. These immigrant groups had to overcome language barriers as well as cultural norms and laws

[30] Adam Nossiter, "A Jamaican Way Station in the Bronx; Community of Striving Immigrants Fosters Middle-Class Values," *The New York Times*, October 25, 1995.
[31] Hamilton, *Immigration, and the Remaking of Black America*, 8.

that differed from their own. Only after residing in the country for a substantial period, and most notably with second and third generations, did these groups become unhyphenated Americans.[32] Likewise, being foreigners, Jamaicans naturally isolated and bonded together. The nuances of navigating the complexities of a new country brought about its own challenges without the central issue of racism.

New York's renowned diversity, attributed to the myriad immigrant groups that have established roots in the city, has earned it the reputation of being the gateway to the United States. Yet, despite its diversity, Jamaican immigrants have witnessed the city evolved into one of the most segregated cities in the United States. It is an interesting revelation for a city in a state where segregation was never legal. The city's segregation did not necessarily stem from overt racism; rather, it developed from the influx of immigrant groups that predominantly associated with their own kind, thereby leading to isolation from other groups.[33] Over time, these communal insularisms contributed to the broader segregation of New York. Therefore, Jamaican communities sprung up as a defense against racial categorization that tightly constrained individuals of African ancestry to the bottom as well as by the natural design of immigrant communities in a foreign country.

Scholarships on post-1965 West Indian immigrants have revealed similar community isolation. In Foner's *In A New Land*, a West Indian Black activist pointed out, "you can walk through [West Indian neighborhood] and not see a white face, except

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[32] Aristide Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), Location 1178, Kindle.
[33] "Settlement Patterns of Immigrants in New York City," in *The Newest New Yorkers, 2000: Immigrant New York in the New Millennium*, (New York City Department of City Planning, 2005), 43–85.

passing in a car."[34] However, bolstered by their substantial numbers, post-1965 Jamaican immigrants manifested a discrete Jamaican identity that is discernably different from a communal West Indian one. This distinct identity was most prominently exhibited by the first generation, who showcased their Jamaican identity through their accents and the use of cultural artifacts, such as flags, music, and food. They built restaurants and supermarkets that offered traditional Jamaican products and maintained connections with their homeland by participating in import-export businesses. They utilized a communal credit system called *paadna* (partner) to purchase homes in neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by Jamaicans, operated gypsy vans that serviced routes frequented by their compatriots, and conducted church worship in a revivalist manner reminiscent of Jamaican practices.[35] Not surprising, in the 1970s, several Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) churches emerged in neighborhoods with high Jamaican populations. They served as further indications of the establishment of a unique niche. The SDA church is highly prevalent in Jamaica and represents the island's second-largest Christian denomination.[36] These were but a few examples of the myriad ways in which Jamaicans have distinguished their communal identity from the larger Black community.

Dr. Pauline Collins, a school principal from Long Island, New York shared in her interview that her Jamaican father grappled with systemic racism while attempting to

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[34] Nancy Foner, *In a New Land: A Comparative View of Immigration* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 118, Kindle.

[35] Partner or *Paadna* in Patwa (Jamaican Creole) is a rotating credit system that was carried over from the island. It involves several members agreeing to deposit a sum of money on a weekly or monthly basis to a treasurer (usually a woman). Each member then gets to take home the sum of the deposit on a rotating basis.

[36] "Our History," Hanson Place SDA Church, https://www.hansonplace.org/about/our-history; "The History of East New York Seventh-day Adventist Church," East New York SDA Church, https://www.eastnewyorksda.org/about; and "Our History," New Haven Temple SDA Church, https://www.newhavensdatemple.org/about/our-history.

establish his electrical engineering business in the 1970s. Fortunately, he discovered a supportive community in Brooklyn that enabled him to persevere. Similarly, Channette Greaves mentioned that her uncle initially considered returning to Jamaica in the 1970s due to the racism he encountered in New York. However, he ultimately decided to stay after reconnecting with familiar faces from the island in Brooklyn. Debra Lee also highlighted that despite his encounters, her father's success in New York was facilitated by the presence of the Jamaican community her encountered.[37] Their examples showed that whether intentionally or by inherent design, the Jamaican community appeared to shield its members from some of the adverse effects of racism. One could remain in these communities and seldom encounter a white individual, except for the occasional passerby in cars.

These close-knit communities offered more than just protection from racism; they also provided crucial support to recent arrivals. Notably, Martha Gayle, a prosperous landlord who could have chosen other Black enclaves, opted for Brooklyn where she lived until she died. Her decision to remain in Brooklyn suggests that she may have been charmed by the sense of community that prevailed in the borough. Dr. Collins took it a step further in stating that:

> "Everything you wanted was in Brooklyn as a Jamaican immigrant. If you wanted a job, there was someone there who could tell you where to go whether on the books or off the books. If you were sick, they would counsel you on where to go knowing that you would be well taken care of at King's County Hospital regardless of your immigration status. If you wanted a place to live, they would tell you who to talk to."[38]

[37] Channette Greaves, interview by author, East Prospect, St. Thomas, Jamaica, March 1, 2023; and Dr. Pauline Collins, interview by author, Amityville, New York, April 28, 2023.
[38] Dr. Pauline Collins, interview by author.

Collins underscored that most of the information dissemination occurred through word of mouth. Women exchanged information with one another at their workplaces, predominantly in home care, while men shared information amongst themselves in bars. According to her father, bars proved to be the most valuable sources of information, surpassing even schools in their utility. Dr. Collins recalled, "my father also said, if you want to know anything, go to the bar."[39] She elaborated that often times the individual capable of helping lived in the same building, sometimes as close as two doors away.[40] This proximity facilitated numerous tenants in securing boarding arrangements with fellow compatriots. As a result, they never had to advertise, and potential landlords were never short of tenants.

It is also essential to accentuate how these close-knit communities responded to institutional racism. Perhaps their use of *paadna* to bypass traditional banking best exemplifies this concept. As evidence in archival material, Martha Gayle served as the banker for her rotating credit clientele, thus providing a vital service to her immigrant community. Both Debra Lee and Dr. Collins confirmed that their parents also utilized *paadna* to attain financial goals.[41] Dr. Collins further elaborated that Jamaicans used *paadna* not only to purchase their first homes, but also to sponsor relatives' relocation to New York.[42] Consequently, *paadna* played a significant role in circumventing redlining and restrictive covenant practices that denied loans, insurance, and housing to traditional loan applicants based on race or ethnicity. Since *paadna* was a no interest loan, it also

[39] Dr. Pauline Collins, interview by author.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.; and Debra Lee, interview by author, Amityville, NY, March 23, 2023.
[42] Dr. Pauline Collins, interview by author.

offered Jamaican immigrants an alternative to traditional loans, which typically charged high interest rates.

When discussing the Jamaican immigrant community in New York, the West Indian Labor Day Parade is often mentioned as a powerful expression of group identity. Although the parade may not represent a Jamaican identity best, it is still worth commenting on the largest Black parade of its kind in the United States. The event prominently features calypso and soca carnival music, which are more closely associated with Trinidad and the Lesser Antilles than Jamaica. Where Calypso music is an archetypal characteristic Trinidad and the Lesser Antilles, reggae and dancehall are organically Jamaican. In fact, the Jamaican component was notably lacking when the parade began to gain momentum in Brooklyn in the 1970s.[43] Nonetheless, the event's organizers invited Jamaicans to participate, recognizing that their inclusion would enhance the parade's popularity.[44] More symbolically, the West Indian Labor Day Parade is the only event of its kind not held in Manhattan. It was traditionally staged in Harlem from 1924 until 1964. However, after the event's organizer, Jessie Wattle, lost his license to host the event under dubious circumstances, the parade has been relegated to Brooklyn ever since.[45] Consequently, while the parade served as a powerful display of a collective foreign-Black identity, the switch to Brooklyn is yet another example of pushing Blacks out of white spaces.

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[43] The first staging of the parade in Brooklyn occurred in 1964, but it was in the 1970s that it began to gain momentum with the influx of West Indians imported in after the Hart-Celler Act. See Donald R. Hill, "A History of West Indian Carnival in New York City to 1978," Department of Anthropology, SUNY Oneonta, January 1993, http://employees.oneonta.edu/hilldr/brookc.htm; see also Charles Simpson, interview by Michael Roberts, September 14, 1994, call number: 2010.019.26, West Indian Carnival Documentation Project Records, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[44] "A History of West Indian Carnival in New York City to 1978;" and Charles Simpson, interview with Michael Roberts.
[45] Charles Simpson, interview with Michael Roberts.

Hip Hop's Black Immigrant Roots

Within the existing body of literature on Jamaican immigrants, a significant aspect of their experience that often goes unnoticed is their influence on the Black American community, particularly through music. The often-ambivalent relationship between these groups—simultaneously asserting their distinct identities while occasionally unifying in response to events affecting the broader Black community—forms a compelling part of their shared social history. This dynamic interplay has evolved into a unique socio-cultural narrative. Perhaps the clearest manifestation of the impact of Jamaican culture on Black American socio-cultural history can be observed within the genre of hip-hop. Though there were Jamaican imprints on other elements of Black America, vis a vis Marcus Garvey and Colin Powell, it was through this artistic medium that Jamaican immigrants had made the most significant impact on the Black American community. Despite it being a Jamaican who started the movement, the Jamaican element within the origins of hip-hop remains relatively esoteric, thus underlining the need for further exploration and acknowledgment.[46]

Jamaicans have collaborated with Black Americans on various racially charged initiatives throughout the 20th century, Take for instance, Wilfred Domingo's work with WEB Dubois or Marcus Garvey's UNIA movement. However, not much pioneering work had been done since the first wave in the 1920s. That changed in the 1970s when Jamaican DJ Kool Herc introduced a major paradigm shift in American popular culture. Kool Herc, who emigrated to the Bronx in 1967, first sampled his Kinston-transplanted

[46] See Rachel Rubin and Jeffrey Melnick, *Immigration and American Popular Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 177; Also see Jeff Chang and DJ Kool Herc, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of The Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005).

music-making techniques in the South Bronx. By 1973, his innovative beat-making took off and triggered a cultural movement that would overwhelm the entire Black community.[47] As a result, he is widely regarded as the pioneer of hip-hop music. His biography, even in its barest outlines, holds in it a great deal of crucial information about the Jamaican immigrant experience in New York and their response to racism through an art form. Moreover, his work truly embodies the outsized global impact of Jamaicans, as it is an achievement far greater than one might expect based on the island's size, population, and economic status.[48] As Afrika Bambaataa, another hip-hop pioneer, aptly credited, "I'd say more the inspiration came from the disco DJs and Herc, when he came out. It was more his inspiration, cos he came straight from the islands."[49]

While hip-hop's creation was credited to a Jamaican, it's explosion could have only occurred in New York. The island's limited resources and diminutive entertainment market would have constrained its proliferation had it started in Jamaica. For instance, reggae only became a global sensation after Bob Marley's world tour. Some might even posit that it occurred during Marley's exile in London – a mega city. Similarly, given its status as the cultural capital of the world and the pulsating heart of America, New York was the prime location for hip-hop to go viral. This occurred because, although Jamaican immigrants endeavored to carve out their own cultural niche in the city, they lived amongst Black Americans. As the larger of the two groups, Black Americans absorbed hip-hop and transformed it into an American enterprise. Nonetheless, its hip-hop's

[47] Rachel Rubin and Jeffrey Melnick, *Immigration and American Popular Culture*, 179.
[48] Rubin and Melnick, *Immigration and American Popular Culture*,180.
[49] Frank Broughton's interview with Afrika Bambaataa, April 7, 2017, From the DJ History Archives, Red Bull Music Academy, https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2017/04/afrika-bambaataa-interview.

history provides an insight into what happens when the two cultures coalesce and how a subculture can be easily consumed by a prevailing one.

It is certainly worth mentioning hip hop in a chapter on Jamaican immigrants' response to race in America. Hip-hop was not only a musical art but also a tool urban youth used to voice their frustration with racial and social inequalities. Hip-hop artists have used their music to shed light on the discrimination, prejudice, and violence experienced by Blacks and other marginalized groups. Their lyrics have tackled issues such as police brutality, racial profiling, and institutionalized racism.[50] Hip-hop music has provided a platform for Black voices to be heard not just in the United States, but the world over. The genre has served as a tool for social activism and has helped to raise awareness of the injustices faced by communities of color. Through hip-hop, artists have expressed their experiences and emotions in a way that resonates with listeners and has helped foster conversations about race, privilege, and power. To this end, Jamaicans have given a powerful voice to Black America.

The significance of Jamaican heritage within the genre was personified by one of its most prominent figures, Biggie Smalls, who was of Jamaican descent. This fact underscored the significant influence that had shaped what was considered emblematically New York and quintessentially Black American.[51] Notwithstanding, stemming from the 1980s, and more visible in the 1990s, Jamaican artists began collaborating with American rappers and pop icons, giving birth to a musical hybrid that incorporated elements of reggae, dancehall, rap, and hip-hop. Through these shared artistic expressions and a sense of racial solidarity, Jamaican artists spearheaded a new

[50] See Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*; and Rubin and Melnick, *Immigration and American Popular Culture.*
[51] Rubin and Melnick, *Immigration and American Popular Culture,* 211.

collaboration with the Black American community. Paradoxically, through music an intriguing paradox emerged. As Jamaican artists Americanizing their music by fusing rap/hip-hop with reggae and dancehall, they unconsciously assumed the identity of Black Americans. It became apparent through the lens of hip-hop that the very American racism that initially triggered Jamaican separation from Black Americans also compelled Jamaicans to collaborate with Black Americans in pursuit of shared objectives.

When Jamaican Immigrants Become Black

The 1980s marked a significant transition period for Jamaican immigrants in New York. As delineated in chapter 2, they came in record numbers, at times maxing the 20,000 per year threshold. With their superior numbers, many shifted their focus from transitory migrants to permanent residents. This new immigrant outlook also impacted their experiences and responses to American racism. First-generation Jamaicans who were concerned with being identified as Black American often found it difficult to differentiate because they were viewed as Black in the eyes of white America. They learnt that when they were being followed in the stores, it was not because storekeepers were curious about their nationality. Rather it was because storekeepers suspected they might steal something based solely on the color of their skin. Ultimately, they developed a heightened consciousness of race in response to these encounters and as a means of understanding them. Race then ceased to be the background variable that it was in Jamaica and became self-evidently more important.[52]

[52] Vickerman, *Crosscurrents*, 92.

In *Crosscurrents: West Indian Immigrants and Race,* Vickerman shares the experiences of Harry, a college honors graduate from Jamaica who immigrated to the United States and secured employment with a leading American corporation. Harry recounted the difficulties he faced transitioning from a society where his race was irrelevant to one where it was a perpetual consideration. He expressed frustration with the tendency of others to focus on his skin color instead of his merits. Harry recounted instances at his workplace where, despite his colleagues' respect, he was singled out by the security guard and asked for identification, questioning his right to be in the building.[53] Dr. Collins, a Long Island School principal, shared a similar experience stating, "a photographer came to the school to take pictures. I asked her, 'can I help you.' She shrugged me off and said no, you cannot help me. I am looking for the principal."[54] The visiting photographer dismissively assumed she was not the principal due to her race, only to later apologize for her misjudgment. Other Jamaican immigrants described experiencing racial bias in more explicit ways, such as witnessing white women clutching their purses on the subway or being followed in stores. Ralph, a Jamaican immigrant, lamented, "you have to develop a thick skin because if you have never been taken for a thief before and all of a sudden you have to deal with this!"[55]

In their difficulty understanding the salience of race in New York, many Jamaicans expressed a sense of bewilderment, anger, and frustration at their experiences. These encounters occurred not only amongst those with lower incomes but also those who held professional jobs. In fact, their upward mobility might have actually sharpened

[53] Vickerman, *Crosscurrents*, 92.
[54] Dr. Pauline Collins, interview by author.
[55] Vickerman, *Crosscurrents*, 95.

their perception of racism, as they encounter treatment that was inconsistent with their status. They felt a sense of betrayal as they realized that adhering to society's norms for achieving upward mobility does not necessarily insulate them from invidious treatment because of race. Race comes to stand out more clearly as the factor causing mistreatment.[56]

One of the central paradoxes of the post-1965 Jamaican immigrants' experience in the United States is that they believed that racial discrimination was widespread, but it coexisted with the possibility of upward mobility. However, their unpleasant encounters exhibited the reality that race permeates all facets of American life. Hence some held a pessimistic belief that the United States will never become color blind. It was through these experiences that Jamaicans became Black in the American sense of the word. Jamaican immigrants were at pains to define themselves as separate from native-born Blacks, but at times, this foreignness crumbled in the face of racism. Still, the development of greater race consciousness among Jamaican immigrants does not negate their overriding goal of achieving upward mobility. Most would prefer to ignore the whole issue of race all together. The problem is that American society would not allow them to forget.

Dr. Collins emphasized that in her experience, Jamaicans were bold in standing up for what they believed in. They refused to tolerate disrespect and faced racism directly when confronted with it. Likewise, Gayle, who was a devout Christian, displayed marked assertiveness on racial issues. Though she was a proud Jamaican, she was also

[56] In her interview, Dr. Collins declared that she had to interview three times before she was given the job as an elementary school teacher, while the white candidates interviewed only once. Despite her title, she felt race played a role in her application.

unwaveringly united with the broader Black community on racial matters.[57] It can be argued that Gayle's position on race was influenced by her longevity in New York, which augmented that the longer Jamaicans lived in New York, the more they became racialized along American color lines. Dr. Collins' father, who immigrated to Brooklyn in 1980, also maintained that while his Jamaican identity had been beneficial in the past, the idea that Jamaicans were different from Black Americans was a spurious claim used by whites to drive a wedge between Jamaicans and Black Americans.[58]

Vickerman made similar discoveries in his interviews with Jamaican immigrants in New York. One respondent shared an experience where he had invited a white colleague from work to a bar for a drink. However, the colleague hesitated when he realized the bar was located in Flatbush, a predominantly Black neighborhood. Apparently, the colleague feared for his safety, associating the area's racial composition with potential danger. The interviewee, feeling insulted, asserted that having Black skin does not equate to criminality. In another interview conducted by Vickerman, Neil, a social worker, shared his experience on a flight to Miami. He noticed he was the only Black person on the flight, and when the flight attendant distributed magazines to passengers, he was overlooked. He confronted the situation head-on, stating, "when she was walking back, I simply leaned forward, and I said: "I can read!" just like that, and

[57] Scrapbook Materials, Box 5, Folder 6, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[58] During our interview, Dr. Collins call her father to discuss his experience as a Jamaican immigrant in New York. Her father declared he became a self-employed electrical engineer through a New York City initiative for minority small businesses. He also stated that from his years bidding for contracts he learned that the differences between Black Americans and Jamaicans was something whites used to divide the two groups.

she gave me a magazine."[59] These accounts illustrated some of the experiences and responses of Jamaican immigrants in the face of racism in New York.

Discussing Jamaican encounters with racism in the United States necessitates acknowledging the fact that Jamaicans were not always portrayed as "good Blacks" and "model immigrants." During the 1980s, a prevailing stereotype depicted Jamaicans as dreadlocked drug dealers, an image largely propagated by the violent activities of the Shower Posse, a notorious Jamaican gang that originated in West Kingston. The Shower Posse came to New York with the surge of Jamaican immigrants that stormed the city in the 1980s. Laurie Gunst's *Born Fi Dead* offers an extensive examination of the posse's underworld, tracing its origins in West Kingston, Jamaica, and charting its dissolution in New York City.[60] As a result of the posse's nefarious activities, a negative stereotype started circulating across the city painting Jamaican immigrants as dreadlocked drug dealers. Most Jamaican immigrants fervently disputed this association. Ironically, they had previously associated crime and drug dealing with Black Americans, but now found themselves confronting a similar stereotype. Therefore, it was not only in protest that Jamaicans became Black but also in criminal enterprises.

There seemed to be a degree of identity crisis within the broader West Indian community too, causing significant consternation among those from the Lesser Antilles. It stemmed from the notion that many outsiders viewed West Indians in general as Jamaicans. The misidentification was not necessarily a post-1965 phenomenon, as West Indians who arrived during Gayle's era were similarly misidentified. However, the

[59] Vickerman, *Crosscurrents*, 104.
[60] For more on the Shower Posse and its impact on the Jamaican immigrant community see Gunst, Laurie, *Born Fi Dead: A Journey Through the Yardie Underworld* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2003).

negative stereotype of Jamaicans in the 1980s also stirred discontent among the rest of the West Indian community. Apart from national pride, they understandably sought to disassociate from Jamaicans for the same reasons that Jamaicans sought to differentiate themselves from Black Americans. Vincentian immigrant Roxanne De Shong noted, "I see it sometimes because when I talk sometimes and people hear me, it is like [Jamaica] that is the only West Indian island they know."[61] Still, as indicated earlier, the separation existed only when negative references were involved. Like Jamaicans, they rally and unite as a collective Black community in the face of adversity.[62]

As the Jamaican immigrants' encounter with racism gradually morphed into the Black American struggle for equality, whenever there was an act of perceived racial injustice, they mobilized with Black Americans to defend the Black community. This starkly contradicts the notion of "good Blacks," and "model immigrants" that do not fuss about race. In fact, it was during instances of racial injustice that Jamaican immigrants emerge as Black activists.[63] Take for instance, two of the most controversial moments that galvanized the Jamaican and West Indian communities around racial injustice in New York – the death of Michael Griffith, a Trinidadian immigrant who was assaulted and pursued to his demise by a group of white American youths, and David Cato, the son of Guyanese immigrants, who tragically lost his life in an accidental collision with a Jewish motorist.[64]

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[61] Roxanne De Shong, interview by Craig Wilder, August 29, 1993, Call number: 1994.006.07, Oral History Collections, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[62] Ibid.; and Gladwell, "Black Like Them."
[63] Tony Best, "Jamaicans – Victims of Injustice," *New York Carib News*, March 28, 1989.
[64] John T. McQuiston, "Fatal Crash Starts Melee With Police in Brooklyn," *The New York Times*, August 20, 1991

The death of Michael Griffith was a tragic event that occurred on December 20, 1986, in Howard Beach, New York. Griffith, who was out with three friends, Cedric Sandiford, Timothy Grimes, and Curtis Sylvester, ran into a mechanical problem with their car. They then decided to find a pay phone to call assistance. While walking back to their car, they were confronted by a group of young white teenagers, some of whom were carrying baseball bats. They chased Griffith and his friends while hurling racial slurs at them. Griffith and his friends tried to flee, but Griffith was caught and beaten mercilessly with a baseball bat. The police arrived on the scene to find Griffith unconscious with a cracked skull. Despite the efforts of medical staff, Griffith died later that night from his injuries. Shortly thereafter, civil rights activist Al Sharpton led a protest in Howard Beach and called for boycotts of white-owned businesses. Howard Beach residents responded with, "niggers go home," "white power," and "bring back slavery."[65]

The tragic death of David Cato angered the West Indian community when an ambulance showed up at the accident scene and took off with the Hasidic Jewish driver who seemed to be shaken-up but ok, while Cato bled to death. The foul air erupted into the Crown Heights race riot of 1991, which was a series of violent clashes between Jamaicans, West Indians, and Black Americans against Jewish communities. The violent confrontations between the two communities lasted three days, resulting in several deaths and injuries. During the riots, mobs of Black youth (including Jamaicans) targeted Jewish homes and businesses, hurling rocks, and bottles, and shouting anti-Semitic slurs. In

[65] Robert McFadden, "Black Man Dies After Beating by Whites in Queens, The New York Times, December 21, 1986; see also Charles J. Hynes, *Incident at Howard Beach: The Case for Murders* (New York: Putnam Adult, 1990).

retaliation, groups of Jewish residents also engaged in violent confrontations with the Black community.[66]

The riots represented a deeper underlying issue that the accident brought to the surface. In fact, the argument can be made that the riots had little to do with the accident. Similar to Black Americans, Jamaican immigrants felt like they were being marginalized and disregarded. Many argued that Griffith and his friends were targeted because of the color of their skin. In addition, they argued that they were being marginalized and encroached upon in Crown Heights by the Jewish community, who were increasingly taking over their neighborhood. While they had complained for years, they felt powerless because they did not have the same resources as the Howard Beach or Jewish communities. Authorities did not give an official statement about what incited the riots. Still, the consensus within the Jamaican immigrant community was that they were pushing back against systemic racism and marginalization.[67]

Though neither incident involved a Jamaican immigrant, they showed that in the face of adversity, Jamaicans mobilized and supported not just West Indians but the entire Black community as the media reported these incidents as a Black versus white issue and not an immigrant versus American issue. Against this backdrop, Jamaican-born Una Clarke ran for City Council in 1992, a position in which she felt she could better represent the community and effectuate change. Clarke led many initiatives to educate

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[66] John T. McQuiston, "Fatal Crash Starts Melee With Police in Brooklyn," *The New York Times*, August 20, 1991; and Martin Gottlieb, "The Crown Heights Report: The Overview," *The New York Times,* July 21, 1993.

[67] Roxanne De Shong, interview by Craig Wilder; Reverend Dr. Clive E. Neil, interview by Craig Wilder, July 29, 1993, Call number: 1994.006.21, Oral History Collections, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY; and Carl E. Roberts, interview by Craig Wilder, July 22, 1993, Call number: 1994.006.26, Oral History Collections, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.

New York and Washington on the needs of the Black and West Indian communities. She was most resourceful in advocating for affordable housing, healthcare access, and educational equity for the Black community of her constituency in Brooklyn, a predominantly West Indian stronghold. Her pioneering work in addressing systemic racism has led to other coalition initiates between West Indians and Black Americans in bringing an end to the New York Police Department's controversial stop and frisk policy, as well as petitioning the mayoral office to award mentorship and contracts to minority own small businesses amongst other things. Clark's initiatives were some of the ways in which Jamaicans responded to racism from a public policy perspective.[68]

Understandably, there were benign reasons for the preponderance of literature pertaining to Jamaican immigrants in New York to be predominantly fixated on the triumphs of the purported "model immigrants" or "good Blacks." Numerous scholars have reported that foreign born Blacks fared better in education than their Black American counterparts. Additionally, the *New York Times* article reported that Black American students at Harvard and other prestigious institutions were predominantly the progeny of foreign-born parents. Florida's *Sun Sentinel* also disclosed that "among immigrant Black students at elite colleges and universities, 21% came from families that originated in Jamaica, 17% from Nigeria, 9% from Haiti, 7% from Trinidad, and 6% Ghana."[69] To contextualize this, Jamaica's population averaged roughly 2.5 million

[68] "Councilwoman Comforts Immigrants," *The New York Times*, October, 23, 1994; and "Former New York City Councilmember: 40th District, Brooklyn, New York," Una Clarke's Biography, accessed March 19, 2023, https://www.unaclarkeassociates.com/biography.html.
[69] Sara Rimer and Karen W. Arenson, "Top Colleges Take More Blacks, but Which Ones?" *The New York Times*, June 24, 2004; and Alva James-Johnson, "Immigration Gives New Face to Ivy League," *South Florida Sun-Sentinel,* Mar 21, 2007.

throughout the 1990s, whereas Nigeria's population averaged 108 million.[70] For Jamaicans, it was an intrinsically cultural belief that education was the key to upward mobility. Consequently, education aided many to respectable positions in medical, legal, and public office. Hence, the argument can be made that Jamaicans also pushed back against systematic racism through the attainment of tertiary education.

The Jamaican response to racism in New York is a model example of how marginalized groups, particularly foreign Blacks, pushed back against systemic injustice. They frequently emphasized their identity as foreigners over their racial identity, thus crafting a unique way to persevere in a hyper race-conscious country. In 1996, Stanley, a Jamaican technician, gave an interview to Vickerman stating, "I think America is a white country and I see Jamaica as a Black country, and if I am a Black man then I don't really have a choice… This is never going to be my country."[71] Stanley's statement showed that the systemic and structural racism in the United States hardened the Jamaican sojourner mentality. However, many found themselves so entwined with American life that they lost hope or the means to return home with their 'pot of gold.' One could argue that more Jamaicans would fully assimilate and identify as Americans if they were not persistently reminded of their Black identity—not in a phenotypical sense but as an economic and social construct. It is this troubling structuralism that has confined people of the Afro-diaspora to the bottom of American society. Astonishingly, race spurred Jamaican

[70] "Jamaica Population 1950-2024," Macrotrends, accessed March 5, 2024, https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/JAM/jamaica/population; and "Nigeria Population 1950-2024," Macrotrends, accessed March 5, 2024, https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/NGA/nigeria/population.
[71] Vickerman, *Crosscurrents*, 120.

immigrants to establish their own spaces in the city, while in the face of adversity, it united them with the broader Black community.

Conclusion

In the scholarly discourse surrounding Jamaican immigrants in New York, post-1965 Jamaicans often countered the negative perceptions associated with Black Americans. They were regarded as industrious immigrants, partly because some were willing to accept lower wages than Black Americans. More pointedly, there was a presumption that Jamaicans were not overtly concerned with racism. Consequently, they were perceived as "good Blacks" and exemplar immigrants. This sentiment was also embraced by white American employers, who were keen on identifying "good Blacks" with whom they could establish trust and rapport without the burden of guilt for historical injustices, encumbering the relationship.[72] However, Jamaicans were not molded by the same historical injustices that Black Americans endured. For instance, Black Americans lacked access to the same resources and privileges awarded to white Americans. As a result, their economic perspectives were unlikely to align with those of their white counterparts. All Jamaicans from a certain class, however, had the same access to the resources available on the island, and even those from a lower class could work their way up the ladder. Finally, most Jamaican immigrants were economic migrants who journeyed to the United States with the sole intention of amassing sufficient wealth to return to their homeland. This unwavering focus and determination allowed them to ignore racism as a temporary inconvenience. However, the longer they stayed in the

[72] Waters, *Black Identities,* Location 2372, Kindle.

United States, and as reality of a return to Jamaica dwindles, they became Black in the American sense of the word. With time, they also united and responded to racism in ways akin to Black Americans.

CHAPTER 5: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF JAMAICAN IMMIGRANTS IN NEW YORK

"Wi likle bit but wi talawah"

As a transnational group, Jamaican immigrants have the potential to influence politics in both New York and Jamaica. Yet, the political economy of Black immigrants, among whom Jamaicans represent the largest single national group, has been relatively understudied. Consequently, this chapter explores the conversation by examining the economy of Jamaican immigrants in New York and its intersection with political agendas. As a disclaimer, this chapter's scope is limited to examining the Jamaican diaspora's economy in New York and the political responses from Jamaica and New York. It does not attempt to decipher the immigrants' voting behavior, as such an inquiry would merit its own dedicated chapter.

Political Economy Defined

Broadly speaking, political economy refers to the connection between economic and political systems. Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and John Stuart Mill are often considered the pioneers of the political economy concept. For example, Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* served as the foundational text for the discipline from its publication in 1848 until the end of the 19th century. At the dawn of the 20th century, the fields diverged and became two distinct disciplines, only to be reunited in the 1970s when it became evident that politics and the economy were inextricably linked. In fact, the state of a country's economy is considered high politics. This is because numerous

studies have demonstrated its potential to sway voters.[1] Given that economics and politics are inseparable, as the Jamaican immigrants' economy grew, it also influenced how politicians addressed them.

The economic mindset of post-1965 Jamaican immigrants has frequently been highlighted in scholarly circles as a distinctive feature that sets them apart from other immigrant groups. However, the political economy of these immigrants remains a largely unexplored area in academic research. While numerous studies have examined their economic circumstances and political engagement independently, there has been a conspicuous lack of integrated analyses. This gap in the literature is significant, as an in-depth investigation into the political economy of Jamaican immigrants is crucial for comprehending the economic attitudes prevalent within the broader West Indian community.

Despite being a subgroup within the West Indies, Jamaicans often serve as the primary example cited by scholars, illustrating broader trends within the West Indian diaspora. Their relentless pursuit of economic opportunity has been the principal motivator behind their ceaseless immigration. Consequently, analyzing the intersection of their economic practices with their political behaviors provides a unique lens through which to understand the distinctive characteristics of this immigrant community. This integrated approach offers deeper insights into how Jamaican immigrants navigate and influence their socioeconomic environments, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of their role within the larger fabric of immigrant communities.

[1] "The Political Economy of Economic Policy," International Monetary Fund, accessed March 16, 2023, https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2020/06/political-economy-of-economic-policy-jeff-frieden.

At the onset of Jamaica's independence in 1962, when the island's inaugural Prime Minister, Alexander Bustamante, appealed to President Kennedy to relax immigration quotas, he did so, knowing that an independent Jamaica would struggle to sustain itself. Faced with a burgeoning population and inadequate resources to develop the land around them, Bustamante recognized that dependency on imports of essential commodities could precipitate a foreseeable cycle of debt. Emigration, he believed, would at least offer the island some respite. Bustamante's open advocacy for his citizens to relocate to another nation may appear counterintuitive. However, recalling from chapter one how the Jamaican diaspora offered economic relief to the island in the early 1900s, it was a practical economic strategy. Bustamante wrote to Kennedy, "we are not blind to our own domestic problems… we are with the problem of over-population, underdevelopment, limited land room, and scarce natural resources."[2] Since then, every subsequent Prime Minister has refrained from opposing Jamaican emigration to the United States because they, too, recognized the economic benefits therein. Rather than expressing concern over the diminishing talent pool and the brain drain effect that came with immigration, they redirected their focus towards leveraging potential gains from the diaspora.[3]

One does not have to look far to comprehend Jamaica's economic orientation to its migrant population. On the eve of independence, the country's agricultural and manufacturing sectors accounted for approximately 27% of its GDP.[4] This figure had

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[2] Prime Minister Alexander Bustamante Letter to President John F. Kennedy, September 29, 1962, Jamaica: General 1961-1963, John F. Kennedy Library Archives, https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKPOF/119b/JFKPOF-119b-011.
[3] Wonderful Hope Khonje, *Migration and Development Perspective from Small States* (London: Marlborough House, 2015), 15.
[4] Ramocan, "Remittances to Jamaica," 37.

diminished to 25% just six years later. To make matters worse, foreign investors were increasingly privatizing the island and repatriating their profits instead of reinvesting them in Jamaica. In addition, the island suffered acute shortages during the turbulent Manley years, and soaring inflation further exacerbated the economic decline, prompting the middle class to flee with their capital. Throughout the 1970s, Jamaica's unemployment rate consistently exceeded 20 percent, hitting a high of 31.1 percent in 1979. The subsequent Seaga years of the 1980s brought scant relief. In fact, the island's inflation that averaged 18.5 percent annually during the 1970s dropped to 16.0 percent throughout the 1980s.[5]

The Jamaican Immigrants Economic Outlook

By observing the Jamaican immigrant experience through the life of Martha Gayle, one can discern how she crystallized the Jamaican immigrant economy. Despite residing in New York for the majority of her life, Gayle frequently used phrases like "I am going home" and "I am coming home" when referring to Jamaica.[6] Apart from maintaining her brownstones, she channeled all of her disposable income into Jamaica for an anticipated retirement. Unfortunately, that dream never materialized and the specific factors that thwarted her return remain unclear. Perhaps the financial exigencies of American life restricted her to New York. It was common for Jamaican immigrants to find it challenging to disengage once they had integrated into the American economy.

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[5] Philip Kasinitz and Milton Vickerman, "Ethnic Niches and Racial Traps," in *Migration, Transnationalism, and Race in a Changing New York*, ed. Hector R Cordero-Guzman and Robert C Smith (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 192.

[6] Martha Gayle's Letter to Sis D, June 28, 1981, Box 5, Folder 14, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.

Her story, nonetheless, mirrors the melancholic reality of numerous Jamaicans who spoke of the island with grandiose nostalgia and oriented themselves for a return that seldom materialized.

To elaborate further, in a recent survey, ten middle-class Jamaican immigrants who arrived in New York in the 1970s were asked about their retirement plans. They all expressed a desire to "go home" and financed different projects there.[7] Even though all the respondents' harbored ambitions of returning to the island, only two had actively pursued that goal. The realities of their American lives kept the others anchored in the United States. More specifically, the reality of lifelong mortgages and financing their children's education, among other financial constraints, made a return to Jamaica unlikely. As evidenced, Gayle's retirement outlook was not unique. Her prevaricated retirement was a prevalent theme within the Jamaican immigrant community.

Since Chapter Three mentioned Gayle's properties as income generators, it is worth mentioning how homeownership operated to build economic clout. For families within the lower and middle-income brackets in the United States, housing invariably represents the most substantial expenditure, which augments their socioeconomic status beyond the confines of conventional employment. During epochs characterized by escalated inflation, homeowners find themselves uniquely advantaged, given that mortgage rates remain largely static while their respective property valuation undergoes a noticeable appreciation. Thus, propelling homeowners up the social ladder. The incongruities in homeownership rates frequently surface as a contributory factor to the

[7] Juliet Campbell-Farrell, "Understanding the Factors that have Contributed to the Maintenance of a Jamaican Identity Despite Assimilation Pressures faced by Jamaican Immigrants Living in the United States of America" (PhD diss., Bryn Mawr College, 2010), 107.

enduring economic chasm between whites and minority groups when income levels are similar. The acquisition of residential property holds intergenerational significance as well. In many cases, the equity accrued in a parent's home emerges as the singular source of capital that individuals within the lower and middle-income brackets can leverage to become homeowners themselves. Given the parity between Jamaican and white American homeownership rates, Jamaicans demonstrated a higher propensity to penetrate the middle-class sphere. Their homeownership rates also represented a seminal stride towards gaining political and economic clout.[8]

Gayle owned a triumvirate of brownstones in Brooklyn, with her principal dwelling at 164 MacDonough Street. Her additional properties, situated at 51 MacDonough Street and 285 Macon Street, functioned as rental properties, generating sufficient revenue to sustain her self-employment. However, despite her commendable success, self-employment rates amongst Jamaicans remained markedly inferior to other immigrant demographics boasting comparable labor force participation rates. In addition, underhand policies towards Blacks by financial institutions meant they were less likely to acquire upfront capital for business endeavors. Furthermore, the Jamaican community's prevalent cultural emphasis on education generally funneled them into public sector employment. Nonetheless, Gayle's 1967 leases showcased a respectable annual income of $900.00 and $840.00 from her properties at 51 MacDonough and 285 Macon, respectively. Even though there was no lease to adjudicate, Gayle's personal notes suggested that a portion of her principal residence at 164 MacDonough was also rented

[8] Suzanne Model, *West Indian Immigrants: A Black Success Story?* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011) 188; Phillip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 87 and 158.

out - a fact later substantiated by her grandniece, who confirmed the multi-unit nature of the brownstones.[9] All this is to say that homeownership created an underground economy, because like Gayle, some Jamaican homeowners rented apartments as well as rooms and basements (off the books) to generate passive income.[10]

Gayle's property acquisition within earshot of each other was not a uniquely Jamaican phenomenon. Rather, it was through such distinct homeownership patterns that ethnic enclaves were established. These patterns facilitated the West Indian diaspora in carving out a unique community and constructing a substantial economic foundation within Brooklyn. In his comprehensive study on West Indian immigrants in New York, Kasinitz reported that a Guyanese immigrant whose family owned four houses on the same block in Flatbush, Brooklyn described the pattern in this way:

> It is like our own little village here… It is an old Caribbean tradition of families living close together. What happens is one person will come here, and with hard work and some help, he will eventually be able to afford a house. Other members of the family follow and you begin to have something like a neighborhood."[11]

In the Bronx (the borough with the highest concentration of Jamaicans), sociologist Andrew Beveridge declared that Jamaicans there were wealthier, better educated, more likely to own homes, and have more stable families than those in Brooklyn. Kasinitz added, "the Bronx plays the same role for Jamaicans as it once did for Jews… It is basically stable, middle-class neighborhoods."[12] Some scholars pointed to

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[9] Documents for 164 MacDonough Street, 51 MacDonough Street, and 285 Macon Street, Box 6, Folder 3 - 5, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000.

[10] In his interview, Reinford Evans disclose that although it was illegal to rent basement apartments because they lacked egress windows, it was a common practice within the immigrant community. Renters only rent to members of the community, and vacancies were advertised by word of mouth. These illegal rentals were of course not reported as income and renters paid in cash.

[11] Kassinitz, *Caribbean New York*, 58.

[12] Adam Nossiter, "A Jamaican Way Station in the Bronx: Community of Striving Immigrants Fosters Middle-Class Values," *The New York Times*, October 25, 1995.

the high rate of Jamaican homeownership for their deemed success in the Bronx. Homeownership rates were higher because the mostly two-story buildings in the Wakefield-Williamsbridge area of the Bronx did not lend themselves to a high rate of tenant occupancy as the high rises in Brooklyn. Furthermore, when residing in such proximate quarters, individuals tend to gravitate towards those with similar appearances, behaviors, and ideologies, creating an environment conducive to the development of a close-knit community.

In 1995, Colin Powell argued that "there is a degree of clannishness among West Indians, Jamaicans included."[13] His statement remained the distinctive feature of Jamaicans in the Bronx. It was normal to see professionals – an electrician, an insurance agent, a physician, a janitor, and a domestic aide – all cohabiting in the same economic and social sphere. Racial segregation made it difficult for middle-class Jamaicans to move into predominantly white middle-class spaces. Race shaped and sometimes truncated the development of their niche and limited their effectiveness of social and economic capital outside of their niche.[14] As a result, White Plains, Boston, and Gunhill Roads in the northeast Bronx transformed into Jamaican take-outs, restaurants, bakeries, record stores, supermarkets, and shipping companies. Hence, it was in the Bronx, where they had the strongest economic base.

The Jamaican Partner

Jamaican immigrants utilized various strategies to amass capital for their economic pursuits. Among these, the most unique was, perhaps, the utilization of a

[13] Nossitter, "A Jamaican Way Station in the Bronx."
[14] Kasinitz and Vickerman, "Ethnic Niches and Racial Traps," 206.

rotating credit association, colloquially referred to as "*paadna*" (partner) (also called "suss" within the wider Anglo-Caribbean).[15] *Paadna* is an informal financial system where a group of individuals collectively save money by pooling a pre-agreed sum, which is subsequently rotated among each member on a weekly, bi-weekly, or even monthly basis. The sum ranged from several hundred to a few thousand dollars. While both genders participated in *paadna*, women typically assumed the role of bankers.[16]

One of the great benefit of the *paadna* savings scheme was that it provided an avenue to circumnavigate the policies of commercial banks, which also contributed to a higher homeownership rate among Jamaicans compared to other Blacks. It was common knowledge that, historically, banks were less likely to lend Blacks. However, *paadna* allowed Jamaicans to amass the necessary capital for down payments on houses. Interviewee Debra Lee validated this narrative, confirming that her Jamaican father secured the down payment for his first brownstone by utilizing the *paadna* scheme. Lee explained that while *paadna* did not give them the opportunity to buy in cash, lenders exhibited greater willingness to risk loans to borrowers who were able to provide a down payment, as these individuals were less likely to be categorized as high-risk borrowers.[17] In similar fashion, *The New York Times* ran an article stating:

> When Monica Foster arrived in Brooklyn from Jamaica in 1968, she started saving to buy a home, but she did not open a bank account. Like many Caribbean immigrants, she joined a partnership, or savings club, run by her family and friends, "throwing a hand" of $100 a week. In the next 20 years, that $100 a week paid for a house on Long Island and the furniture in it.[18]

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[15] See Aubrey W. Bonnett, "An Examination of Ratating Credit Associations among Black West Indian Immigrants in Brooklyn," in *The New Immigration: Implication for the United States and the International Community,* ed. R. S. Bryce-Laporte (New Brunswick, Transaction Press, 1980), 271-84.
[16] Women were normally bankers in the *paadnas* perhaps stemming from slavery when they were trusted with money to go to the markets on the slave master's behalf. See source above.
[17] Debra Lee, interview by author, Amityville, NY, March 23, 2023.
[18] "Jamaican Emigres Bring Thrift Clubs to New York," *The New York Times*, June 19, 1988.

It is plausible that Martha Gayle also procured her first property through *paadna*. While her bank records substantiated the existence of a mortgage, the origin of the down payment for her mortgage remained ambiguous. If Gayle did not venture into asset acquisition through *paadna*, naturally, the next question would be, where did she get the money for her downpayment? Her records revealed she was employed as a domestic helper to Nancy Fass of a Brooklyn address. Gayle earned $30 per week, according to Fass's letter to the U.S. Consulate on May 10, 1945.[19] This equates to an annual income of approximately $408. Given the average price of a brownstone in the 1940s was around $15,000, amassing a twenty percent down payment solely through her income would take over seven years. Gayle purchased her first brownstone in 1946, which lends credence to the supposition that she likely leveraged some form communal assistance to acquire the asset.

Gayle's role as a banker within her *paadna* group further advanced the possibility that she may have purchased one or more of her properties via this method. Her personal notes meticulously recorded the number of individuals in her *paadna* group, the payments made and owed, the recipients for each *paadna* draw, and the timeline for these transactions.[20] This informal economic activity was predicated upon a profound degree of trust, commitment, and mutual support that was intrinsically linked to a shared identity. Absent this bond, the network's operational efficiency would have been significantly compromised. All the reasons then why Gayle operated her *paadna* along cultural

[19] Nancy Fass Letter to the American Council in Kingston, Box 3, Folder 11, The Martha Gayle Collection.
[20] Martha Gayle's Personal Notes, n.d., Box 1, Folder 3, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.

affinity. Kassinitz pointed out that evidence from other *paadna* bankers suggested that they were certainly more successful when they operated along cultural lines.[21]

In addition to housing, *paadna* was utilized as a capital generator for small business ventures and even routine expenditures, such as purchasing household appliances or funding weddings. The communal saving scheme was particularly appealed to recent immigrants unfamiliar with the American banking infrastructure, as well as undocumented workers who favored its unrecorded nature. Undeterred by the proliferation of credit cards and the banks' reform policy to lend to anybody, many Jamaican immigrants continued to utilize *paadna* because it encouraged a productive routine. Brian, a Brooklyn construction worker, exclaimed, "when I get my paycheck, the first money I take out is my hand."[22] Through *paadna*, he saved one hundred dollars a week for almost twenty years. He admitted, "I do not think I would be disciplined enough to do that on my own."[23]

In New York*, paadna* transcended more than monetary transactions among a group of compatriots. It encompassed participants from all social strata within the community - domestic workers, live-in maids, elevator operators, and government employees alike. As a social nexus, *paadna* fostered mutual support, group cohesion, and profound bonds of friendship. It promoted unity among the recently arrived, undocumented, and well-established community members. For many, the camaraderie, fellowship, and information sharing were as valuable as the actual savings, with *paadna* offering a financial resource that facilitated the broader economic integration.

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[21] Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York,* 87-88.
[22] "Jamaican Emigres Bring Thrift Clubs to New York," *The New York Times*, June 19, 1988.
[23] Ibid.

Jamaican Immigrants and Remittances

When Gayle arrived in New York, she prioritized finding employment as quickly as possible to support her family back home. This single act was the epitome of the Jamaican immigrant experience. Remitting funds to their native land was not merely an obligation, it was a social contract that anchored them to the island. When they sent remittances to their loved ones, that money got circulated throughout the Jamaican economy. Therefore, remittances constitute the most substantial economic impact the Jamaican diaspora imparts upon the island.

Remarkably, the money that was being pumped into Jamaica's economy was sent through the mail. Though traditionalists, like Gayle, relied on the postal system to send remittances to her relatives, it was a method fraught with risk as funds did not always reach the intended recipients. Instances of letter theft led her nephew Cliff to issue her a cautionary warning in one of his letters. On November 16, 1972, he wrote, "all you have to do is to register any letter that you are sending with money. The stealing of letters in Kingston now is very rampant, so letters with money must be registered."[24] In another letter dated December 7, 1982, Gayle wrote to her sister, "the Christmas season is here, so I want to send a few cents for those that are there. Enclosed is $100, I am taking a chance, so please let me know if you get it or not."[25] On February 28, 1983, Gayle frantically penned to her sister, "I sent you two letters on Friday the 4th February and the other on the 9th both contain money, $1,000 on the 4th and $2,000 on the 9th."[26] She worried that not hearing from her sister meant she did not receive the money. Still, her

[24] Cliff letter to Martha Gayle, November 16, 1972, Box 2, Folder 14, The Martha Gayle Collection.
[25] Martha Gayle letter to Sis D, December 7, 1982, Box 1, Folder 3, The Martha Gayle Collection.
[26] Ibid.

collection of letters was inundated with countless thank-you letters from grateful recipients, especially around Christmas, which meant despite its flaws, the mail was a workable outlet.

Sending funds via the postal system further exemplifies how Gayle's experience mirrors the broader Jamaican diaspora. This archaic method of money transfer harks back to the era of the initial wave of Jamaican migrants who journeyed to Panama, Costa Rica, and Cuba. The so-called "Panama men," some of whom never returned to Jamaica, were known to support their families in this manner. The practice was not unique to Jamaicans either; other West Indian diaspora communities engaged in similar methods of sending remittance. Sharon Marshall and Bonham Richardson's research in *Tell My Mother I Gone to Cuba* and *Panama Money in Barbados* illuminate this phenomenon among Barbadian migrants in Cuba and Panama, respectively. Both researchers describe how Barbadian families eagerly awaited letters from abroad, not only for the emotional connection but also for the monetary support enclosed within the envelopes.[27]

With the many flaws and unreliability of sending money through the mail, a more efficient service was long overdue. Notwithstanding, Grace Kennedy Limited partnered with Western Union to facilitate money transferred into the island in 1990. The partnership became a big game changer in the remittance process for several reasons. It had enabled governments on both shores to track the volume of funds being transferred. For instance, Western Union data enabled the Bank of Jamaica (BOJ) research on

[27] In their literature on Barbadian migrant workers, Marshall and Richards explain how Barbadians were able to care for their family members back home by sending money through the mail. See Bonham C. Richardson, *Panama Money in Barbados 1900-1920* (Nashville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986); and Sharon Milagro Marshall, *Tell My Mother I Gone To Cuba: Stories of Early Twentieth-Century Migration from Barbados* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2016).

remittance to Jamaica to reveal that a significant proportion of the population received monetary remittances that averaged higher than the minimum wage.[28] The data used was from recipients from the 1990s, which was within the first decade of Western Union operations on the island. Before electronic monetary services, there was no way for the government to accurately track how much money was being sent. Moreover, the BOJ's finding was further evidence that the diaspora was a fully functional part of the Jamaican economy.

More importantly, Western Union revolutionized the remittance process by reducing the delivery time from the previous one to two weeks by mail to a single day. The agency's streamlined system ensured that money transferred directly from the sender to the receiver without passing through multiple intermediaries. Additionally, recipients were required to present photo identification to collect funds, thus enhancing security and reliability. Despite the nominal fee, the efficiency and security encouraged senders to remit regularly thus increasing Western Union's profit.[29]

Perhaps not surprising, Western Union, with its convenience and ease of use, has dominated the remittance market in Jamaica. When the agency began operating on the island, remittance flowed from just four countries.[30] However, by the late 1990s, Western Union was channeling funds from over fifty countries into Jamaica, with the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. being the primary origin of these funds.[31] Unsurprisingly, Western

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[28] Ramocan, "Remittances to Jamaica," 70.
[29] "Western Union and Grace Kennedy Celebrate 25 years in Jamaica with Expansion Plans," Western Union, accessed March 15, 2023, https://ir.westernunion.com/news/archived-press-releases/press-release-details/2015/Western-Union-and-GraceKennedy-Celebrate-25-Years-in-Jamaica-with-Expansion-Plans/default.aspx.
[30] GraceKennedy Limited is one of the Caribbean's largest conglomerates, with several diversified companies in the Caribbean, Europe, and North America. It is headquartered in Kingston, Jamaica.
[31] "Western Union Remains The Reliable Remittance Company in Jamaica," *Jamaica Observer*, December 21, 2006.

Union outlets are present in all fourteen parishes in Jamaica. Its profound impact on Jamaica's economy is evidenced by the fact that it delivered more funds to recipients than most employers on the island. Recipients often braved long, overcrowded queues, slow service, subpar customer service, and the even more perplexing, cash shortages.[32] These propagated inconveniences were cycled in a seasonal pattern, as remittance inflow into the island exhibited an equally seasonal pattern. From 1998 to 2003, for example, Western Union locations on the island experienced their highest traffic during the Christmas and back-to-school periods.[33]

One might understandably wonder why Western Union outlets on the island experienced its highest traffic during the Christmas and back-to-school seasons. While the latter is self-explanatory, the former warrants additional elucidation. Though ostensibly a season for generosity, Christmas holds a deeply ingrained significance for the predominantly Christian Jamaica that transcends religious boundaries. During slavery, the holiday was marked by feasts, celebrations, and most crucially, a respite from forced labor. Plantation owners, overseers, and slave drivers alike also abstained from work during this period, thus permitting the enslaved to openly partake in festivities.[34] While adorned in their finest garments, they would engage in drumming, singing, and dancing well into the night. As numerous customs persisted post-emancipation, Christmas remained a highly venerated occasion, characterized by church gatherings, parties, feasts, and grand markets in every major town. Notably, the rebellion that

[32] Cash shortages often happened when there was more money to hand out than a location typically stored. The government and other stakeholders have tried to remedy the recurring situation by opening more locations island-wide.
[33] Ramocan, "Remittances to Jamaica," 10.
[34] The enslaved received three days off during Christmas, December 25–27. See Tom Zoellner, *Island on Fire: The Revolt That Ended Slavery in the British Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2020), 69.

ultimately culminated in the abolition of slavery on the island is commonly referred to as the Christmas Rebellion.[35] As a result, Christmas signifies not only the birth of Jesus Christ, but a reprieve from bondage. Enduring traditions such as *Junkanoo* and grand markets, although unrelated to Christianity, remain deeply embedded within the fabric of Jamaican society.[36] In Jamaica, Christmas assumes a collective social significance, symbolizing freedom and cultural celebration. As such, both senders and recipients of remittances ascribe considerable cultural importance to the holiday season.

Using Gayle as a transitory point from the old remittance practice to the new, it remains uncertain whether she used Western Union for remittance purposes, but the possibility cannot be discounted, especially considering some expressions of gratitude from her relatives did not explicitly outline how they received the funds. Her letters suggest a consistent pattern of sending remittances spanning from the 1940s through the 1990s, demonstrating a remarkable consistency. This practice may have begun even earlier, given that she arrived in 1924. Moreover, Western Union, which began providing services on the island in the 1990s, had a significant presence in immigrant communities in New York, as these communities formed the backbone of its customer base. Given Gayle's residence in Brooklyn, she would have had convenient access to a Western

[35] The Baptist War or Christmas Rebellion (also the Christmas Uprising) began on Christmas Day in 1831 when the enslave people on Kensington estate decided to take advantage of their masters laxed Christmas spirit and launch a revolt. Led by Samuel Sharpe, a mulatto Baptist deacon, the revolt engulfed the entire western end of the island and lasted until mid-January 1832. Though there were already talks to end slavery in Britain, the rebellion led many British legislators to conclude that they could no longer hold slaves in bondage. For more see, Zoellner, *Island on Fire*; and Gad J. Heuman, *The Killing Time: The Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 35–38.

[36] Grand Market is a Christmas eve activity that dates back to slavery. In anticipation of having Christmas Day off, the enslaved would dress up in their finest garments the night before, meet up at a central location, sing, dance and play drums until the wee hours of the morning. Junkanoo (also from slavery days) is a street parade with music and dance that is celebrated across the English Caribbean on Boxing Day (the day after Christmas). Patrons wear traditional African themed costumes and reenact spiritual dances.

Union facility. Furthermore, her relatives most likely informed her of the agency's advantages in terms of security and speed over the postal service. Considering Western Union's accessibility, coupled with Gayl's extensive list of recipients, it seems highly plausible that she utilized its services.

Gayle's remittances were not confined to monetary contributions; they also encompassed tangible goods. This is colloquially known amongst Jamaicans as "send a barrel," a practice wherein a variety of items were packed into a barrel and shipped to the island, where they were subsequently retrieved by family members from the wharves in either Kingston or Montego Bay. These shipments represented an additional bolster to the Jamaican economy, and unlike sending money through the mail which had been largely replaced by digital transfer, sending a barrel continued to be a mainstay in the remittance process. Furthermore, expatriate family members who sent essential commodities unattainable on the island also alleviated the fiscal responsibility that would have been otherwise shouldered by the government.

Although the precise number of barrels Gayle sent home remains indeterminate, her correspondence with family members revealed that she sent quite a few. It is noteworthy too that barrels did not constitute the sole medium for sending goods to family members in Jamaica. Judging from a letter Gayle sent to her sister, it was apparent that remittances sometimes included packages, as she summoned her sister to retrieve a package from the Wharf in Kingston. In addition, her collection revealed an old invoice in which the United Fruit Company charged her $123.00 to ship four crates weighing 500 lbs. to Kingston aboard the SS Cape Cod.[37] In a few more correspondences, Gayle

[37] Martha Gayle letter to Sis D, August 18, 1982, Box 1, Folder 3, The Martha Gayle Collection; see also Invoice from United Fruit Company, Box 6, Folder 1, The Martha Gayle Collection.

provided instructions for the collection of packages that were air-carried by acquaintances. This was yet another common occurrence within the Jamaican immigrant community, in which goods were carried by an acquaintance who would meet up with the recipient at an agreed upon location on the island. Still, sending a barrel was a conformist way of getting goods to relatives on the island. In areas with a substantial Jamaican presence, such as the Bronx, Queens, Mount Vernon, and parts of Long Island, procuring a barrel often entailed a simple visit to any West Indian or affiliated supermarkets.[38]

Looking at the bigger picture, in the latter half of the 1990s, remittances sent to the island amounted to over a billion dollars annually. Within that decade, personal remittances received neared twenty percent of the country's annual gross domestic product (GDP). The revenue generated by remittances surpassed that of agricultural exports, including sugar, coffee, tobacco, and bananas. In most years throughout the 1990s, remittances stand on par with tourism and as Jamaica's the primary source of gross income. Remarkably, it outpaced foreign direct investment, income from export processing zones, and international development aid.[39]

A comprehensive survey conducted by Esmond McLean for the Bank of Jamaica (BOJ) on remittance recipients revealed that of the 2,072 interviewees, 75 percent were female, with 60 percent of them being single. The largest demographic among the recipients were working-age adults, with 44 percent aged between 26 and 40, 27 percent

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[38] Knolly Moses, "The 'Barrel Children'" *Newsweek*, February 19, 1996; see also Claudette Crawford-Brown, *Who Will Save Our Children: The Plight of the Jamaican Child in the Nineties* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1999).

[39] Esmond A. McLean, *An Investigation of Recent Trends in the Remittance Industry: Evidence from Jamaica - Economic Information and Publication Department External Sector Statistics Unit*, (Kingston: Bank of Jamaica, December 2008), 14.

between 41 and 60, 21 percent between 18 and 25, and only 6 percent over 60 or under 18.[40] The survey's findings indicated that the working working-age adults incomes were being supplemented by remittances. Hence, by maintaining homeland ties through remittances, the broader Jamaican community in New York served as an economic lifeline for the Jamaican economy.

In terms of contribution to Jamaica's GDP, only tourism competed on pare with remittances as foreign exchange into the nation's economy. A Planning Institute of Jamaica study reported that remittance rose to $1.3 billion in 2003, which exceeded the amount earned in the same period through tourism. Even in tourism, for the past four decades, Jamaicans visiting home were the freest spending tourists that went to Jamaica. It is a fact that further underscores the critical role of the diaspora in bolstering Jamaica's economy, to the extent that visits by Jamaicans were perceived as an extension of remittances. The BOJ indicated this notion in stating that "tourism included how often remitters visit Jamaica, their average length of stay, their likelihood to return, and the receiver's likelihood to migrate and visit Jamaica as a tourist."[41] In this context, Martha Gayle was well integrated into the Jamaican economy. Her visits to her homeland were characterized by their considerable duration, often spanning months rather than mere days or weeks. Her grandniece, Petal, recalled she once spent a whole year on the island.[42] Understandably, her self-employment afforded her extended stays; this would not apply to most Jamaicans. Nevertheless, the economic significance of the diaspora's return visits cannot be understated, irrespective of their length.

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[40] McLean, *An Investigation of Recent Trends*, 14.
[41] Ramocan, "Remittances to Jamaica,"4.
[42] Petal Miller, interview by author, Queens, NY, March 25, 2023.

In the survey conducted for the BOJ, Ramocan discovered that the population growth rate of legal Jamaicans in the United States was outpacing the island by 1.5 to 0.8. That translated to an approximate annual migration rate of 10 percent of the island's population during the 1990s and early 2000s. The ripple effect resulted in Jamaica being ranked second only to Mexico in Latin America and the Caribbean for the highest percentage of households receiving remittances. In the early 1990s, remittances represented around two percent of household income. By the early 2000s, it was close to seven percent. On average, around a quarter of Jamaican households received remittances between 1995 and 2002. In addition, Ramocan reported that the average monthly household remittance averaged $250 in 2002, which was a significant amount considering that the minimum wage was $105 at the time.[43]

Jamaican Immigrants in Jamaica's Political Economy

In the study titled "The Impact of Remittances on Labor Supply," commissioned by the World Bank, Namsuk Kim discovered a paradoxical consequence of remittances: while they furnished recipients with tangible wages, they concurrently precipitated a withdrawal from the labor force, thereby increasing the island's unemployment rate.[44] Kim's research illuminates an infrequently contemplated negative repercussion of remittances, one that is rarely, if ever, considered by the senders, recipients, and even the Jamaican government. Jamaican immigrants' remittances, in their various forms, facilitated the provision of food, clothing, and shelter, covered educational and medical

[43] Kim, "The Impact of Remittances on Labor Supply," 7.
[44] Namsuk Kim, The World Bank, *The Road to Sustain Growth in Jamaica. A World Bank Country Study* (Washington D.C: The World Bank, 2004), 3.

expenses, settled bills, and helped small businesses. However, amidst these benefits, the potential disincentive to work that they introduced is seldom considered. Kim's findings suggest that households with substantial remittance income possess elevated reservation wages, and, consequently, exhibit a diminished labor supply by those who exit the workforce. Individuals not engaged in employment consequently forgo paying taxes and other levies, which would otherwise have been channeled as capital to the government to bolster the national economy. This issue was particularly disquieting given that the primary recipients of remittances were predominantly adults of working age.

Kim's finding was a plausible counterargument but the reality was that Jamaica's limited resources meant that the island could not produce beyond its capability. Jamaica's intricate reliance on money from its diaspora constituted a complex situation that, despite its potential negative implications, it alleviated the Jamaican government's responsibility to provide jobs and other opportunities for its citizens. Had individuals like Gayle refrained from sending assistance, the government would have been overburdened with the task of creating opportunities on an island with limited resources.

Realizing the diaspora's impact on the nation's economy, the Jamaican government began some serious politicking on how to influence the diaspora dollars in the 1990s. The arduous pursuit of diaspora dollars had brought several Prime Ministers to New York.[45] However, it was Prime Minister PJ Patterson who brough to the conversation to a head in a passionate speech he delivered in Brooklyn on October 2, 2003. He asserted, "the time has come for both sides of the connection, the diaspora and

[45] "Visits by Foreign Leaders of Jamaica," Office of the Historian, Department of States, accessed June 5, 2024, https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/visits/jamaica.

home region, to work together to realize the full potential of a dynamic relationship."[46] While addressing a largely West Indian audience, he announced that Haiti was a welcome member of the West Indian collective, thereby extending the West Indian identity beyond the Anglophone Caribbean. Notwithstanding his pan-West Indian sentiment, Jamaicans were the primary focus of his discourse, not solely due to his position as their Prime Minister, but because their 40 percent representation of the West Indian population in New York underscored the real potential he alluded to. Additionally, his specific references to "the country" and "the economy" suggest a focus on Jamaica, rather than the broader West Indies.[47]

Patterson acknowledged his government's inability to stem the decades-long tide of emigration to New York, attributing this to constraints in human, financial, and institutional resources. Therefore, he was interested in how Jamaica could benefit from its now established immigrant community in New York. He explained:

> We will only stem the tide when we expand our economies, increase professional and job opportunities and accentuate social mobility fast enough to satisfy the growing expectations of our people. All this can be spurred from the benefit of the added synergy to be gained from regional integration and progressive social policies, which will in time substantially reduce lack of opportunities as a push factor."[48]

Without government interference, the Jamaican diaspora has conducted numerous charitable initiatives on the island, such as providing medical equipment for children's wards, and nursing homes, and assisting with back-to-school supplies. In addition, there were those, like Gayle, who returned frequently and gave freely to family and friends.

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[46] Percival James (P.J.) Patterson was Jamaica's sixth and longest serving Prime Minister. He held office from 1992-2006. In 2003, while in Brooklyn, he gave a speech titled Caricom Beyond Thirty. See, "Prime Minister's Speech on CARICOM Beyond Thirty: Connecting with The Diaspora" Jamaica Information Service, October 2, 2003. https://jis.gov.jm/speeches/pms-speech-on-caricom-beyond-thirty-connecting-with-the-diaspora-brooklyn-new-york/.

[47] Ibid.

[48] "Prime Minister's Speech on CARICOM Beyond Thirty."

Hence, the diaspora's significance to the Jamaican economy was beyond measure. However, Patterson's interests were not solely confined to philanthropy. Beginning in the 1990s, the Jamaican government began examining the diaspora's maintenance of foreign and local currency deposits in banking institutions on the island. Their foreign currency deposit increased the capacity of the island's banks to provide necessary loans to local businesses to finance expansions and production for export. This was one of the things Patterson sought to encourage on a broader scale.[49]

In his address, Patterson pointed out that the "barrel phenomenon" had received very little attention in research or analytical work. This research should add to the conversation, given that it was highlighted earlier in the chapter. Patterson added, "numerous dependents back home rely as much on the goods sent home regularly to them in these barrel consignments as they do on actual cash remittances."[50] He further admitted that remittances in cash and goods were a "significant part of the implicit social safety net of the country, supporting consumption at adequate levels, and thereby providing stimulating injections into various sectors of the economy."[51] As it appeared, he was very much in favor of remittances because he saw the benefit they brought to the Jamaican economy.

Patterson outlined a slew of activities that the diaspora could get involved with for the betterment of the region, such as free trade and freedom of movement for CARICOM citizens.[52] He further encouraged the diaspora's involvement in the Performing Arts and

[49] "Prime Minister's Speech on CARICOM Beyond Thirty."
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] CARICOM is an intergovernmental organization which includes fifteen Caribbean nations. Its objective is to promote economic integration and cooperation between its members.

in the development of sports facilities. While acknowledging that his government could not impose a mandatory remittance from the diaspora, he called for vigorous leadership within the diaspora to create substantial institutions that could aggregate money for prudent investment. These institutions could amass funds for judicious initiatives, which he believed, would contribute to the development of the island.

Patterson deserves credit for not solely focusing on the economic benefits that the diaspora could bring to Jamaica. He also recognized the potential for political lobbying within the broader West Indian community in American politics. He posited that advocating for West Indian interests in U.S. politics should not be seen as a disservice to the U.S. Historically, actions taken to safeguard Caribbean interests in the U.S. often coincided with U.S. interests in the Caribbean. An illustrative case is the Cuban American lobby, which has significantly influenced U.S. policies toward Cuba. A comparable West Indian lobby could advocate for its interests along the U.S. "third border."[53] Therefore, Patterson's suggestion was not revolutionary. In fact, it echoed sentiments held by the broader West Indian community regarding their political potential in the United States. This was particularly evident during the 1985 mayoral election when a politically active West Indian community supported Ed Koch, contributing to his re-election for a second term as mayor of New York City.[54] Patterson, however, was the first head of state to publicly acknowledge the power of the West Indian vote, which made his speech a significant catalyst for this research.

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[53] Dating back to the Monroe Doctrine, the U.S. third border or America's backyard is a Political Science term used in reference to the U.S. sphere of influence in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). See Samuel Frazier, "Ethnicity, Empire, and Exclusion: The Incorporation of a Caribbean Borderland, 1893 - 1909," January 14, 2007, 6-36, accessed March 15, 2023, http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/llilas/ilassa/2007/frazier.pdf.

[54] Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York*, 170-173.

Markedly, Patterson was not the only Jamaican politician who campaigned for diaspora dollars. There were several Jamaican politicians who unswervingly called for stronger reciprocal relations with the diaspora. As a result, a bi-annual diaspora conference was inaugurated to get the diaspora more involved with the island's economic development outside of remittances. The Jamaican immigrant community was estimated to be worth some $40 billion in 2003.[55] However, the majority of this wealth remained within the United States, prompting the Jamaican government to explore ways of tapping into this resource. Politicians like Delano Franklin, (a Jamaican State Minister) sought a reciprocal relationship with Jamaicans abroad that would redound to the benefit of all Jamaicans on the island. K.D. Knight (Minister of Foreign Affairs) similarly appealed to the diaspora to "become true stakeholders in Jamaica's economic and social development."[56] Knight emphasized the government's commitment, stating, "we are going to be driving this process, and we are going to be doing what is possible."[57]

Although these politicians were addressing all Jamaican expatriates, New York, being home to the largest community of expatriates, was the epicenter of the diaspora. The city significantly outpaced Florida, its closest competitor, in terms of remittance origin, registering 24.3 percent compared to Florida's 12.9 percent. Given its economic significance to Jamaica's financial ecosystem, New York has received more visits from Jamaican Prime Ministers than Washington D.C., the usual destination for state visits in

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[55] Lisa Lake, "Remittances and the Jamaican Economy: From Fundamentals to Effective Policy Recommendations," MPA/ID Second Year Policy Analysis, Harvard Kennedy School, 2006.
[56] "Knight Urges Overseas Jamaicans To Become Stakeholders In Country's Future," Jamaica Information Service, accessed March 19, 2023, https://jis.gov.jm/knight-urges-overseas-jamaicans-to-become-stakeholders-in-countrys-future/. https://jis.gov.jm/knight-urges-overseas-jamaicans-to-become-stakeholders-in-countrys-future/; and "State Minister Calls for Stronger Reciprocal Relations with Jamaican Community Overseas," Jamaica Information Service, accessed March 19, 2023, https://jis.gov.jm/state-minister-calls-for-stronger-reciprocal-relations-with-jamaican-community-overseas/.
[57] "Knight Urges Overseas Jamaicans To Become Stakeholders In Country's Future."

the United States.[58] As the global financial capital, apparently, New York also played an integral role in the Jamaican financial ecosystem.

In further pursuit of the diaspora dollars, Patterson's government was innovative in launching a returning resident program that catered to the needs and security of returnees.[59] He astutely recognized their economic potential, particularly those who returned after retirement. For one, they did not require employment from the government. Two, the were compensated in foreign currency and spent it in the Jamaican economy. Lastly, they often created employment opportunities by hiring domestic help or other business ventures. As a result, developers began constructing communities, aptly called retirement villages, around the idea of welcoming retirees. Hellshire Hills in St. Catherine, Ingleside in Manchester, and Oracabessa in St. Mary were just a few examples of communities boasting grand mansions, owned mostly by Jamaicans who worked in the United States.[60] Returnees, having lived in the more advanced New York, shared their experiences and imparted lessons learned abroad, thus further enriching the economy and the society at large.

Jamaican Immigrants in New York's Political Economy

The diaspora's economic influence had also garnered New York's politicians' attention. However, its impact on the island was far more significant. For the period of

[58] Ramocan, "Remittances to Jamaica," 25; and "Visits by Foreign Leaders of Jamaica."
[59] "Returned Residents Vibrant" *Jamaica Gleaner*, September 26, 1996; "Returning Residents Unit Launches Website," *Jamaica Gleaner*, June 25, 1998; and "The Returning Residents Programme," Ministry Paper No. 12-98, The Jamaica National Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica.
[60] Julius Reynolds Letter to Martha Gayle, March 15, 1979, Box 3, Folder 5, The Martha Gayle Collection; "Easier Passage for Returning Residents, *Jamaica Gleaner*, June 23, 1993; Claude Mills, "Crime Feasting on Returning Residents, *Jamaica Gleaner*, August 30, 2000; and "Returning Residents Staying Put," *Jamaica Gleaner,* April 30, 2001.

this research (1965-2003), it was possible for a candidate running for Mayor, Congress, or Senator to get elected in New York without soliciting the Jamaican or West Indian vote. In contrast, it would have been a political suicide if a candidate running for Prime Minister snubbed the diaspora even though they did not have a vote in Jamaica's election. For comparison, in 2002, Jamaicans accounted for less than 2% of New York's economy. In that same year, the diaspora accounted for 14% of Jamaica's GDP. Ramocan's BOJ survey also revealed that remittance inflows surpassed exports by 29 percent and foreign direct investment inflows by 41 percent.[61] For further emphasis, the population of New York metro area was roughly 17 million in 2002. That was over six times that of Jamaica which stood at 2.6 million. Therefore, the diaspora's political economy in New York paled in comparison to its impact on Jamaica. Nevertheless, the Jamaicans population was still discernable enough for New York politicians to take note, and when coupled with the West Indian community, their vote mattered.

For Jamaican immigrants in New York, race seemed to have shaped and sometimes truncated the development of their niches and limited the effectiveness of social capital. Like Black Americans, Jamaicans worked disproportionately in the public sector, where opportunities for capital accumulation were limited and where dense networks of connections for individual success were less than in the private sector. This was because, again like Black Americans, Jamaicans suffered a marked discrimination in private sector hiring.[62] As a result, most Jamaican immigrants have little control over the sectors in the economy in which they are concentrated.

[61] Ramocan, "Remittances to Jamaica," 2.
[62] Kasinitz and Vickerman, "Ethnic Niches and Racial Traps," 192–93.

Jamaican employment in New York is far more niche-concentrated among women than among men. This points to the importance of gender, an issue rarely brought up in the literature on ethnic economies. Here, Gayle's experience is useful in highlighting the Jamaican women labor participation. Her first occupation as a domestic helper was more prevalent among Jamaican women than among other immigrant women. In fact, following the enactment of the Hart-Cellar Act, the immigration of Jamaican women outpaced that of men, largely due to the increased availability of employment opportunities as live-in aides for children and the elderly. Their suitability for these jobs was facilitated by their English proficiency and moderately high levels of education, skills necessary for employment in a service sector-oriented economy.[63]

Based on the scenario above, it would be a fair to think Jamaicans favor big government. However, the first wave of Jamaicans that came to the city did not have a particular party affiliation. Current issues that affected immigration guided their political outlook. As the Democratic party began to sympathize with the immigrant community, these immigrants started to side more with New York Democrats rather than the Republican Party that Black Americans supported. Understandably, Black Americans had a historical allegiance with the Republican Party because that party was credited with the abolition of slavery. When the Black vote shifted to the Democrats with the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, Jamaicans were already aligned with that party. Post-1965 Jamaican immigrants, likewise, tend to side with the party that advocated for immigrant rights. This does not imply that all Jamaicans vote Democrat. Rather, as an immigrant

[63] Commencing in the 1940s, the post-war economic boom in the United States, coupled with a shortage of men in the workforce, prompted many middle-class women to seek employment outside their homes. The ensuing consequence created a vacuum for domestic help which Jamaican women pursued. See Kasinitz and Vickerman, "Ethnic Niches and Racial Traps," 192–93.

community, they tend to align themselves more with the party that supports immigration.[64]

While examining Gayle's collection, it was obvious that she supported the Democratic Party. Demar Ludford, the archivist who compiled Gayle's records, verified her admiration for Kennedy through photographs and newspaper cuttings of Kennedy's speeches, his obituary, as well as various announcements from the New York Mayor's office regarding a planned memorial for the assassinated president. Her collection also suggested an affinity with the party due to its stance on immigration. She retained excerpts of discussions on proposed immigration reform, and in several of her correspondences, she informed her family about changes to immigration policy.[65]

Jamaicans on the island also favored whichever party that backed liberal immigration laws. Yet, when Cliff wrote to Arnold celebrating LBJ's victory, given its implications for improved race relations and immigration, it was unforeseen that a West Indian American would become the first Black woman elected to Congress. Nonetheless, Shirley Chisholm went a step further and became not only the first Black woman elected to Congress but also the first Black person to run for president of the United States in 1972.[66] Born in Brooklyn to Barbadian parents, Chisholm represented a Brooklyn district with a substantial West Indian base. While her constituency's demographics aided her election to Congress, she was a trailblazer for Black Americans rather than West Indians. West Indians and individuals of West Indian descent have a long history in American

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[64] J.A. George Irish and E.W. Riviere, *Political Behavior and Social Interaction Among Caribbean and African American Residents in New York* (New York: CUNY Press, 1990), 35-99.
[65] Demar Ludford, interview by author, Kingston, Jamaica, March 3, 2023; and Non-personal Photographs and Postcards, Box 5, Folder 5, The Martha Gayle Collection 1902-2000, Center for Brooklyn History, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.
[66] Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York*, 207.

politics, especially in New York. However, when they assumed power, they traditionally represented the larger Black community.[67] This was because there was neither a West Indian political constituency nor a recognized West Indian vote before the 1980s. The tables in chapter two showed that Jamaica's most significant migration to New York occurred in the 1980s, which was true for the entire West Indian community. It was during that decade that a West Indian vote finally began to take shape in New York.

It was with this population growth that Jamaican-born Ronald Blackwood won a special election for mayor of Mount Vernon. Initially, Blackwood was a registered Republican, but after being rebuffed twice for the party's nomination for mayor, he switched his allegiance to the Democratic Party in early 1980s.[68] Having switched to the Democratic Party and winning an election in the suburb with the largest Jamaican population, it was evident that party allegiance and identity politics played their part. Blackwood was an activist and community leader who dedicated his life to advocating for social justice and equality. He was a founding member of the National Association of Jamaican and Supportive Organizations (NAJASO), a nonprofit organization that aims to promote education, cultural awareness, and economic development among the Jamaican diaspora in the United States. Blackwood was also a prominent figure in the Civil Rights movement, working alongside the likes of Martin Luther King Jr. and Jesse Jackson to promote racial equality and combat systemic racism. Throughout his life, Blackwood remained committed to uplifting his community, empowering young people, and advocating for marginalized groups. He has been recognized for his contributions to the

[67] Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York*, 207.
[68] Spruill, Larry H. Spruill and Donna M. Jackson, *Mount Vernon Revisited* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 110-111.

Jamaican immigrant community, receiving numerous awards and honors, including the Order of Distinction from the Government of Jamaica.[69]

Jamaican-born Una Clarke's rise to political notability as a Democrat Councilwoman was also culturally aligned. Clarke who was a community organizer and educator turned politician, became the first Caribbean-born woman to be elected to the New York City Council in 1992. She served three consecutive terms from 1992 to 2001. During her tenure, she advocated for affordable housing, healthcare access, and educational equity, particularly for immigrant and low-income communities. She founded the Flatbush Development Corporation, a nonprofit organization that provided housing, education, and economic development services to underserved communities in Brooklyn. More importantly, Clarke spearheaded campaigns for citizenship and voter registration to enable her constituents to receive greater rights and benefits. In response to flaws in the immigration law, Clarke led delegations to Washington, D.C., to educate Congress on necessary revisions to ensure equitable treatment for all immigrants. She also advocated for favorable U.S. foreign policy in the Caribbean, particularly with regard to trade. This ties back to the argument PJ Patterson made that the diaspora should promote their interest in U.S. politics. Her dedication to public service has earned her numerous awards and recognitions, including the Ellis Island Medal of Honor and the Jamaican Order of Distinction.[70]

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[69] Lena Williams, "Man in the News: Milestone for New Mount Vernon Mayor," *The New York Times*, January 30, 1985.
[70] "Councilwoman Comforts Immigrants," *The New York Times*, October, 23, 1994; and "Former New York City Councilmember: 40th District, Brooklyn, New York," Una Clarke's Biography, accessed March 19, 2023, https://www.unaclarkeassociates.com/biography.html

In 2001, Clarke's daughter, Yvette Clarke, succeeded her mother in the New York City Council for the 40th district, marking them the first mother-to-daughter succession in the council's history. The younger Clarke would later ascend to become a Congresswoman for New York's 11th district.[71] Given the demographics of her constituency, her election represented an important milestone in the evolution of Jamaican and West Indian identity politics transcending into the second generation. Thus, it was through Yvette Clarke that the West Indian community ultimately succeeded in fostering a candidate who not only reflected their identity but also represented their interests in Congress. Yvette's election illustrated that the gradual increase in the diaspora's population was transforming New York's political landscape. No longer was Jamaican identity confined to beef patties, take-outs, and gypsy vans. As their population grew, so too did their political economy. As a result, their elected representatives began to change and started to look like them.

To echo the significant influence of the Jamaican (and West Indian) vote in the 1980s, when hurricane Gilbert ravaged the island on September 12, 1988, the New York National Guard was on its way within days.[72] Note, this was a state-led initiative, not a federal aid. Similar assistance was rendered to Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic in times of their crisis, which speaks volumes to the active participation of these communities in New York's politics. These groups are the bedrock of New York's immigrant community and, by default, an integral part of its economy. Beginning in the

[71] Jonathan P. Hicks, "Vying to Help Businesses at Heart of Caribbean Enclave" *The New York Times*, September 4, 2001; Jonathan P. Hicks, "The 2001 Elections: The Council; New Look Shaped by The Primary Comes Into Focus," *The New York Times*, November 7, 2001; and "Jamaican Among Top Two Elected for Positions in The US Congressional Black Caucus," *Jamaica Observer*, December 5, 2022.
[72] Jared McCallister, "Planes Sought for Aid to Jamaica," *Newsday*, September 21, 1988; and Merle English, "Break in Logjam of Relief Aid to Jamaica," *Newsday*, October 11, 1988.

1980s, West Indians were no longer on the periphery; they became a visible part of New York's economic ecosystem. Hence, it was only a matter of time before politicians came knocking for their support. Ed Koch was perhaps the first mayor to acknowledge this fact, and he acted accordingly, courting the West Indian votes to his advantage in the 1985 Mayoral election. Other prominent Democrats, such as Senators Chuck Schumer and Hilary Clinton, followed suit, making their own high-profile appearances at the West Indian Labor Day Parade.[73]

While the West Indian Labor Day Parade was discussed in chapter four, its economic significance merits additional emphasis here. The parade, which began on Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights in the 1970s, grew exponentially with the population boom of the 1980s and soared in popularity during the 1990s. By the early 2000s, it became the largest annual parade in New York. A 2004 study commissioned by Governor George Pataki and the New York State Economic Development Corporation found that the 2003 staging of the parade generated an impressive $154.8 million in revenue. It was these eye-catching figures that had drawn every notable New York politician to make a photo-op appearance at the parade, even the unpopular Mayor Mike Bloomberg, who was booed at the 2002 staging.[74]

[73] Jessica Kowal, "Hillary Cheered, Mayer Booed," *Newsday*, September 5, 2000; and Patricia Hurtado, "Parade Dripping with Campaigns," *Newsday*, September 3, 2002.
[74] Clem Richardson, "Soaring Costs and Drop in Sponsor Donations Forces West Indian Carnival Group to Cut Back," *New York Daily News,* August 6, 2012; and Jessica Kowal, "Hillary Cheered, Mayor Booed," *Newsday*, September 5, 2000.

Conclusion

Drawing from Martha Gayle's experience, it was evident that Jamaicans made inroads into New York's political economy, first through asset acquisition and then through political participation. As the Jamaican population grew, more individuals acquired assets, thus making a significant imprint on New York's economy. Gayle's legacy also highlighted the diaspora's economic impact on Jamaica itself. Understanding the economic benefits therein, the island's Prime Ministers had artfully used emigration as an economic strategy to remedy its lack of resources. Although there were negative consequences, the overall impact on the economy suggests that the strategy was reasonably successful. It is worth mentioning that Jamaicans on the island held two contrasting views of the diaspora's economic influence. Some view it a modernizing force, given the transmission of material and intellectual capital to the island, while others associate it with social ills such as materialism, perversive sexuality, and crime. Still, the significance of the Jamaican diaspora to the Jamaican economy cannot be overstated. Jamaica, an island of fewer than 3 million people in 2003, ranked tenth in remittance payments from the U.S. Sounds unlikely, yet it was true. The Jamaican proverb "wi likle bit but wi talawah," "meaning we are small, but we have a huge impact," rings true for the small island nation with an outsized global influence.[75]

[75] Carrie Gibson, "Jamaica: A Small Nation With an Outsize Global Influence," *The New York Times*, November 13, 2019.

CONCLUSION

After navigating the Jamaican immigrant experience in New York, there are a few key points that merit recapping. What led the migrants to migrate in the first place? As a quintessential British colony, it is worth highlighting Britain's role or lack thereof in this story. From there, one should reflect on the American tie-in. When and how did the United States get involved with Jamaican immigration? Being a predominantly Black country, it is also important to highlight how Jamaican immigrants view themselves in a race-conscious country like the United States. Transnationalism seemed to be a concurrent theme in the Jamaican immigration experience as well. Through this feat, they maintained an actively fluid connection with the island. Understanding the dynamics of this relationship speaks to the interconnectedness of diasporic communities and their role in shaping homeland policies and development. Therefore, rehashing what this looked like in the Jamaican immigrant community is equally important. Lastly, it is worth recapping how Martha Gayle epitomized all these features of the Jamaican immigrant experience in New York, as the story was framed around her legacy.

Jamaican immigration commenced in the mid-nineteenth century. It was triggered by a decline in sugar production, the end of slavery, and British neglect thereafter. The Morant Bay Rebellion had brought brief British attention to the cause of the massively disenfranchised poor. However, returning the island to direct Crown Rule hardly did anything to improve the lives of the island's poor. Rather, it circumvented the possibility of the island being ruled by a representative democracy. Elected representatives such as George William Gordon advocating for the destitute Jamaicans meant that the threat of the Jamaican legislative body being overrun by more like-minded individuals was quite

real. This concern, rather than caring for the over 300,000 unemployed, brought Jamaica back to Crown rule after the Morant Bay Rebellion.

After the Morant Bay Rebellion failed to achieve its intended outcome – access to the resources necessary for human development – it was apparent that the answers for the massively unemployed were not going to come from within Jamaica. When Queen Victoria stated, "It was from their own efforts and wisdom that they must look for an improvement in their condition,"[1] it was obvious Jamaicans' relief would not come from their colonial overlords either. Luckily, American commercial interest in Latin America was taking off. This expedition required an abundance of cheap labor. Jamaicans fit into this ordeal for two primary reasons. One, they were massively unemployed on the island, and two, their English-speaking capability likely gave them an advantage with American employers. Hence, it was from American commercial interest in the region that Jamaicans benefited. Put another way, Jamaican immigration was a result of British failure and American success. As a result, Jamaicans were the largest group of West Indians working on American sugar plantations in Costa Rica, Honduras, Cuba, and the Panama Canal.

The Jamaican migration to Latin America was paramount because it set an incessant migration cycle in motion. Though this study was primarily focused on post-independence Jamaican immigrants, it was evident that, like those before them, migration was seen as a means of upward mobility. More importantly, those who went before them paved the way for a continuous stream of immigrants seeking greener pastures overseas by directly and indirectly financing the journey for others. For instance, those who went

[1] Edward Seaga, "The Critical Role of Jamaican Migration," *The Jamaica Observer*, February 11, 2018.

to work on the Panama Canal financed the journey for relatives back on the island who wanted to journey north to the United States. In some instances, they journeyed to New York after work on the canal had dried up. The first lot that resettled in New York, in turn, financed the journey for those left behind and those who would eventually make the journey after the passage of the Hart-Celler Act in 1965. Hence, the significance of the first wave of Jamaican immigrants was indeed paramount.

Although the United States' involvement with Jamaican immigration commenced in the mid-nineteenth century, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that it truly took off. This occurred as a result of the Hart-Celler Act that expanded immigration from the Caribbean Basin from 100 persons per year to 20,000, quite literally overnight. The argument can be made that with such drastic immigration reform, immigration from Jamaica to the United States would inevitably explode. However, there were two other key ingredients that must not be overlooked. First, British immigration reform, namely the Commonwealth Immigration Act, shut the valve on Jamaican emigration to Britain, which peaked in 1962. Debatably, had there been continuous access to the metropole, the vast majority would have ideally gone there instead of the United States. Admittedly, this is an inconclusive theory that may never be solved. The likelihood is that had they remained British citizens, immigration there would have been more feasible than to the United States. The second thing was that the Civil Rights Movement forced immigration reform in the United States. Without the Civil Rights euphoria, it was unlikely that immigration reform would garner such massive support in Congress.

Post-Hart Celler Jamaicans migrated to New York more than anywhere else because that was where there was already a Jamaican presence to support them. For these

migrants, New York's cosmopolitan nature provided the same opportunities it did for their predecessors. The city's Black population not only gave them a group they could easily identify with, but it also protected them from the sting of racism they would have endured elsewhere in the United States. The robust nature of a cosmopolitan city like New York also provided readily available employment opportunities that were unattainable elsewhere in the United States.

Transnationalism was a recurring theme throughout this research. The Jamaican immigrants continuously illustrated how they transcended borders by maintaining homeland ties with the island. It was through this feat that they were able to grow the Jamaican diaspora in New York. For example, the Martha Gayle Collection and the David C. Hurd papers gave first-hand accounts of how communication between New York and the island facilitated networks for others to migrate. Furthermore, chapter three highlighted how immigrants in New York bypass state agencies and create pathways for others to join them. The chapter also emphasized the point that Jamaicans seldom assimilate. Instead, they adjusted to New York and maintained patriotism and orientation towards the island. Many viewed themselves as sojourners who would return to the island at some point in the future. Additionally, chapter five highlighted the many ways in which the diaspora participates in the Jamaican economy, both formally and informally. It was through their economic participation that they acted best as transnational bodies influencing both New York and Jamaican politics.

What was it like being a Jamaican in New York? While conducting oral history research, the consensus was that many grasped that they were Black after arriving in New York. Realizing that this can be confusing for readers, it is worth clarifying. What they

were saying was that being Black in America was more than skin deep. It was a social condition that kept Blacks anchored to the bottom of the social ladder. It determined where they lived, worked, and played. The interviewees were very proud to be Black and had a strong affinity to Africa, which many referred to as the motherland. However, being Black in the United States meant more than being merely of African descent. In fact, it had more to do with locating a group of people for the purpose of regulating them for social positioning. With the influx of Black immigrants arriving from the content, Blackness as a physical condition versus social construction would be an excellent topic for further research. Put another way, what does it mean to be Black in the United States? While this question remains open, at least for Jamaicans, they consent to physical Blackness (affinity with the motherland) but not economic Blackness (socioeconomic condition). They believed education was the key to success, not skin color. As a result, many assert their Jamaican-ness to emphasize that they do not subscribe to the American definition of "Black," or more potently, the "African American" label.

Of course, the story would be inconclusive without mentioning Martha Gayle. From making the trek from her rural community in St. Elizabeth to the port city of Port Antonio, Jamaica, and later working her way up from a domestic helper to a self-employed landlord, Gayle showcased both the "emigration" and "immigration" experience. At twenty-two, she left her community to do what seemed like a rite of passage. This rite of passage translates to it is not a matter of if but when a Jamaican will migrate. For most, this occurred during their youth. Therefore, Gayle served as a model for most Jamaican immigrants. Her longevity in New York eloquently documented the

Jamaican diaspora evolution from a few thousand people in 1924 to over 300,000 at the time of her death in the fall of 2000.

Gayle's biggest impact on the Jamaican immigrant community was through her deeds as a landlord. Her records showed that she mainly rented to Jamaicans. Although quite predictable, it was an essential support that aided the migrant's adjustment to the city. Without housing from people like Gayle, many recent migrants would have found adjusting to New York's rugged urban landscape difficult. Jamaican landlords, such as Gayle, were more than proprietors. They provided recent arrivals with employment assistance and other essential social networks such as churches and places offering immigrants healthcare. Moreover, the ability to rent under the table and the use of *paadna* schemes were the lifeblood of their underground economy, which proved useful for other immigrants acquiring properties of their own.

Gayle and the Jamaican immigrants in New York have shown that the United States is a great country because it allowed many immigrants to feed the American ecosystem. Understandably, that statement is not without scrutiny. However, the founding father's statement that "the bosom of America is open to receive not only the Opulent and Respectable Stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations and Religions,"[2] personified the notion that from the very beginning, the United States was a nation of immigrants. It is this belief in people from "all nations" that has propelled it to become great. People from diverse backgrounds brought different perspectives and ideas, which coalesced into what became the United States. To that end, Jamaican immigrants' have contributed to New York becoming the cultural capital of the world.

[2] "From George Washington to Joshua Holmes, 2 December 1783," *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 28, 2022, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-12127.

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