

Black Identities Revisited:
New and Old African Americans in Middle Class New York

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Dedication:

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, *Antoine* and *Deesse*, whose hard work, sacrifice, vision and love as immigrant parents made this dream possible for my siblings and I; and to the next generation, *Felicia*, *Naaji*, *Immaculee* and *Max Aiden* who will bring the dream to new heights.

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Black Identities Revisited:

New and Old African Americans in Middle class New York

by Orly Clerge, Ph.D., Brown University, May 2013

Abstract: Two important social transformations have occurred since the 1960's: The rise of the black middle class and the influx of immigrants from Latin, America, Asia and Africa. The cultural and economic outcomes for first and second-generation West Indian immigrants are often linked to the culture and neighborhoods of the black poor/underclass. However, we understand little about the ways in which the black middle class is a potential pathway of integration for today's immigrants. This dissertation investigates the social identities and residential patterns of select black immigrants in the middle class, Haitians and Jamaicans, and compares them to the African American middle class in Queens and Long Island, New York. I draw from the literature on social inequality and immigrant incorporation in order to analyze the ways in which blacks in the middle class are forming their racial and class identities and how this process differs across space. This dissertation uses qualitative interviews, participant observations and census data in order to unpack the cultural lives of black ethnics and the socioeconomic landscape of their neighborhoods. Findings demonstrate that ethnicity, generation and space matter in the identity formation of black middle class ethnics. The African American middle class has a place specific culture of mobility, which is partially adopted by the Haitian and Jamaican middle class. The racial and class identity convergence between these groups provides key evidence that the African American middle class is a potential pathway of socio-cultural and economic integration for today's immigrants. These findings demonstrate that the segmented assimilation theoretical framework should incorporate the black middle class into its paradigm. This research speaks to the sociological debates on the socio-economic incorporation of today's immigrants and the racial and ethnic relations between new and old minorities.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean bring another history and lifestyle to what it means to be black and middle class.”

(p. 211, Patillo-McCoy *Black Picket Fences*)

The civil rights movement created a political rupture in domestic and international race relations (Omi & Winant, 1994). Preexisting structures of racial oppression were challenged and policies were created to remedy the racial inequality that kept racial minorities from equal access to education, work, interracial contact and self-determination relative to whites. As a result, a small pre-existing African American middle class expanded in the late 20th century. Many African Americans were able to keep pace with the new service and financial based economy. They formed a solid middle class black population of managers, executives, and lawyers in the private and public sector (Landry 1987; Lacy 2007). During this same epoch, another important social transformation was occurring in the United States: mass immigration from the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia. Blacks from the Caribbean, in particular, began to grow in significant numbers, ethnically diversifying America’s black population. Therefore, the emergence of the African American middle class and the increasing ethnic heterogeneity of the overall black population has created opportunities to explore the relationship between race, class and ethnicity in the United States.

This dissertation project investigates a central aspect of the black middle class experience in America— social identity—by exploring how race, class, ethnicity and residential context influences the identity and group formation of African American, Haitian and Jamaican middle class immigrants. The guiding question of this dissertation is:

How do African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans negotiate their ethnic identities, middle class status and racial background in everyday life?

Classical assimilation theory states that integration into the American middle class occurs when an immigrant group becomes socioeconomically and culturally similar to the white middle class (Park 1925). Segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou 1993) has since provided models of immigrant integration into the white middle class, one's own middle class immigrant group, and the black underclass. Within the segmented assimilation framework, there is little discussion of the ways in which contemporary racial and ethnic immigrant groups may become similar to the African American middle class. This project sets out to understand the African American middle class as a viable pathway of socio-economic and cultural integration for immigrants of color (Neckerman, Carter et al. 1999). In order to achieve this goal, I've evaluated the experiences of the African American middle class and the ways in which Haitian and Jamaican middle class immigrants model or diverge from the social, economic and cultural experiences of the African American middle class in New York. Therefore, the second driving question of this dissertation is *how are middle class Jamaican and Haitian immigrants similar or different to the African American middle class?*

Segmented assimilation theory has outlined the trajectories of the most racially and ethnically diverse immigrant population in American history. Segmented assimilation theory states that Asian, Latin American/Caribbean, and African immigrants will follow three pathways of incorporation: 1. They will integrate into the white middle class and experience upward mobility, 2. Reside among and identify with the poor black underclass and experience downward mobility, or form their own ethnic communities and experience

socioeconomic mobility, albeit limited cultural integration (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). These models do not account for the class diversity that exists among African Americans, and therefore overlooks the ways in which identification with African Americans in the middle class influences the trajectory of immigrant groups (Neckerman, Carter et al. 1999).

This is particularly a relevant issue for Jamaican and Haitian immigrants, the largest black immigrant groups in America (Mederios-Mederios-Kent 2007). The continuing significance of race sorts well off Jamaicans and Haitians into residential spaces with high concentrations of middle class and affluent African Americans more so than any other racial group (Foner 2001; Logan, Deane et al. 2003). For example, in middle class areas of Queens and Westchester, New York, blacks are hyper segregated into well demarcated neighborhoods, many of which have high concentrations of foreign born blacks. These spaces have served as historical sites of racial transformations. They were once predominately white residential settings which experienced racial turnover in the mid-20th century. Today, they are key sites of black middle class life and embody the tensions between economic mobility, racial exclusion and political representation.

Framing the African American Class Experience:

What do we know about the African American middle class and why should we care? The majority of the African American middle class is heavily dependent on political mandates for racial inclusion, and continue to be heavily segmented into public sector and low-mid level service occupations (Collins 1983; Landry 1987; Pattillo-McCoy 1999;

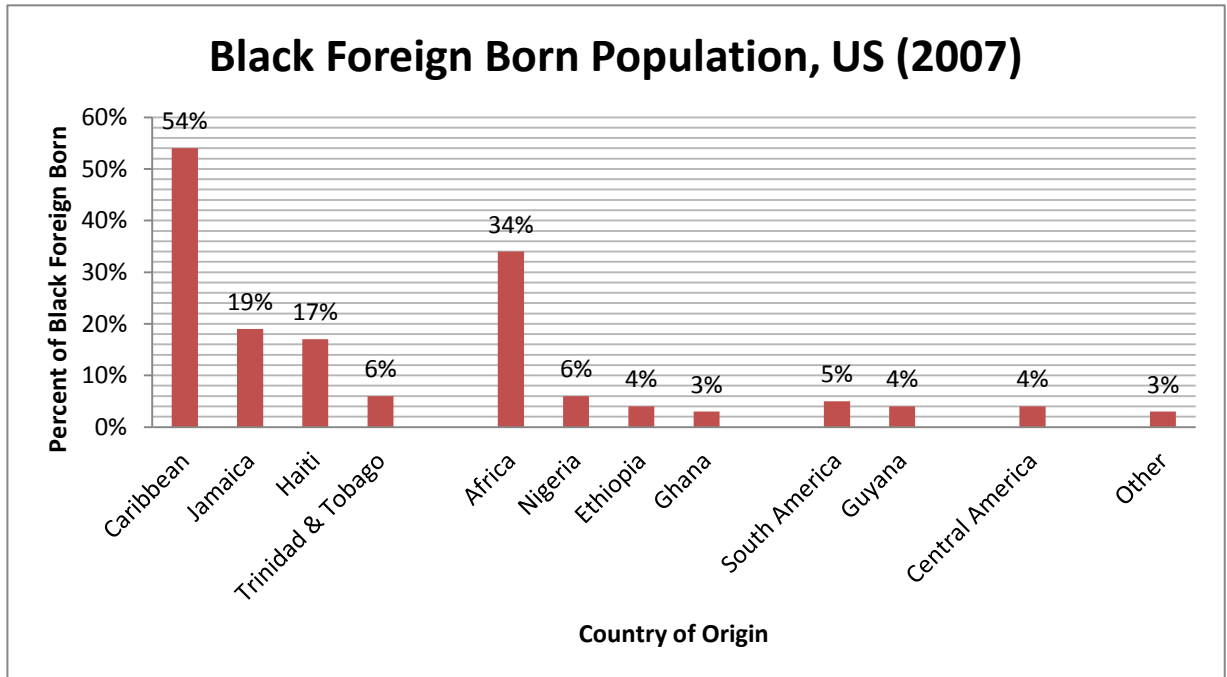
Landry and Marsh 2011). This instability means that the black middle class has been built on a fragile terrain. The black lower class, on the other hand, is excluded from accessing work and acceptable standards of living. Wilson (1987) defines this population as the *truly disadvantaged*. As a result of the break-down of legal and political barriers to work and housing, the African American middle class gained access to suburban housing markets and abandoned segregated black neighborhoods for greener residential and suburban pastures. The lower class/poor black population, however, was left without options for exiting the inner city. As the political agenda of the 70s and 80s became focused on neo-liberal economic development as opposed to redistribution (Peterson 1981), and service and financial industries became the new engine of the economy, blacks in the inner city were increasingly isolated socially and economically from the American mainstream.

The African American middle class, however, has had a different orientation to the changing socioeconomic structure. The African American middle class has accessed middle class lives through the expansion of the public and service sector. However, like the African American lower class, they are said to be separate and unequal from the white middle class, as they continue to be sorted into segregated neighborhoods and experience social barriers to full inclusion into America's political economy (Alba, Logan et al. 1999; Lacy 2007). This provides a potential milieu for complex social identities around one's racial and class status, and the black community's prospects for true social and economic integration (Landry 1987).

West Indians, Black Immigrants and Ethnicity:

The black middle class, in itself, is a relatively understudied group compared to lower class blacks. Much of the sociological work on America's black population emphasizes the presence of poor or working poor African Americans in urban areas. The growing literature on the African American middle class has come from ethnographers and demographers interested in the racial and class resource tensions experienced by well-off blacks in cities with a sizeable black population. Despite the growing geographic diversity of these studies, they overlook the ethnic diversity of the American black population, which was created by an influx of immigrants from the Caribbean, Latin America and Africa (see Table 1.1). According to the Census Bureau Reports (Grieco 2009), there are 3 million foreign born blacks in the United States, and their children constitute millions more. Therefore, studies of the black middle class are truly studies of the ethnic African American middle class, missing the intersections of ethnic and class diversity among the black US population.

Figure 1.1: Black Foreign Born Population, United States, 2007



Source: American Community Survey Reports (2009)

Therefore, there are two theoretical and empirical issues at hand in the sociological literature. Despite the recent advancements in our knowledge of the social and political lives of the African American middle class, we understand little about a. how the black middle class is a potential native born group for immigrants of color to model in their integration process and b. the contemporary ethnic heterogeneity that exists among the black middle class and how different black middle class groups create and challenge racial and class boundaries. Patillo-McCoy (1999) notes that black immigrants will have different orientations to their class and racial status compared to African Americans. This dissertation makes this statement a central aspect of its agenda by studying the ethnic variation of the black middle class.

The comparison between African Americans, Jamaicans and Haitians is interesting for several reasons. First, Jamaicans are considered West Indian immigrants, particularly

because they are Anglophone. Haitians are francophone and do not fall under the West Indian definition (Foner 1987; Stafford 1987). West Indian immigrants began migrating to the United States in large numbers after the Hart Cellar 1965 Immigration Act opened up American borders to immigrants from the Caribbean. In the 1970's, West Indians were entering the United States and Britain in larger numbers and scholars were beginning to give them increased attention.

Thomas Sowell (Sowell 1978), for example, noted that West Indian migrants fared better than the African Americans in terms of income, education, and entrepreneurship. His findings helped in the construction of West Indians as 'exceptional' and gave fuel to conservative criticisms of Affirmative Action policies. The general idea behind West Indian exceptionalism was that black social mobility was not hindered by racism because West Indians, too, were black, but were faring better than African Americans. West Indians were said to have a superior culture and work ethic compared to native-born blacks. This belief implies that the lack of social advancement among the African American community was more about their cultural deficiency as opposed to structural racism.

Haitian immigrants on the other hand, do not fit into the West Indian model. Haitians, too, arrived in the U.S. in record numbers in the late 20th century (Zephir 2001). The first wave of Haitians were professionals who arrived in the United States in the 1970's. Haitian immigrants experienced a decline in the skill level of their immigrants and arrivals during the 1980's and 1990's when less educated immigrants fled Haiti for economic and political reasons. Therefore, Haitians are constructed as faring poorly upon

arrival as refugees and less educated economic migrants who are said to be destined for the underclass (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly et al. 2005).

Despite the high education levels of first generation Jamaican immigrants, the Jamaican second generation, like Haitians, are predicted to experience downward mobility (Portes and Zhou 1993; Waters 1999). The factors dictating downward mobility from the first generation to subsequent generations are that Haitian and Jamaican immigrants are sorted into poor, inner city black neighborhoods. In these neighborhoods, the second generation is said to adopt African American, underclass culture which leads them to adopt oppositional stances towards education and mainstream behaviors and values (Waters 1999). Many Jamaicans and Haitians interested in setting themselves apart from African Americans to gain social acceptance from whites socially distant themselves from a black identity. They do this by emphasizing their ethnic background and distinctiveness (Waters 1999).

The scholarship on West Indian immigrants and their relations with African American is based on the following assumptions: 1. Native Born Blacks are poor and culturally deficient, 2. Blocked mobility of blacks is more about individual behavior than structures of racism and inequality and 3. Immigrant incorporation into black America can only lead to underclass status. However, recent studies have demonstrated that $\frac{3}{4}$ of blacks in the United States live outside of poverty and underclass conditions (Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Pattillo 2005). Furthermore, black immigrants, namely, Haitian and Jamaican immigrants are a growing part of the African American middle class (Neckerman, Carter et al. 1999; Rogers 2006).

In order to answer my research questions, I have spent over one year in two neighborhoods *Cascades*ⁱ, a black middle class urban neighborhood and *Great Park*ⁱⁱ, a racially integrated middle class suburban neighborhood. These sites have been chosen in order to compare the experience of middle class blacks in different types of spatial and racial residential racial contexts. New York is an ideal city to conduct research on the middle class because the outer-boroughs of Queens, Brooklyn and suburban districts of Nassau County are the sites of middle class life and identity. This study will contribute to classic urban studies of Italian Americans in Canarsie, Brooklyn, (Rieder 1985), The Chinese in Chinatown, (Zhou 1995), the African American working class in Corona, Queens (Gregory 1999) and the multiracial and multiethnic populations of Elmhurst/Jackson Heights, Queens (Sanjek 2000). I used ethnographic observations, semi-structured interviews with 59 families and demographic information to analyze the social identities and ethnic group identities of middle class Haitians, African Americans and Jamaicans in everyday life. The hope of this dissertation is to uncover the dynamism of minority middle class groups and the ways in which they manage the economic mobility and social marginalization in relation to one another.

Chapter 2: Literature Review Chapter

Introduction

In this literature chapter, I outline existing theoretical debates and concepts which inform the research questions explored in this dissertation: What are the racial identities of middle class African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans? How do they conceive of their class identities? What is the role of ethnicity in their racial identity formation? What are the ways in which Haitians and Jamaicans are becoming similar or distinct from middle class African Americans? Is the African Americans middle class a viable pathway of integration for today's black immigrants? We will discuss the frameworks used in order to analyze data on identity and integration of African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans in the middle class.

This dissertation uses cases of black ethnic groups across urban and suburban contexts in order to raise questions about how today's immigrants negotiate race and ethnicity, but also their class identities. In the assimilation discourses of old, ethnic identity was said to diminish as Southern and Eastern European immigrant groups sought to join the white mainstream (Gordon 1964). Because today's immigrants of color encounter structural racism in America, their life chances are compromised in educational and occupational institutions. Therefore, the children of today's immigrants are said to either join the American underclass or selectively acculturate into American society, drawing from the "best" parts of their immigrant origins and American society in order to succeed. Success is normatively defined as educational success, upward economic mobility and locational attainment. The crisis of intergenerational downward assimilation is averted and immigrants are said to realize the American dream if they hold on to or are

embedded in their immigrant community. Other scholars argue that today's ethnoracial immigrants will move into mainstream occupations and institutions overtime, similarly to yesterday's immigrants. Others argue that today's immigrants are growing up in a multicultural world and therefore adopt the cultural ethos and expressions of native born and other immigrant ethnoracial groups, but have a foot in the mainstream white world, therefore making them quintessentially cosmopolitan.

Overall, this dissertation builds upon these popular notions about how today's immigrants integrate into American society and how they relate to native born groups. Specifically, a serious consideration of middle class minority groups is used in this dissertation in order to model if and how middle class immigrants are integrating into native born minority middle class groups, specifically African Americans. Based on the literature, I hypothesize that middle class Haitian and Jamaican adults adopt the African American culture of mobility in order to manage the stigma of being a racial minority in light of their economic status. A key analytical issue, however, is that ethnicity will matter in the ways in which Haitians and Jamaicans orient themselves to their racial and class identities. The literature often treats black immigrants as a pan-ethnic group, paying little attention to the variation across ethnic groups. With this problem in mind, I draw from key works on assimilation, cultural sociology and race to decipher the ways in which the largest black foreign born middle class groups are becoming American, and more specifically African American.

Another theoretical issue raised in this dissertation is the relationship between identity, integration and space. I take a spatial approach to identity, belonging and boundary work of each group in order to disentangle the connections between one's

residential context (urban or suburban, racially integrated or segregated), the ways in which they see themselves and socio-culturally integrate and how these relations are embedded in systematic relations between different ethnoracial social actors.

Pathways of Social, Cultural and Economic Integration:

The Puzzle of Immigrant Assimilation and Invisible Native Born Minorities

In this section, I review the theories of assimilation. As it stands, immigrant assimilation theories have transformed over time to account for the changing ethnoracial composition of the immigrant stock and economic structure of the US population. However, existing assimilation theories do not adequately explain the role of native born minority middle class groups in the incorporation of upwardly mobile immigrants.

Classical Assimilation

How immigrants from various ethno racial groups socially, economically, culturally and politically incorporate is a pressing social issue among many scholars and policy makers. Assimilation has been the unifying concept of the field of immigrant incorporation, albeit its' controversial nature. In the early 20th century, the influx of Italian, Irish and Polish immigrants to America's major cities like Chicago and New York became the focus of theorist like Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and Warner Srole. Assimilation theory, in its earlier forms, posited that, in order for non-Anglo European immigrants to experience socio-economic mobility, they adopted the cultural and religious norms of the Anglo-American middle class (Closs, Gordon et al. 1964; DeWind and Kasinitz 1997). Assimilation was originally defined as the "sharing of common historical memory and

cultural life by different groups” (Hirschman 1999). Assimilation was seen as a natural process which took place over an extended period of time, as white ethnics relinquished their ethnic ties to assimilate into the public and private life of white Anglo Americans (Closs, Gordon et al. 1964).

Assimilation, as perceived by Park and Burgess, is constructed in functionalist and problematic ways. The assimilationist perspective has the following shortcomings: a. it assumes that assimilation is an inevitable process and an appropriate end goal for immigrant groups, b. the adoption of the cultural and behavioral norms of Anglo Americans world occur as the immigrant group rejected or shed its ethno-cultural beliefs of the homeland, and c. did not account for why the African American community was ‘unassimilable’, hence overlooking structural racism. Therefore, in the context of immigrant adjustment, holding on to the language of home, maintaining old cultural ways and residing in concentrated ethnic residential clusters kept immigrants at the margins of the mainstream and disadvantaged. However, assimilation in its older form has since been challenged, where authors such as Alba and Nee(2003) have sought to rehabilitate it while others such as Glazer (1993)have set out to question its very core, by asking: is assimilation dead?

Because classical assimilation has problematic tenets, scholars have revisited the concept of assimilation to understand the similarities and differences between the native born, old and new immigrants. The social position of blacks has continuously been left unexplained by assimilation theory, highlighting its weaknesses. Nathan Glazer (1993) posits that assimilation is a process of boundary crossing, for “whites” only. In an examination of assimilationist discourses in the early 20th century, Glazer finds that

blacks and indigenous people are completely absent from the construction of the American nation state and are simply deemed as outsiders. As stated by Dubois, blacks Americans, although as tied to U.S. soil as white Americans, were seen as “unassimilable” to whiteness, and therefore, excluded from the American imagined community, citizenry and mainstream. Glazer states: “assimilation is still the most powerful force affecting the ethnic and racial elements of the United States and that our problem in recognizing this has to do with the one great failure of assimilation in American life, the incorporation of the Negro” (123). He argues that assimilation is based in inequality and distinction. Its underlying principles of inclusion and exclusion are constantly at play in racial and ethnic relations in America, where assimilation is an act of race making and nation building. Americanization (becoming American) had little to say about blacks, who had a changing social status from chattel (property), partial humans, landless “refugees” and later second class citizens. Race, therefore, was a bright boundary which hindered blacks from full assimilation into American society.

Although upon arrival, many Irish and Italian immigrants were deemed as having the same social status as African Americans, they were able to transcend this boundary overtime through the rejection of the “ethnic” affiliations such as language, culture, religion and last names. However, the increasing ethnoracial diversity of the post 1965-immigration society has forced the reevaluation of assimilation models, posing questions about who the increasingly large ethnic and racial immigrant groups entering the United States will assimilate into in light of the bright racial boundary between white and non-whites.

Segmented Assimilation

How then has the assimilation and incorporation of immigrants from Latin America, Asia and Africa been modeled? How are native born groups such as white Americans and black Americans constructed in newer assimilation perspectives? Do they adequately explain the social, economic and cultural outcomes of today's diverse ethnoracial groups?

Today's immigrants are unambiguously phenotypically different from the 1880-1920 European immigrants of the 18th and early 19th century. The 1965 Hart-Cellar Immigration Act lifted the 40 year ban on immigration, and to the surprise of many, opened America's doors to the most racially diverse immigrant stock in its history. Because America imagines itself as a white nation, the increased diversity of immigrant groups has created bright boundaries that separate immigrants from the native born along racial, class, linguistic and religious lines (Alba 2005). How are these immigrants and their children adjusting in today's post-industrial American society?

Seeking new ways to understand the predictors and consequences of immigrant youth's cultural and socio-economic assimilation, Portes and Zhou (1993) formulated Segmented Assimilation Theory (SAT), a theoretical paradigm which accounts for the divergent pathways traveled by immigrants and their children in their integration into the United States. They explicitly set out to extend the classical assimilation model and make up for its shortcomings by accounting for the social conditions which shape immigrant upward mobility. These factors include post-industrial economic conditions, race and racism and the benefits of parental ethnic background. This middle range theory looks at cultural as well as socio-economic adaptation. According to SAT, the children of

immigrants will follow one of three potential pathways: a. upward mobility through acceptance of and by middle class America b. downward mobility where acculturation and economic integration into the underclass occurs and c. upward economic mobility into the middle class, but cultural preservation of particular immigrant values and behaviors (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

The sociological literature has departed from the classical assimilationist perspective which posits that the second generation will leave their parent's home country practices and beliefs behind and become full members of the dominant white middle class (Gordon 1964). SAT outlines the myriad of integration pathways and outcomes of second-generation immigrants (Waters 1994; Portes and Zhou 1996; Zhou 1997; Alba, Logan et al. 1999; Portes, Fernandez-Kelly et al. 2005). Portes and Zhou (1993) coined the term "divergent destinies" when describing the growing disparities between the outcomes of immigrants of color in the United States. Segmented assimilation theory describes the determinants of what segments of American society second-generation groups will integrate into. The theory unpacks the competing factors of social mobility: human and social capital, modes of incorporation (context of reception and discrimination), geographical settlement and economic resources. A group's incorporation, the ways in which different immigrant groups are received through policy, public reception, and the socioeconomic makeup of a preexisting co-ethnic community dictates the socioeconomic structure of recent immigrants, their networks, communities and, ultimately, the relationship between parents and their children. In this context, discrimination matters: experience with differential treatment in places of learning, work,

and play are strong determinants of an immigrant groups ability to successfully integrate into respective segments of American society (Rumbaut 2001).

The segmented assimilation theory proposes comprehensive, but not deterministic, pathways of acculturation: *selective acculturation*, *dissonant acculturation* and *consonant assimilation*. In *selective acculturation*, second-generation youth are able to keep some of the beliefs and practices of their parents' country of origin, while integrating into American life on some levels. Because immigrant youth are able to retain respect for and connections to their parent's cultural and social practices, and simultaneously navigate the "American" sector of their lives, they are believed to have an edge in the education and occupational mobility process. *Consonant acculturation* occurs when immigrant youth are learning and navigating the American lives alongside their parents. Therefore, this similar pace of integration allows parents to sympathize with their children's shifting lives and identities in school and in the community. This relationship is complicated, however, by the immigrant child's increasing awareness of racial and ethnic discrimination and unfavorable psycho-social adaptation patterns. In *dissonant acculturation*, immigrant youth depart from the cultural beliefs of parents and home country and adopt oppositional behaviors in an effort to integrate and find acceptance in the American sector that they want to integrate into.

Black Immigrants: Possible Pathway?

How are black immigrants, the focus of this dissertation, constructed in the segmented assimilation perspective? How might their racial background and immigrant status combined shape their incorporation into American society?

In SAT discourses, black immigrants (Afro-Caribbean and Haitian immigrants) are often theorized as falling in the dissonant acculturation category because of interactions of neighborhood effects, lower socioeconomic status and adoption of the contested notion of “oppositional cultures” or reactive ethnicities (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly et al. 2005).

Black second generation immigrants, based on a combination of racial, class, and neighborhood effects have been said to be on a fragile path that is leading them to *downward assimilation*ⁱⁱⁱ. Black immigrant parents must confront and integrate into alleged “underclass” black communities, where battles between the home and the “streets” (drugs, gang violence, poor schools) further complicate the trajectories of the black immigrant second generation (Waters 1994). This may be the story of some, but not all black immigrants. The diversity of the black immigrant population complicates this simple understanding of their trajectories (Kasinitz 2008). Other scholars put forward a contrasting view, where black immigrants in places like New York and Miami are experiencing upward mobility and integrating into old and burgeoning black native middle class communities (Kasinitz 2008; Kasinitz 2008). These communities are said to have “real resources,” which provide social and cultural capital to second generation black immigrants, and therefore, accelerates their transition into and success in various social, educational and occupational institutions.

Limits of Segmented Assimilation Theory

Segmented assimilation is a pivotal lens through which we understand immigrants’ assimilation process. However, it suffers from the lack of a clear definition

of what the native and immigrant disadvantages and advantages are in the process of incorporation. For example, a young immigrant could potentially adopt advantageous native born attitudes towards success, but remain tied to the immigrant disadvantages such as their parent's lack of English capability and low human capital which may hinder their ability to be upwardly mobile. Dense ethnic networks may also mean that immigrants take part in immigrant gangs which recruit on the basis of common ethnoracial origins (Braga, Papachristos et al. 2010).

At the same time, another immigrant may remain tied to the "immigrant advantages" such as dense ethnic networks and cultural identities but also experience native born disadvantages such as racism and discrimination, leading them to adopt critical views of whites who hinder their mobility (Waters 1999). However, this view towards white racism does not always lead to low aspirations and poor academic performance. Kasnitz et al (2008) argue that segmented assimilation does not account for the reality that, , the second generation negotiates between different forms of immigrant and native disadvantages and advantages. They undergo this process in order to choose the best combinations for themselves. Sometimes, they combine their multiple socio-cultural worlds in order to create something novel. The point is that the incorporation of immigrants of color and their children today is highly variable and complex (Alba, Kasnitz et al. 2011).

Best of Both Worlds: Selective Acculturation Reexamined

One of the examples of the mismatch between theory and empirics lies in the notion of selective acculturation. As stated earlier, in selective acculturation, the children

of immigrants are said to choose from the best of their immigrant parents and American worlds. Normatively, the best of the American world is operationalized as upward economic mobility and the adoption of white-Anglo norms and values. This perspective neglects that the norms and values of the best parts of American society may also come from native born minority middle class groups. Alba and Nee (2003) note that the increasing diversity of America's population is transforming the mainstream, however, the boundaries of race and racism continue to confer whites and white culture with dominance over how mainstream America operates. Therefore, these minority native born middle class groups may not adopt social and cultural identities aligned with the mainstream because it is defined in terms of whiteness. What selective acculturation also does not address is that the minority middle class is a complex group which immigrants may be becoming similar to as they spend more time in the US, gain upward mobility and move across generations.

Stratified Ethnoracial Incorporation: The Class and Racial Faultlines Within

Itzigsohn (2009) contributes a more nuanced perspective on the assimilation debate by noting that today's immigrants experience what he calls Stratified Ethnoracial Incorporation (SEI). Stratified Ethnoracial Incorporation highlights how class stratification and racialization work together to shape the social and economic experiences and outcomes of immigrant groups and their children. Ethnoracial incorporation emphasizes how racial categories and class status influences the identity formation of immigrants. The second generation experiences divided incorporation processes. Few enter professional and managerial occupations, and the majority work in the service working class sector. In

terms of identities, the Dominican first generation constructs transnational identities. They are connected to their homeland through their identity labels and practices. However, the Dominican second generation's identities are ethnic and panethnic in nature, and are influenced by the racial and class structure in the United States. Because of the color line in the United States, the boundaries around ethnoracial identities for Dominican immigrants are quite strong, leading them to identify more with American minorities than with whites. Therefore, becoming American for Dominican immigrants means they are becoming minorities.

Itzigsohn argues that class matters in the integration of an ethnoracial group. He pays particular attention to how different class groups experience incorporation. Middle class Dominican immigrants, for example, confront a racialized class structure and their incorporation patterns are more similar to that of African Americans than whites. The middle class are conscious of their position as racial minorities. Counter to the predictions of segmented assimilation theory that posit that affiliations with a native minorities leads to downward mobility, the Dominican second generation are experiencing intergenerational upward mobility. The middle class criticize life in America more so than their lower class peers, but also have high future aspirations for themselves and their ethnic group. This marks the interplay between economic integration and social marginalization. This is in line with Lamont's (2000) work on lower class African American men whom are more likely than middle class African Americans to buy into mainstream ideas about meritocracy, individualism and morality. Therefore, the stratified ethnoracial incorporation model refines segmented assimilation theory by taking the class differentiation and native born minority population seriously. SEI outlines the ways in which race and class are both

political categories and group identities that affect how the Haitian and Jamaican middle class will potentially see themselves, their social group and their prospects for socio-economic integration.

In sum, SAT overlooks the class diversity of the native born minority population. They are constructed as often being a part of the urban poor. However, scholars are bringing our attention to their presence in the service lower class, working class, middle class and affluent (Gregory 1998; Oswald 1999; Dhingra 2007; Itzigsohn 2009; Vallejo and Lee 2009). Alba (2009) notes that more blacks and Latinos are in middle class occupations than have ever been before, marking the increased occupational and class differentiation of this group. SAT neglects the cultural variation as well as the class diversity that exists among minorities in general and native born minorities in particular. Immigrants are left with two options: attempt to integrate with the white middle class, which, despite recent discourses about America being a post-racial society, is exceptionally difficult because white racism continues to keep minorities at a safe social and spatial distance (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Logan and Stults 2011; Bonilla-Silva 2012), or assimilate into the black underclass and experience downward mobility. The African American middle class and other minority middle class groups are left out of the assimilation equation.

This oversight is not surprising. Often, sociological research on African Americans portrays a uni-dimensional depiction of their lives. They are assumed to be the locus of adversarial identities and counter-mainstream behaviors such as drug abuse, criminal activity, teenage pregnancy and poor school performance. They are the instigators of countercultural, morally inept behaviors. They are either down and out,

living in the inner city with no exit strategies, live in the inner city and are pushed out by mostly white gentrifiers, are un or underemployed and portrayed as crippled in a ethnoracial structure which places them in last place before the race even begins.

While African Americans are disproportionately disadvantaged in the United States, it is incredibly worrisome that social scientist are often insistent on using what Bonilla Silva (2012) 'racial grammer' to highlight the abnormality of blacks as opposed to the spaces of social mobility, resistance, growth, achievement and resilience among this population (Jackson 2001). It's almost as if sociology has created a racial narrative of blacks in which it pays for them to continue to reproduce "conventional wisdom" of a culturally deficient and economically stagnant black and brown population. Scholars have emerged who highlight the depth and breadth of the African American population such as their upward mobility (Neckerman, Carter et al. 1999), political organization (Gregory 1998; Pattillo 2007) and self-determination (Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Lacy 2007). It is at this juncture, that I begin to unravel the complexities of the African American middle class and use it as a basis for understanding the cultural and economic integration of black immigrant groups.

Revisiting Segmented Assimilation: The Minority Culture of Mobility Hypothesis

How might we revisit and refine segmented assimilation theory to understand the class diversity of native born minorities and refine selective acculturation or other pathways to incorporate the minority middle class? What does the minority middle class look like and how are they distinct from the white middle class?

In light of the “curious omission” of the African American middle class from segmented assimilation models, Neckerman, Carter and Lee (1999) suggest that the African American middle class is an invisible, yet key group into which immigrant groups will assimilate. They state

“It is because the minority middle class has long coped with such barriers that its experiences might be relevant. Just as immigrants might borrow oppositional culture from poor inner-city minorities, we suggest, they might also borrow cultural elements from the minority middle class” (p.946).

They challenged the simple theoretical framing of black lower class and white middle class behavior as having “oppositional” and “mainstream” views, respectively. Research has demonstrated that whites participate heavily in drug use, underperform in school and have oppositional attitudes towards mainstream conformity (MacLeod 1987; Kasinitz 2008).

In order to address this theoretical gap in the segmented assimilation literature (which is somewhat acknowledged in the new assimilation work (Perlmann, Waldinger et al. 1996; Alba and Nee 2003; Alba 2009), Neckerman, Carter and Lee propose the Minority Culture of Mobility (MCM). MCM is defined as a constellation of specific cultural beliefs and behaviors, specific to the minority middle class and absent from the white middle class. MCM provides a set of tools for managing economic assimilation and mobility in conjunction with persistent ethnoracism and group disadvantage that accompany being a person of color and being middle class. MCM is more appropriate for immigrant groups who have remained in the United States for a significant amount of time. New immigrants are believed to have dense social ties with their ethnic group, and remain in occupations within the ethnic economy and neighborhood. However, overtime,

these ties with the ethnic group wane as immigrants seek work, school and/or social activities and consumption outside of their ethnic group (if language permits and ethnoracial discrimination lowers).

MCM provides insight into what occurs to an immigrant group once they move away from their immigrant community. Segmented assimilation theory posits that central city immigrants adopt lower class African American values and behavior. Portes and Zhou cite that school is a primary place where cultural norms and behaviors of lower class African Americans is diffused to immigrant youth. However, this is a simplistic portrayal of inner city African American culture, which is culturally and socially diverse (Anderson 1990; Duneier 1992; Jackson 2001) and the lack of theorization of African Americans who live in the outer-layers of cities and in suburbs is an oversight of this theoretical model.

Neckerman, Carter & Lee (1999) note that distinctive problems arise for middle class minorities which requires that they negotiate interracial contact with whites and interclass relations with the lower class strategically. There are “competing demands of the white mainstream and the minority community which place real social stressors on middle class minorities. In interactions with whites in schools, neighborhoods or work, the minority middle class exercises particular identities and practices, embedded in the larger ethnoracial minority culture, which respond to the social conditions experienced by immigrants who have spent a significant amount of time in the United States. A “racial learning” takes place overtime in conjunction with economic mobility which sets the minority middle class immigrant group in a peculiar position, sometimes causing identity ambiguity. As stated in race-class debates about the allegiances of the African American

middle class, does race or class (or even ethnic) identity become the most salient?

According to the literature, this depends on the context of the social interaction.

Middle class minorities experience the following social problems in interactions with the white world: conformity to white middle class norms, overt and covert racism and prejudice, the psychological burden of being the “token” minority, social isolation, and the glass ceiling in the workplace (Feagin and Sikes 1995). In interclass interactions with the lower class, middle class minorities must adopt identities and practices to manage their relationships with lower class co-ethnics. For example, African Americans are more likely than their white counterparts to have lower class African American neighbors, family members and associates (Massey and Denton 1993; Landry and Marsh 2011). While the minority middle class may experience support and reverence from lower class co-ethnics because of their economic achievement, they deal with interclass social problems in a minority community which encounters significant racial boundaries and internal problems in achieving middle class status. Some of these problems include, but are not limited to: managing contentious relations with lower class coethnics who are jealous of one’s achievement, responding to accusations of “acting white” and the questioning of one’s ethnoracial authenticity, balancing demands for financial assistance and figuring out methods to use their status to improve the poor conditions of their communities (Landry and Marsh 2011).

The ethnoracial group is important in understanding how MCM works. While MCM may manifest in similar ways across groups, the culture and social position of a group shapes how members of that group experience interracial and interclass relations and build identities and practices. For example, racial stratification places Korean

immigrants in a more favorable status in comparison to black immigrants (Bonilla-silva 2004). Therefore, the extent to which Koreans and blacks encounter racism and conformity to whites will differ; in turn impacting the cultural tools they adopt in order to navigate this boundary. Furthermore, ethnic group matters. For Latino immigrants, for example, Cuban immigrants have higher incomes as an overall group than newer immigrant groups such as Mexicans, who are less occupationally incorporated (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Therefore, the interclass boundary management among Mexicans is likely to be more salient than among Cubans.

As it currently stands, the MCM contributes a more theoretically nuanced approach to assimilation processes. However, it is simply a theoretical perspective which has not been empirically tested. Segmented Assimilation theorists have appreciated the renewed insights that MCM provides, but have altogether dismissed it as a robust explanation of immigrant incorporation. Portes, Fernandez-Kelley and Haller (2005) state:

“Most theoretical reflections on segmented assimilation have endorsed the basic concept while seeking to extend it in one direction or another. Thus, Neckerman, Carter, and Lee (1999) invoke a ‘minority culture of mobility’ among middle-class African-Americans which they argue could be usefully imitated by racialized immigrant families in confronting discrimination and avoiding the dangers that gangs and inner-city lifestyles pose to their offspring. While insightful and suggestive, Neckerman et al.’s argument remains strictly theoretical. There is no empirical evidence so far that immigrant families have deliberately adopted a ‘minority culture of mobility’. In any case, those in a better position to do so are themselves middle class, a fact which largely insulates them from the challenges confronted by impoverished immigrant youths living in inner cities.”

While they are correct to state that MCM requires more evidence to prove its point, Portes, Fernandez-Kelley and Haller’s (2005) perspective suffers from a similar

presumption as Wilson and other scholars have purported about the black middle class: that their plight is completely distinct and unique from that of their lower class peers. While it is safe to say that attaining middle class status for African Americans has provided them with certain privileges, Patillo (1999) has demonstrated that the African American middle class confronts similar challenges as inner city, low income blacks and that race and racism continue to trump their ability to successfully realize their middle class dreams.

Therefore, the outright assumption that being middle class for African Americans is the answer to assimilation, integration and/or incorporation and therefore it is such for middle class minority immigrants is a key oversight. This makes it difficult to understand the ways in which class stratification and racialization are a key part of becoming American for the minority middle class (Itzigsohn 2009). Furthermore, the reliance on the urban poverty literature to explain the temptations immigrants face such as early childbearing, gangs, poor schools, is not simply confined to poor, inner city areas. As more minorities are leaving (or being pushed out by gentrification) from cities (Singer 2003), suburban spaces are increasingly important places to revisit the relationship between residential mobility, suburbanization and immigrant incorporation (Haynes 2001). Therefore, this dissertation uses MCM as a departure point for analyzing the incorporation experiences of middle class foreign and native born blacks in urban and suburban New York.

Minority Culture of Mobility: A More Holistic Approach

While MCM provides an interesting theoretical framework in which to base this study, there are specifications which I would like to add which may emerge as potentially challenging analytical issues. First, I submit that space and location matters to the MCM of an ethnoracial group, primarily because recent research has demonstrated that immigrants groups, within the first generation depart from inner city settings into outer city and suburban neighborhoods which have a better social status and standard of living (Singer 2003; Massey 2008). Therefore, while MCM argues that it is not applicable to new immigrants, the reality of the increased spatial diversity of new immigrants (who are moving into urban fringe, suburbs and rural areas in greater number, see Massey (2008) calls for a reconceptualization of the ways in which new immigrants are immediately encountering interracial contact (or not) in their new destinations.

MCM also could potentially account for the reality that America is becoming increasingly diverse and that the black/white or non-white/white boundary are no longer adequate for understanding race relations in the US (Bonilla-silva 2004). While white racism, “opportunity hoarding” (Massey and Russell Sage Foundation. 2007) and privilege (McIntosh 1986) remains at the center of racial problems in the United States, the increasing “browning” of America has implications for how middle class minorities experience racial problems. Middle class minorities will inevitably encounter overt, covert or institutional racism at the hands of whites. However, minority-minority social and political relations are also fraught with racial tensions (not to discredit the reality of coalitions and cooperation, but see (McClain and Tauber 1998; Gay 2006) on black-Latino competition). For example, middle class African Americans may encounter

discrimination from Chinese business owners whose racial suspicions cause them to be followed in stores or provide them with poor customer service (Lee 2006). As the global nature of cities continue to increase, middle class minorities interact with a more diverse mainstream workforce, neighborhoods, churches, all of which create more opportunities for contact with out-groups and the formation of identities to manage prejudice and discrimination at the hands of other minorities.

Lastly, MCM would also be improved if it analyzed, not only how middle class minorities manage interclass relations with the lower class, but also with the upper class. In the past year, the social reality of income inequality has jumped to the forefront of the American social consciousness. National and global protests called for the accountability of multi-million dollar companies who contributed to the demise of the economy, the squeezing of the middle class, high unemployment rates and a crippled economy. These economic problems have further demonstrated that the middle class sees itself as a distinct group relative to the affluent/rich class in the US and they have specific identities and practices for managing relations with them. In Lamont's study of working class white and black men in the United States and France, she finds that the working class has particular moral boundaries which they erect in order to define themselves as morally upright individuals compared to the wealthy. Prasad et. al (2009) finds that white working class voters erect boundaries against who they perceive as the undeserving rich. These boundaries are moral in nature and shape their views and voting behavior towards politicians. Middle class minorities may also see upper class co-ethnics in the U.S. and their home country in a particular light, which shapes how they see themselves and interact with their social worlds. Therefore, suburbanization, a tri-color racial system and

interclass relations with the affluent will be incorporated into understand the culture of mobility of the black middle class.

The African American Middle Class and the African American Culture of Mobility

In order to explore the African American middle class as a potential pathway of socio-cultural incorporation for black immigrants, we must first review the literature on the African American middle class in order to provide background to the existing empirical data on the African American middle class experience. Who are they, how do they see themselves in racial and class terms and how do they negotiate their economic mobility and social exclusion from the white American mainstream? I review the literature on the black middle class' navigation of racial and class boundaries and outline the 'black middle class' toolkit as a framework for understanding the distinctive identity work of Haitians, Jamaicans and African Americans in order to ultimately tell a story about the ways in which these groups are similar or distinct from one another.

This dissertation's goal is to uncover how the Haitian and Jamaican middle class are incorporating into American society. Haitians and Jamaicans enter the United States from predominately black Caribbean countries, and are sorted into the black American community upon arrival in the United States (Foner 2001). Middle class African Americans are therefore, an appropriate group to use in order to begin analyzing how middle class Haitians and Jamaicans navigate their economic mobility in the face of racial exclusion. This dissertation is particularly interested in the *cultural toolkit* (whose theoretical origins will be discussed later in this chapter) of Haitians and Jamaicans in the middle class and the ways in which it emulates or departs from that of the African

American middle class. In the data analysis chapters of this dissertation, I also look for cues of the ways in which Haitians and Jamaicans adopt identities and practices which are generally viewed as lower class African American, white middle class or bi-culturally immigrant and American in order to test MCM.

However, in order to understand how the minority culture of mobility operates among Haitians and Jamaicans in urban and suburban New York, this dissertation first seeks to identify the place-specific culture of mobility of African Americans. By place specific, I mean that middle class identity and culture vary across time as well as space. Therefore, being African American and middle class in the context of urban Chicago may manifest differently if one were African American and middle class in Phoenix, Arizona. The social order, ethnoracial structure and economic history of a city and/or neighborhood space shapes who middle class African Americans interact with and how they define their identities in social interactions (Lacy 2004; Rollock 2012). To begin to understand the empirical data of New York's middle class African American population, we begin by exploring what the literature says about middle class African Americans identities, behaviors and outcomes.

Post Integration African American Middle Class

The African American middle class flourished after the 1960s. The Civil Rights Movement (CRM) created a political rupture in domestic and international race relations (Omi and Winant 2000). Preexisting structures of racial oppression were challenged and policies were created to remedy the racial inequality that kept blacks and racial minorities from equal opportunity access to education, work, interracial contact and self-

determination relative to whites. Many blacks were able to keep pace with the new service and financial based economy and had increased access to educational opportunity. A sizeable portion of the population formed what Bart Landry (1987) called the “new” black middle class consisting of managers, executives, doctors and lawyers who participated in conspicuous consumption and saw themselves as a distinct group from other blacks. However, the majority of the black middle class is heavily dependent on political mandates for racial inclusion, and continues to be heavily segmented into public sector and low-mid level service occupations (Collins 1983; Landry 1987; Pattillo-McCoy 1999). This instability means that the black middle class has been built on fragile terrain and are vulnerable to external economic shocks (Conley 1999). Due to the Great Recession, this vulnerability has become a reality for many middle class African American families in the past 5 years (Washington, 2010)^{iv}. Black wealth is mainly built on homeownership and jobs, each of which has been compromised by massive cuts in work and the foreclosure crisis which disproportionately affected black homeowners (Rugh and Massey 2010; Mitchell 2011; Nichols 2012).

The black lower class, on the other hand, is largely excluded from accessing work and acceptable standards of living. Wilson (Wilson 1987) distinguishes the black poor and working poor as the *truly disadvantaged* black population. They are a part of the urban underclass whom are isolated within inner city communities with little access to meaningful work, opportunity for exit and social mobility across generations. Wilson argues that the urban underclass was created by the disappearance of manufacturing work from cities and the out-migration of the black middle class. As a result of the CRM and federally mandated housing and school desegregation policy, the black middle class

gained access to outer-city housing markets which were previously closed to them by white developers, real estate agents and residents. They abandoned segregated black neighborhoods for greener pastures outside of central cities. The lower class/poor black population, however, was left without options for migrating out of the inner city. As the American political economy of 70s and 80s lost manufacturing industries, privileged capital accumulation through an emerging financial and services-based economy, and redistributive policies were under attack (Peterson 1981), blacks in the inner city were increasingly socioeconomically isolated from the white American mainstream (Massey and Russell Sage Foundation. 2007). Therefore, Wilson argued that among post-integration African Americans, class, not race, was emerging as the most important faultline in their socioeconomic experience and life chances.

Wilson's work became the cornerstone of race/class debates in academic and social policy circles. As academics, policy makers and practitioners tried to figure out how to remedy racial inequality of the past and present, the urban underclass emerged as a central group ravaged by urban renewal, white flight, workplace discrimination and poor school structures. Wilson noted that the disappearance of work was the main factor in poverty creation in inner cities; however, he also posited that the cultural and moral practices of the black lower class also contributed to their economic stagnation and isolation. These propositions were the basis of much controversy, which continue to shape policy and research today. One major critique of Wilson's work was that he did not acknowledge the continuing significance of race in the prospects of the black middle class (Collins 1983; Pattillo-McCoy 1999). His work assumed that because the black middle

class was able to escape the inner city, they automatically socially integrated with whites and gained access to equitable living conditions.

However, Landry's seminal text on the African American middle class in the late 1980s demonstrated that the black middle class is "bottom heavy", with a large portion occupying the lower middle class (Landry 1987; Pattillo 2005) and reside in or adjacent to neighborhoods that have a higher percentage of low income residents (Alba, Logan et al. 2000). They are often times "one paycheck away" from becoming a part of the black working poor (Lacy 2004). Data has demonstrated that blacks of all class strata continue to experience racial discrimination, are under educated, underemployed and economically excluded (Landry 1987; Pattillo 1999). The uncertainty around the social and economic integration of middle class blacks provides a provocative context for black middle class racial and class identities to form.

Pattillo-McCoy's *Black Picket Fences* (Pattillo 1999) contributed to this race/class debate with a thorough analysis of the social identities of the black middle class in Chicago. She highlights that moving to outer-city, middle class neighborhoods do not correspond with social integration and economic mobility, as was assumed by Wilson. In the neighborhood of Groveland, Chicago first generation middle class blacks struggle to transmit their class status to the second generation. Despite their middle class status, blacks in Groveland reside near lower class black neighborhoods, and the problems of low income blacks such as low achievement and aspirations, spillover into their neighborhoods and schools. They create social boundaries between themselves and lower class blacks in order to protect their children from falling into gangs, teenage pregnancy unemployment and broken homes that are present in lower class black neighborhoods.

Therefore, their class identities are constructed in opposition to the black lower class. Patillo McCoy's study focuses on the lower black middle class, who reside in suburban neighborhoods in an old industrial city, whose spatial propinquity to the areas affected by urban decay compromise their ability to maintain the middle class character and identity of their neighborhood. Therefore, class identity is a salient and contentious faultline for the black middle class in Groveland.

Despite the fact that the black middle class is concentrated in the lower strata of the middle class and are borderline working class (Landry 1987) there is a strong black upper middle class population that is often overlooked. Karyn Lacy's *Blue Chip Black* (Lacy 2007) uncovers the racial and class identities of the black middle class in the suburbs of Washington. Through extensive ethnographic work, Lacy finds that middle and upper middle class blacks in the suburbs of D.C. have a process of identity formation that is influenced by the types of suburban spaces in which they reside and their relations with lower class blacks, whites and each other. Lacy is interested in exploring "how different groups of middle class blacks conceive of their status position and define themselves relative to whites and lower class blacks across a number of distinct settings". Lacy uses the framework of boundary work in order to understand the status distinctions that exist between upper middle class blacks and middle middle class blacks. The black upper middle class has different concerns and racial and class identities than the lower black middle class. Since they do not live in close proximity to the black lower class they are not preoccupied with creating social distance with them. Instead, the upper crust of the black middle class have distinct and fluid racial and class identities.

The Black Middle Class in the City:

Spatial assimilation theories posit that economic mobility is coupled with the out migration of groups into suburban settings, and social integration with the white Anglo middle class population (Massey and Denton 1993; Massey and Denton 1993). This outmigration has real political consequences, primarily because whites seek to maintain their physical and social distance from black and minority populations in cities. The basis of white flight was built upon white racial anxieties about the decline of property values once blacks moved in (Harris 1999) and their children becoming friends with or intimate with black youth they interacted with in their neighborhoods and schools (Moody 2001). Therefore, when the federal government facilitated the suburbanization of whites and eastern and southern Europeans from the city in the mid-20th century (Boustan 2010), they seized the opportunity and formed “lily white” communities far and away from the city. These suburban communities also sought to protect their tax revenue, were opposed to shared redistribution practices with cities and sought to ensure that their taxes benefitted vanilla suburbs, not chocolate cities. Therefore, the suburbs became republican and separatist in their local level politics (Lassiter 2006).

Much of the contemporary fascination of African American suburbanization is connected to an interest in understanding how African Americans manage the racialized politics of suburbanization. Are they received well in white suburbs? Does their class identity trump their racial identity? Do they become more politically conservative as they ascend the class ladder and locate in more white communities? In what ways are they pressured to conform to white middle class values and norms such as styles of dress and consumption and how do they negotiate these pressures (Feagin and Sikes 1995). These

questions are covered in this study for the Great Park community (albeit more diverse than just white, described in Chapter 3). This study is also interested in the middle class urban black milieu. What are the social identities and politics of the African American middle class population who have either stayed in place, participated in inter-metropolitan relocation out of the inner city? Much of the literature on urban blacks constructs the black population as being a part of the urban underclass, detached from the labor force and unskilled. However, although Wilson's work has led many to believe that African Americans in cities are mostly poor and morally deficient, a range of literature has emerged which highlights that in the post-Civil Right era, urban black neighborhoods are social class heterogeneous entities (Anderson 1990; Gregory 1998; Sanjek 2000).

Black Middle Class In-Migration

In the cities of Chicago and New York, scholars have highlighted the class diversity of iconic black urban neighborhoods (Gregory 1998; Jackson 2001; Taylor 2002; Boyd 2008). Urban middle class blacks are distinct from suburban black middle class populations because many have chosen to opt out of the suburbanization movement and relocate to black urban neighborhoods such as Bronzeville, Chicago and Harlem, New York. This attraction and residential choice demarcates the significance of race and desires for racial belonging among the black middle class. They confront significant racial boundaries in predominately white workplaces, and find refuge in predominately black residential urban spaces. However, they also manage interclass conflicts in their economically-mixed neighborhoods. Taylor (Taylor 2002) identifies this identity

management as a double-double consciousness (Du Bois 1965), where middle class blacks in Harlem manage how they are perceived by whites as well as lower class blacks.

Middle class blacks in urban settings, extract social and emotional benefits from living among other blacks in their urban neighborhood. However, their consumption patterns are rarely satisfied because of poor economic and cultural investment in their neighborhoods. Urban black neighborhoods have experienced significant disinvestment and are the victims of a spatial racism which routes economic investment, jobs and city services to non-black neighborhoods (Wilson 1987). Therefore, the shopping, cultural and social appetites of urban middle class blacks are not met. For example, in order to access what are perceived as “suburban style” or “middle class” social activities for their children such as piano and soccer lessons, black middle class urban residents have to leave their neighborhoods to access them or introduce cultural businesses and activities to their existing neighborhood. In other cases, the black middle class try to advance their interests in neighborhood revitalization by using black identity and history as a cultural attraction to the neighborhoods. At times, this poses conflicts between the black middle class and the black lower class because increased investment in black urban neighborhoods often correlates with increase cost of living, and pushed lower class blacks out of that space (Boyd 2008). The class diversity of the black urban experience is key for understanding the ways in which blacks contest racial exclusion, shifting us from a simple to a more complex understanding of the ways in which black see themselves, interact with their social worlds and the everyday politics of black identity (Gregory 1998).

The Changing Nature of Black Ethnicity

Within the raging race-class debate in the post-integration era, lies an additional faultline which is often overlooked: ethnic identity/nationality. Haynes' *Red Lines Black Spaces* (Haynes 2001) is the first text on the black middle class to acknowledge the diversity in the black middle class population. Haynes argues that West Indians were a part of the development of the New York black suburb of Runyon Heights in the early 20th century. He argues that despite ethnic tensions between West Indians and southern migrants, the violence of the black-white boundary inspired racial solidarity between these groups. High rates of intermarriage between West Indians and African Americans demonstrated the declining importance of ethnic difference in social relationships. Segregation and the small numbers of West Indians compared to African Americans contributed to this intermixing and solidarity. In Runyon Heights, residents experienced tensions between their political interests in black racial advancement and their shared class interest with the white middle class. However, this take on the cooperative relationship between West Indians and African Americans must be reevaluated because black ethnicity was more subdued in the early 20th century than it is today (Kasinitz 1992).

The black immigrant population of the early 20th century experienced significant pressures to assimilate into African American life in order to fight against racial injustice (Watkins-Owens, 1996). In fact, many black immigrants were at the forefront of black political social movements. For example, Marcus Garvey, born in Jamaica, migrated to Harlem in 1916, New York to forge the 'Back to Africa' Movement. He was frowned upon by the black middle and professional classes because of his "radical", separatist racial logic. He purported that black Americans would never assimilate because white racism would always ensure their subordination. Nonetheless, Garvey, a leading Black

Nationalist, managed to rally the support of many African Americans. Garvey's ideals contradicted that of another black immigrant who emerged as a Civil Rights leader, W.E.B. Du Bois. DuBois, whose father was born in Haiti (Du Bois 1965) was a leading academic and civil rights advocate. While Garvey posited that racial equality between whites and blacks was impossible, Dubois adopted more integrationist policies and garnered the support of the black elites and whites. DuBois' racial logic was more amenable to the black middle class, primarily because it argued that racial integration was the remedy to black subjugation and unequal treatment. While Garvey's black immigrant and low income African American supporters backed his vision of returning to their homeland, DuBois' light skin and racial cooperation politics made him the representative of black middle class politics, marking an interesting intersection of ethnic, class and racial politics in the black community of the early 20th century.

In the current environment of black immigrant replenishment, increased access to integrated settings and the proliferation of ideas of black immigrant exceptionalism (Sowell 1978) it is not clear that the ethnic assimilation forces present among the black population in the past persist in today's increasingly diverse and segmented ethnoracial climate. While we live in a more racially integrated world than the one Dubois and Garvey left behind, the "color line" continues to be a significant problem in 21st century America. However, unlike the ethnic assimilation which occurred at various moments in the 20th century, black immigrants have formed distinct pan-ethnic and ethnic groups (Kasinitz 1992; Foner 2001), and the black population has become increasingly class stratified, leaving us to question how the faultlines of class and ethnicity play out among blacks today and black politics today. Black identity and its definition has changed

overtime as a response to the social conditions of race. This dissertation will keep a pulse on the current state of black identity and race relations, particularly in light of claims that we live in a post-racial society which is purportedly different than the Garvey, Martin Luther King, and Jesse Jackson epochs.

Black Middle Class Toolkit

As scholars have noted since Dubois and Frazier, the black middle class occupy a peculiar social position in American society. They are neither complete insiders of the white mainstream and have conflicted relations with lower class blacks because of their economic status. Given this peculiar state, the black middle class is said to have a “cultural toolkit” which consists of the identities and practices needed to navigate their multiple and challenging worlds. Patillo (1998) argues that the black middle class toolkit is informed by African American cultural tenets and informs social actions. Lacy(2007) takes the black middle class toolkit one step further by describing identities and boundary work which distinguishes them from the white middle class and the black lower class.

I submit that the black middle class toolkit is an instantiation of the minority culture of mobility. Because blacks in the middle class have particular identities to manage the boundaries they encounter in diff spheres of life, it matches MCM interest in how minority immigrants in the middle class navigate their racial and class worlds. Within this toolkit are identities that black Americans use in order to navigate problematic interclass and interracial relations. In her study of the Black church’s role in community collective action, Patillo finds that the black American cultural toolkit consists of religious ethos and practices which shape social action in a middle class black community in

Chicago. Patillo uses Swidler's (1986) definition of the cultural toolkit. Swidler notes that a cultural toolkit is not about values, but is defined by the "habits, skills and styles that people [use to] construct strategic action" (273) and consists of "symbols, stories, rituals, worldviews which people rely on in order to navigate social, interactional spaces" (273). Patillo (2007) submits that culture is embedded in social structure and influences social behavior and collective organization. The cultural toolkit is important because it aids us in understanding how social phenomena such as integration and/or isolation is shaped by the self-perceptions, choices and actions of social actors.

Lacy, in her work on upper middle class blacks in Washington D.C. suburbs, further develops the black American middle class toolkit model. She argues that the black middle class toolkit is internally differentiated among the black middle class, whereby space and class strata matter to how black middle class people understand and invoke particular status-based, racial, ethnic, public and class identities in order to navigate and or build boundaries that make them distinct (and better than) the particular social group they are interacting with. I extrapolate upon this work by examining the specificities of the African American, Haitian and Jamaican cultural toolkits. The frame of the toolkit allows us to unravel their overlapping or diverging identity and boundary work and the ways they are embedded in larger social structures which influence their beliefs, behaviors, and practices. Ultimately, understanding the cultural toolkits of each group will tell an important story of the ways in which they are becoming similar to one another or are remaining distinct ethnic groups.

Lacy's black middle class cultural toolkit model outlines how specific identities are responses to their social condition and struggles for power in respective social

environments. Lacy finds that among middle and upper middle class blacks, residential context shapes their identities. They do not seek full assimilation with the white mainstream. They practice what Lacy calls *strategic assimilation*. Strategic assimilation is a process of limited incorporation into the white social circles of work, college and neighborhood. African Americans deliberately occupy black social spaces in order to maintain their racial identities. Middle class African Americans strategically assimilate by building boundaries against the white world, as well as lower class blacks. One way in which middle class blacks build these boundaries is by orchestrating their children's interactions with black culture. This is especially the case for blacks who reside in predominately white neighborhoods. The absence of black neighbors compels them to cultivate a racial identity in their children through elite black organizations like *Jack and Jill* and the black church.

Therefore, African Americans manage their identity in dual black and white worlds. From preliminary observation in Cascades, Haitian immigrants manage their ethnic identities in a similar way to how African Americans handle their racial identity. Haitian immigrants deliberately send their children to ethnic church associations which emphasize ethnic identity, and educational achievement, therefore, creating ethnic vehicles of educational mobility. For middle class Haitians and Jamaicans, ethnicity may be an additional boundary that they use in order to define themselves in relation to out-groups. Although strategic assimilation theory was used to analyze the case of African American middle class suburbanites, it sees African Americans as an ethnic group and its theoretical origins in immigrant incorporation theory overlap with previous work on West Indians, making it applicable to this study. Strategic assimilation will serve as an important model

for understanding how race, class and residential context influence the identities of Haitian and Jamaican middle class immigrants and their relations with African Americans, other minorities and whites. Unlike MCM, I analyze the place specific characteristics of the black middle class toolkit in order to unpack the ways in which African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans who live in the same spatial context identify and perform these identities.

The Black Immigrant Middle Class

Now that we have explored the literature on the African American middle class, what do we currently know about black immigrants and their class cleavages? We have demonstrated that the African American middle class has a long history of sociological attention. They have distinct ways of navigating racial and class boundaries compared to the white middle class. However, there is still more to be understood about the black immigrant middle class, particularly since much of the attention given to black immigrants relies on data on the lower class. When the middle class is studied, more emphasis is placed on the tension, as opposed to their similarities with African Americans. We begin by discussing the social position of this group as it has been defined in the literature and then discuss how structure is related to their identity work.

Social Structure and Intergroup Relations

There is scant research on the black immigrant middle class. The existing literature constructs black immigrants as a ‘black success story’ and notes that they have more favorable outcomes than native born blacks. In the third wave of West Indian migration

to the United States in the 1960s, research and policy experts began to conduct social experiments to monitor the outcomes of black immigrants and black natives. (1978) argues that:

“the West Indian immigrants and their descendants, also has a socioeconomic pattern quite different from that of the bulk of the black American population-in particular, a high incidence of "success" (income, education, occupation, etc.), and lower incidences of social pathology (crime rates, unemployment, divorce, etc.)” p. 48.

Thomas Sowell(1978) advanced the popular notion of ‘black exceptionalism’. He argued that West Indians have a superior culture and work ethic compared to native born African Americans, which explains their higher propensity of economic mobility. He intensified the notion that cultural pathology and its reproduction across generation plagued native blacks and explained their continued social and economic stagnation. Therefore, white racism was undermined as a major explanatory variable for the poor outcomes of native-born black Americans. In Model’s (2008)work on black immigrants, she investigated if black immigrants were truly the success story that scholars like Sowell purported them to be. She posited that we must look beyond the culture argument, and examine how migrant selectivity and white favoritism provides West Indians with better outcomes. Ifantunji (2011) notes that the presence of black ethnic inequality lies in differential racialization of the black body. By differential racialization, he argues that non-blacks perceive nativity among blacks, and therefore, attach racial meanings of model minority to black immigrants and culturally and morally deficient connotations to the black native born.

As a result of the internalization of *black ethnic inequality* and *differential racialization*, economic, cultural and political tensions characterize the relationship between African Americans and Afro Caribbeans (Foner 1987; Kasinitz 1992; Vickerman 1999; Waters 1999). The conflicts have been framed as economic based, particularly since Afro-Caribbeans are believed to have a superior work ethic, are viewed favorably by whites, and enter the US with significant levels of human capital attainment (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf et al. 2002). Debates ensue as to whether black immigrants are truly doing better than African Americans. However, the perception of black immigrant superiority (Waters 1999) tends to trump the lack of empirical data on the topic and permeates how black immigrants see themselves and interact with African Americans and whites. The continued emphasis on the ‘black exceptionalism’ of black immigrants is argued to be an example of cultural racism which continues to attack and devalue the culture, work ethic and achievements of African Americans across the social class spectrum (Pierre 2004).

Agency and Identities

The literature on black immigrant identity formation focuses on two aspects of these migrant’s lives: a. how the black racial status of West Indians is changing the racial and ethnic landscape of the cities they settle in and b. the ways in which pre-existing racial and ethnic boundaries in their places of settlement shapes the ways in which they see themselves and interact with out-groups. Mary Waters finds that although West Indians are deemed as an immigrant and black success story, many experience blocked and/or downward mobility the more time they spend in the United States (Portes and Rumbaut

2001). West Indians enter the United States with desires to work, pursue education, live in desirable neighborhoods and find job opportunity. However, upon arrival, they encounter interpersonal and structural racism. The longer they stay in the United States, they become increasingly aware of structural racism and adjust their mobility strategies and aspirations accordingly^v. For example, they encounter discrimination on the job, receive low wages, work long hours and have little room for promotion.

Furthermore, their relations with African Americans are conflicted, as West Indians, particularly those of middle class status tend to distance themselves from black identities to increase their social position. West Indian middle class immigrants are said to use their ethnic identities as currency in relations with whites in order to distinguish themselves from native born blacks. White workers and managers perceive West Indians as being less racially conscious or hostile than African Americans. Therefore, they are more exploitable and desirable to have as workers (Waters, 1999). West Indians in the middle class in particular, take advantage of this stereotype and use their ethnic identity, accents and other characteristics to detach themselves from African Americans. Waters frames this as a distancing from black racial identities, which, to West Indians in the United States, means being a part of a low social status group. Zephir finds a similar pattern among Haitian Americans, who use their French language to distinguish their ethnic and class status relative to other blacks.

Waters brings to light the important tension between African Americans and black immigrants. Her respondents report that the boundaries between “ethnic blacks” and black Americans are blurring, so that Jamaicans and African Americans are increasingly indistinguishable (Waters 1999), p. 808). These boundaries are predicted to blur so much

that ethnicity may dissipate and attempts to identify as ethnic will prove futile. Overtime, America's racial system will trump ethnic identity, particularly among later generations who will lose parent's accent and direct ties to home country. However, the boundaries between different black immigrants and their varying relations with African Americans are given little attention. This is particularly the case among suburbanized middle class African Americans who are left out of Waters's primarily urban sample.

Counter to Waters' findings, Sherri-Ann Butterfield's (2004) ethnographic study of West Indians in New York, argues that West Indians embrace their racial and ethnic identities, as opposed to distancing themselves from a black/African American identity. Butterfield calls for a more complex understanding of West Indian racial and ethnic identity and how it intersects with class. She argues that the black racial category is an umbrella term which encompasses different ethnic groups, and should not be viewed in dichotomous terms. Butterfield's use of the pan-ethnic category West Indian is characteristic of the approach of several studies (Kasinitz 1992; Foner 2001; Rogers 2006).

Waters' work on the West Indian population is considered a staple in the fields of race, ethnicity and identity. However, her work's shortcomings are that it aggregates the experience of West Indians, with little regard for the variation across Jamaican, Haitian, Barbadian and others in her study. Like the terms Latino and Asian, the pan-ethnic term West Indian masks the ethnic variation that exists between national origin groups and may override the importance of ethnicity and national origin (Itzigsohn 2000). The terms West Indian and Afro Caribbean are imposed on immigrants upon arrival in the United States. Therefore, these pan-ethnic categories serve as homogenizing tools which hinder our understanding of the variance across and within ethnic groups.

Black Immigrants Unpacked: Jamaicans and Haitians

Although existing literature oftentimes constructs black immigrants as “Afro-Caribbeans” or as “West Indians”, this dissertation purposefully disaggregates these pan-ethnic groups in order to analyze the ethnic groups among the black population. How, then, are Haitians and Jamaicans, constructed in the sociological literature?

Jamaicans and Haitians constitute the central comparison for this study of social identity and ethnic boundaries. Jamaicans and Haitians constitute two interesting and plausible study groups because of their size, distribution and history in American cities. Jamaican and Haitian immigrants constitute the largest black foreign born group in the United States, at 660,000 and 587,000 respectively^{vi} and 318, 498 and 231,361 in the New York Metropolitan area (American Community Survey, 2009-2011). Despite the fact that Haitians and Jamaicans are a part of the same racial category, their ethnic origins make them distinctly different migrant groups. From the studies which have looked at Haitian and Jamaican immigrant adaptation, we find that there are important similarities and differences between them.

Studies of the pan-ethnic category of West Indian and/or Afro-Caribbean overshadow this reality either because they do not rigorously compare the two groups, or exclude Haitian immigrants overall from the analysis of Afro-Caribbean adaptation (Rogers 2006; Kasinitz 2008). Haitians and Jamaicans share similar integration characteristics, despite their cultural and linguistic differences. They encounter racial and nativist discrimination in places of work and school (Kasinitz 1992; Waters 1999; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes, Fernandez-Kelly et al. 2005). They settle in similar urban enclaves and cluster in services, healthcare and transportation occupations (Laguerre

1998; Zephir 2001). For many Haitians, their children attend low performing inner city schools, and parents experience significant barriers to cultivating intergenerational mobility (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly et al. 2005; Kasinitz 2008). In terms of identity, Haitians and Jamaicans are the most likely black Caribbean group to report Haitian or Jamaican ancestry (as opposed to a West Indian) answers on the Census. This reflects the similar emphasis on national origin of both groups (Waters 1999).

The Afro-francophone background of Haitians makes them outliers in discourses about West Indian exceptionalism^{vii} (Haynes 2001; Zephir 2001) and this study attempts to bring them into the race, class and ethnicity debates about black immigrant integration^{viii}. Jamaicans are deemed in large part an “immigrant success story.” Jamaican immigrants have lower poverty rates and higher household incomes compared to other immigrant groups (Kasinitz 2000). Jamaicans are concentrated in employment niches, where female labor participation is a defining factor in the “success” of Jamaican households. However, they are also constrained by a racial structure which hinders their ability to develop ethnic economies, subverting their economic potential. In the global city of New York, where low wage, service jobs have replaced manufacturing jobs, the linguistic and educational characteristics of Jamaicans has helped them thrive in the emerging finance and service based economy. Furthermore, Americans tends to be more receptive to immigrants with a British background, which Jamaicans have and express (Model 1991).

Based on these socio-demographic characteristics, Jamaican immigrants have been found to have more complex orientations to their ethnic identity and their relationship to African Americans. In Vickerman’s (1999) and Rogers (2006) analyses of

the identity formation of Jamaicans in New York, they find that Jamaican immigrants' continue to be organized around their ethnic identity, but are increasingly sympathetic to the racial experiences of African Americans. Like Butterfield, Vickerman and Rogers posit that middle class Jamaicans have an increasing black consciousness and are critical of their co-ethnics distancing strategies toward African Americans. While Waters posits that middle class and higher performing second generation black immigrants tend to be ethnic identified and distance themselves from "ghetto black" identity, Vickerman finds that middle class educated Jamaicans attempt to decrease the social gap between themselves and African Americans, while maintaining their connections to their Jamaican identity. He finds that a predictor of this blurring of ethnic boundaries is length of time in the United States. This finding resonates with that of Neckerman, Carter and Lee (1999), who predict that black immigrants will adopt the African American culture of mobility the more time they spend and the more affluent they become in the United States.

The 1.5, second and subsequent generation Haitian and Jamaican population is coming of age. Portes and Rumbaut (2001), as a part of their Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study(CILS) compare the experience of second generation Haitian and Jamaican immigrants, among other immigrants such as Cubans, Nicaraguans, and Mexicans. The offspring of Jamaican and Haitian immigrants experience significantly high rates of arrest and unemployment compared to other ethnic groups (10 and 17 percent respectively), despite their high aspirations and achievement of education beyond high school (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly et al. 2005), p.1020)^{ix}. The second generation Haitian population fare poorly compared to Jamaicans in their educational and occupational outcomes, placing Haitians on a similar plane as Mexican immigrant youth.

Despite the fact that many have overcome structural barriers, segmented assimilation theory posits that “ a sizable minority (of the second generation) is being left behind” (p.1023) and that they are not achieving or surpassing the class status of their first generation parents. Counter to the hypotheses of segmented assimilation, the study of the second generation in New York finds that Jamaican (West Indian) immigrants are doing significantly better than African Americans, but worse than Chinese, Koreans, whites and Latinos in the sample (Kasinitz 2008).

Early studies of Jamaican identity found that the first generation distanced themselves from African Americans because of their perceived better work ethic. The Jamaican second generation, however, blended into African Americans culture and identity since they attended the same schools and lived in the same neighborhoods (Foner 1987). More recent studies of the second generation in New York argue that the Jamaican second generation have a bi-cultural identity, where Jamaicans adopt their ethnic identity, but also that of African Americans and other racial groups. Their identities are situated and built in a multi-racial and multi-ethnic landscape; therefore, they adopt more cosmopolitan identities that provide them with important cultural capital (Kasinitz 2008).

In the 1970s, Haitians arrived on US shores as skilled migrants. As the 1980s ensued, less skilled Haitian immigrants and refugees entered the U.S. in large numbers, many escaping the political and economic downturn that resulted from dictatorship. Since their mass migration to the United States in the 1980's, Haitian immigrants have been constructed as HIV carriers, poor economic migrants and refugees in the American popular imagination. Unlike the Jamaican population, Haitians have had to deal with

significant stigmas around their country of origin, culture and religious customs. Their poor context of reception and negative racial adaptation has disadvantaged Haitian immigrants compared to Jamaicans. Haitian immigrants manage linguistic barriers as non-English speakers, and have an ethnic community that has low social resources (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

While the integration of Jamaicans is shaped by racial barriers, the integration and mobility of Haitians is blocked by racial and ethnic boundaries. Similar to the Jamaican first generation, Haitians create distance between themselves and African Americans. This is partly a result of linguistic barriers, but is also about the creation of moral boundaries against African Americans whom they perceive as having a poor work ethic (Zephir 2001). Haitians, are also isolated from other black immigrant groups culturally and linguistically (Stafford 1987). For example, the Haitian immigrant community in Florida has had to cope with an undesirable reception and mistreatment in the U.S. (Stepick and Swartz 1998).

The “unrelenting anti-Haitian prejudice and discrimination” has caused many Haitian youth to become ashamed of their ethnic background in a way that is different from the experiences of West Indians. They have “covered up” or denied their ethnic background by strategically self-identifying as Bahamian or African American. As a result, “they often come into conflict with their parents who want them to look, act and talk like Haitian Haitians” (Stepick, Stepick et al. 2001; Nicholas, Stepick et al. 2008) 2001: 10). Because Haitians experience a strikingly harsher context of reception compared to Jamaicans they have to manage their stigmatized ethnic category along with the internal pressures of their ethnic group. The presence of this identity trouble (Zephir

2001) suggests that there is an ethnic hierarchy present in the black community which often goes without examination when studying black immigrants. Haitian youth in particular go to great lengths to 'cover up' their Haitian background in order to socially assimilate into African American or West Indian groups.

The literature examines earlier stages of integration of Haitians and Jamaicans. Therefore, we understand little about how the Haitian and Jamaican middle class perceive their identities, do boundary work and form ethnoracial groups. The literature on these ethnic groups also does not critically examine the role of social class in shaping ethnic identities, boundaries and counter discourses. Middle class Haitians and Jamaicans, therefore, serve as interesting comparative cases for understanding how their middle class attainment, racial background and spatial location impact their social identities and the ethnic boundaries of new Americans.

Theoretical Tools for Analysis of Social Integration

The previously explained contributions and limitations of the contemporary assimilation perspectives has lead me to pull from the minority culture of mobility and the black middle class tool kit to create an analytical framework to examine the social integration of Haitians and Jamaicans into the African American middle class. I will use identity (racial, class, ethnic, spatial) as a measure of commonality and integration, as has been done for other works on immigrant identity and assimilation processes (Portes and Rumbaut ; Portes and Zhou 1994; Waters 1999; Itzigsohn 2009). Therefore, I will explain identity theories. I will then provide a view into ways of belonging and ways of being (Levitt and Schiller 2004; Itzigsohn 2009), and boundary work (Barth 1969; Lamont 2000) as they are

the key analytical tools used to organize our understanding of the racial, class and ethnic identities and behaviors of middle class African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans.

Social Identities and Boundary Work

The Minority Culture of Mobility argues that the African American middle class is the more appropriate group into which black immigrants will integrate. Integration is often measured along the lines of social indicators such as health, locational attainment, intermarriage, occupational attainment, educational mobility, and political behavior (Harker 2001; Rumbaut 2001; Lee and Bean 2004; Iceland and Scopilliti 2008; Portes and Fernandez-Kelly 2008; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008; White and Glick 2009; Lichter, Parisi et al. 2012). A longtime measure of integration/assimilation/incorporation has been identity. This dissertation measures integration by analyzing the social identities (in conjunction with social practices and boundary work) of middle class black immigrants and compares it to the African American middle class experience. Since the focus will be on identity, we are interested in the ways in which individuals in these ethnic groups see themselves in relation to others, as well as the ways in which they give meaning to and perform their self-defined/imposed social identities. I use the theoretical work on identity, ways of belonging and ways of being (Levitt and Schiller 2004), and boundary work (Barth 1969; Lamont 1992) in order to unravel the similarities and differences in the racial, ethnic, class and spatial identities of African American, Haitian and Jamaican adults.

Defining social identity

Scholars would agree that people adopt multiple and intersecting identities. Large surveys such as the Census has created neat checkboxes to represent the racial, ethnic and ancestral background of its population. On the ground, people are managing these categories, but have their own ideas about who they are and how to interact with others which manifests in their identities. Identity is represented by one's concept of self as well as their normative behavior (Hogg, Terry et al. 1995). Identity is a micro-sociological concept which explains how people define the "me" and its corresponding social roles (Cerulo 1997). Identity is social psychological in nature and does not take context, intergroup relations, the collective group and social categories seriously and overlooks the ways in which structure and agency interplays to create identity and corresponding behaviors. Social Identity theory, on the other hand, explains the relationship of the individual to the social group, group processes, and collective dynamics. Social identity is a system of narratives about the self and one's relationship to various social groups. Individuals attach different social meanings to these identity labels and categories, depending on who they are, where they live and whom they interact with. Social identity is, therefore, contextual, situational and fluid, and is expressed through behaviors and practices (Nagel 1994).

Social Identity in this project will be defined through ethnoracial collective identities, or the process by which self-categories link individuals to groups in the social hierarchy (Itzigsohn 2009). I choose social identity, as opposed to identity for the following reasons: Social identity is more concerned with the relationship between self and society, particularly the ways in which perceptions of self and group are tied to one's place

in the social structure. Social identity is a social construct that mediates the relationship between persons, the group and out groups, and their relations with society are central to identity formation process (Hogg, Terry et al. 1995). Categories through which people understand themselves and others include race, class, and ethnicity. These labels are distinctly informed by the meanings people give to the category, the cognitive schema that are central to identity formation processes, and also shape social action and behavior (Swidler 1986; Jenkins 1994; Itzigsohn 2009).

A study of identity must take into account that identities can be distinct, but they may also be overlapping, intersecting and internally differentiated (Butler 1990; Collins 1998). This is important for this study, particularly since we are interested in the racial, class, ethnic and spatial identities of the black middle class and the ways in which these identities work together or perhaps contradict one another in the lived experiences of respondents. Although identities may change across context and social situations, it is important to note that they are not ephemeral and unstable. Many identities hold an important position in people's self-perceptions remain a constant but may well vary in their strength overtime (Huddy 2001; Itzigsohn 2009). Certain identities are simply more relevant to people lives and dictates their behaviors. Other identities are entirely inescapable because of their strength and/or physical visibility. This dissertation will explore the development and strength of racial, class, ethnic and spatial identities among the black middle class.

Ways of Belonging and Ways of Being

This dissertation utilizes ways of being and ways of belonging to an ethnic, racial or class group as an analytical lens. Ways of belonging is defined by a person's symbolic attachments to their group (and exclusion from other social groups), which is often expressed through their identities. Ways of belonging are often expressed through identity labels such as "female", "Indian", or "catholic". Ways of being is defined by the relationships, networks and behaviors practiced in daily life (Levitt and Schiller 2004). In the Transnationalism literature, ways of being and belonging describes ones connectedness to a social field. Glick Schiller and Levitt (2004) argue that the social field is a complex web of social relationship and have emerged as analytical tools for understanding how social identity and its corresponding (or contradictory) practices constitute immigrant identity and integration. Interestingly, ways of belonging and ways of being as a framework allows for immigrants to not identify as a part of an ethnoracial group in name (belonging), yet be deeply entrenched in activities specific to that group (being). Therefore, an immigrant can be a part of a social field through social relations and practices, but not ascribe to its corresponding identity.

Ways of being is represented by the celebration of holidays, voter behavior, and residential choices which correspond (at least in the imagination of the person and group) with a particular identity. Ways of being and ways of belonging may complement or contradict one another, based on the given context of analysis. Individuals can choose to enter social relations with a group's network, through ways of being, such as practicing one's faith, eating particular foods, etc. However, they can also exit this group affiliation when desired. The best example of this is a person who was born and raised in Ecuador,

sends remittances to family members back home, but doesn't identify as an Ecuadorian person. They are embedded in Ecuadorian social networks, yet, their primary social identity is not Ecuadorian, demonstrating a lack of belonging to their ethnic group. Ways of being, on the other hand, describes the specific practices which signal one's deliberate connection to a particular group or social field. Therefore, if a person says that they are Muslim, then they practice ways of being by frequenting a Mosque for prayer.

In order to understand identity and its relationship to behavior, we must discern its contents. In order to discern the Dominican immigrant experience, Itzigsohn (2009) analyzes how tied Dominicans are to their identities and how these ties are represented or transcended by behaviors in everyday life. He finds that many Dominicans identify as being Dominican (or as Latinos) but their ways of belonging transcend the Dominican community through their friendships, multiracial and multiethnic neighbors and occupations.

The ways of being and ways of belonging allows us to contrast identity and social interactions of ethnoracial groups. Based on this framework, we will explore the correspondence of dissonance between identity and its performance. The following questions will be posed: how do African Americans define their ways of being black? How might Haitians conceive of their ways of belonging to the middle class? Do ways of belonging correspond to their ways of belonging? Are social interactions much broader than identities? In the case of African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans, the empirical chapters will analyze their stated ways of being and belonging to their racial and class identity in order to derive an in-depth understanding of the content of their identities.

Ethnic Boundaries

This dissertation examines Haitians, Jamaicans and African Americans as distinct ethnic groups. Defined as the ongoing interaction between internal and external definitions of groups (Barth 1969; Jenkins 1994), ethnicity is both constructed through personal and outward celebrations of ethnic culture such as music and dance and externally defined for the purposes of social exclusion and discrimination. Jenkins and Barth argue that ethnic identity is less about the cultural elements of rituals and practices, but more so about how these practices and identities help group members define and police the boundaries of their group. Jenkins argues for a systematic theory of ethnicity—a theory which moves beyond ethnic identity to one which emphasizes ethnic categorization. Ethnic groups in conjunction with ethnic categories provide the complete story of how ethnicity operates in social life.

Extrapolating from the social anthropological perspectives of Barth (1969), Jenkins believes that ethnicity should not just be viewed as benign. Jenkins states: “Anthropology[...] tends to celebrate ethnicity as a social resource. This is at the expense of paying sufficient attention to ethnicity as a social liability or stigma” (1994, p. 201). He posits that ethnicity or ethnic groups are constructed and redefined for the purpose of power and control over resources. The focus on ethnic groups’ identities overlooks the fact that social relations between and within ethnic groups are divided and unequal. At the heart of ethnic categories and ethnic identity are conflicts over space, history, primacy and power. Historical relations within the black population suffer from this external categorization of ethnicity, whereby, the construction of foreign born blacks as “the good blacks” and native born blacks as the “bad blacks” continues to categorize these groups in

problematic ways which have implications for their access to education, occupations and locational attainment (Model 2008; Ifantunji 2011).

The process of stigmatizing ethnic groups occurs when non-ethnics categorize an ethnic group. Power lies in the authority that external actors and institutions have to define the meaning of the ethnic category. Asian immigrants such as the Chinese, for example, are constructed as model minorities in school settings by teachers and administrators who buy into public discourses of superior work ethic and intelligence and performance (Ng, Lee et al. 2007). This model minority stereotype is internalized by group members and has two main consequences: it influences a rise in accolades and aspirations of group members, or masks the ethnically complex experiences of Asian groups, such as the lower performing groups of Vietnamese immigrants (Ngo and Lee 2007).

A second important dimension of ethnic boundaries is the creation of the “us” and “them” dichotomy, which is also true of any collective identity. Ethnic groups externally define other ethnic groups in order to craft an insider-outsider relationship between themselves and non-ethnics. This serves the purpose of drawing ethnic boundaries in order to protect what ethnic group members believe to be the unique rewards of being a part of that group. Lastly, ethnic groups may build a defense mechanism by way of strong internal definitions of self in order to protect themselves from the imposition of external categories. Therefore, ethnic groups who are continuously discriminated against and stereotyped negatively may build strong definitions of self and ethnic boundaries in order to resist imposed negative stereotypes. Oftentimes, categorization can create an ethnic group identity which may not have

existed before. A key example of this is seen among Native Americans in America, who, prior to colonization, saw themselves as separate entities. Native American identity experienced an ethnic renewal in the middle of the 20th century. This ethnic renewal resulted from the passage of federal Indian policy and the politicization of Indian ethnic identity (Nagel 1995).

Lastly, Alba (2009) uses the boundary framework to develop a systematic tool for analyzing the assimilation of ethnoracial immigrants groups into immigrants receiving societies. He argues that dominant/mainstream groups are involved in defining ethnoracial and linguistic boundaries in order to protect their status position. He advances the concept of bright, blurred and shifting boundaries to demarcate the negotiation and manipulation of ethnoracial faultlines. The manipulation of this boundary is distinctly related to Alba's idea of "non-zero sum mobility", which outlines the way in which minority assimilation into white occupations, neighborhoods, schools and private spaces blurs previously bright ethnoracial boundaries. Theorists such as Bonilla-Silva (2004) have noted that ethnoracial boundaries are changing, where America is increasingly adopting a Latin-American model of racial stratification where blacks continue to occupy the lower position, and mixed-race/ honorary whites will occupy a middle tier position. However, whites will maintain power of positions of power and resources. It is the interaction of racial, ethnic, class and spatial identities, behaviors and boundaries among Haitians, Jamaicans and African Americans that is the focus of this dissertation. Understanding this social process of boundary work will help us elucidate the integration processes of these groups into the American mainstream in general and the African American middle class in particular.

Conclusion

The complex ethnoracial and economic structure in America today is absorbing immigrants in various ways. Ethnoracial groups are internally differentiated along the lines of class, and sometimes race and color. Therefore, they are being incorporated into different segments of American society. This dissertation focuses on an important, yet overlooked native born population as a potential referent for immigrant integration: the African American middle class. Although sociology has provided increased attention to the experiences of being black and middle class in America, little has been done to understand the ways in which immigrants today are becoming similar to or remaining distinct from the African American middle class. Existing theoretical paradigms such as segmented assimilation altogether constructs African Americans as mainly being a part of the urban poor and the new assimilation framework has provided little empirics on what assimilation to the African American middle class looks like. Stratified ethnoracial incorporation, however, points to the ways in which becoming American means becoming minority and that for some, it means socioeconomic incorporation to the native born minority middle class.

This dissertation explores the theories of assimilation in the African American middle class by the two largest black foreign born immigrant groups: Jamaicans and Haitians. I have argued in this chapter that the minority culture of mobility is an important refinement of segmented assimilation theory and helps us understand what it means to be upwardly mobile for immigrants and native born groups. I have also submitted that space, increasing ethnoracial diversity, and income inequality matter to the ways in which minority middle class immigrants experience race and class. I have

highlighted key concepts, like social identity, ways of belonging and ways of being and boundary work, each of which will help me unpack the empirics in this dissertation. How are Haitians and Jamaicans managing economic mobility and racial exclusion, and how is this similar or different than the African American middle class? This is a central question that my cases will help explain.

This dissertation provides empirical background on the abstract concepts discussed in this chapter and contributes to the vigorous debate about the assimilation of new and later generation ethnoracial groups. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, the identities, practices and boundary work of black ethnic middle class groups will vary across groups, demonstrating the importance of using the intersection of ethnicity/national origin group and class when examining the incorporation of minorities and immigrants.

Chapter 3: Research Sites and Methods

In order to address my research questions on identity and integration of middle class Haitians, Jamaicans and African Americans, I used ethnography and in depth interviews. For this dissertation, we rely heavily on in depth interviews to address the theoretical questions at hand. I based my study in two neighborhoods: Cascades, a predominately black, multiethnic middle class urban neighborhoods in Jamaica, Queens and Great Park, a mixed-race suburban setting in Nassau County. These neighborhoods provided fertile, well delineated spaces to analyze the racial, class and ethnic identities of respondents. Hundreds of hours were spent conducting in depth interviews with families within their households, in local coffee shops, schools, libraries and organizations. The ethnographic piece facilitated a richer understanding about what people say they *are*, what people actually *do* and the ways they *perform* their identities across space and in interactions with other groups. I spent time in local organizations, restaurants, Laundromats, side-walks, buses, churches and backyards documenting the way of life of Cascades and Great Park residents. In this dissertation, we first analyze the lived experience of being black and middle class for different black ethnic groups. In follow up ethnographic projects, this dissertation will be used as a foundation for understanding the relationship between how the black middle class view and perform race, class and ethnicity in their social worlds.

New York was chosen as the metropolitan research site because of its concentration of blacks in the middle class and high number of foreign born blacks. Interest in the black native and black foreign born middle class solidified in 2006, when a *New York Times* article titled “Black Incomes Surpass Whites in Queens” was published (Roberts 2006).

“Across the country, the income gap between blacks and whites remains wide, and nowhere more so than in Manhattan. But just a river away, a very different story is unfolding. In Queens, the median income among black households, nearing \$52,000 a year, has surpassed that of whites in 2005, an analysis of new census data shows. No other county in the country with a population over 65,000 can make that claim. The gains among blacks in Queens, the city’s quintessential middle-class borough, were driven largely by the growth of two-parent families and the successes of immigrants from the West Indies. Many live in tidy homes in verdant enclaves like Cambria Heights, Rosedale and Laurelton, just west of the Cross Island Parkway and the border with Nassau County.”

Although wealth and income inequality between blacks and whites is often the focus of social research, there was an increasing amount of work on the African American middle class, and a different relationship between race, class and ethnicity was unfolding in parts of Queens, which has not been examined before.

The characteristics of these Southeast Queens neighborhoods make it both an interesting and distinct from the black middle class areas such as Princes Georges County in Washington D.C. and Dekalb County in Atlanta. The high number of black immigrant households makes this middle class community locally as well as globally connected, inevitably shaping the ways in which they go about being black and middle class. The ethnic and class diversity of the black population are rivaled by few states such as Washington D.C. and Florida, but even these locations lack the spatial richness which exists in New York. New York’s multiethnic and multiracial social structure is expressed in the diversity of its neighborhoods. While the segregation debate continues about how much New York’s ethnoracial spatial segregation can be attributed to structure versus agency (Zubricksy-Charles 2009), the reality remains that New York is an exceptionally racially, class and ethnically stratified city, with a plethora of cosmopolitan canopies/public spaces (Anderson 2011) where ethnoracial groups meet and also

neighborhoods such as Jackson Heights, Queens and Jamaica, Queens where groups from all over the world live side by side in the most diverse zip codes in the nation, some of which are middle class or affluent spaces.

Neighborhoods

This research took place in less traveled, touristy areas of New York: *Cascades*, a predominately black middle class urban neighborhood and *Great Park*, a racially integrated middle class suburban neighborhood. I chose Cascades because it is an ethnically heterogeneous setting, where African Americans, Jamaicans and Haitians comprise the majority of the black population (Burden and Barth 1999). I decided to use Great Park as a comparison setting to Cascades because it is a relatively racially integrated neighborhood consisting of whites, blacks and Latinos, an area which is considered an anomaly in Nassau County's racially balkanized landscape. Great Park is considered a "mixed" or racially integrated middle class section of the Town of Hempstead and has received an increased black population over the past 20 years, a significant amount are foreign born blacks and Latinos.

Many Great Park residents were once city residents who have formed families and seek suburban lifestyles. Predominately black and racially integrated settings like Great Park and Cascades reflects the experience of blacks in middle class America, namely because middle class blacks often reside either in all black neighborhoods or in neighborhoods with whites when there are racial group buffers such as Latinos and Asians (Logan and Zhang 2010). In Great Park, blacks, whites and Latinos comprise equal shares

of the total population, making this an interesting comparative space to study mobility. Ultimately, this neighborhood comparison allows me to analyze the relationship between social identity and space (Lacy 2007).

Over the course of 13 months, I used a variety of methods to gather data on the racial, class and ethnic experiences of middle class blacks in Cascades and Great Park: ethnographic observations and 59 family (parent and youth) in depth interviews. Ethnographic observations allowed me to watch daily life in both neighborhoods unfold in order to craft thick descriptions of social interactions and its relationship to space. I was able to compare how respondents *talked* about their social groups and identities with how these identities were *acted out* in relation to social others, essentially addressing the sociological debate over identity and performance (Cerulo 1997; Steele 1997).

However, while observations provide key insight into interactional experiences, they do not fully describe the ideologies, beliefs, and values of people. Therefore, in depth interviews were heavily relied upon to provide information on family migration experiences, aspirations, shared identities, residential choices, and interclass-racial-and ethnic relations. I asked questions revolving around self-identification, perceptions of ethnoracial group commonality, sense of belonging to ethnoracial and class community, interests in cultural/ethnic reproduction (in relation to next generation) and the boundaries that exist between self and others. Families were targeted (one adult and one child per household) for interviews in order to capture the diverse intergenerational dynamics of identity, belonging and boundary work. In this dissertation, interviews from the adult sample of 59 families, 20 adults from each ethnic group are analyzed (with the exception of the Haitian sample which has 19 adults; (See Tables 1-2 for detailed information on the

respondent sample). In a subsequent project, I plan to analyze and compare the experiences of youth and adults for a more holistic picture of the black middle class experience in urban and suburban space.

The goal was to understand the meanings that people attached to certain experiences and interactions with racial and class in and out-groups. In depth interviews helped connect complex narratives together in order to compile a cohesive story about middle class African American, Haitian and or Jamaican life in select areas of New York. No quantitative datasets deal with such subsets of blacks in the US in great depth. Therefore, this data is an important contribution to empirical work on blacks/minorities, immigrants and middle class populations.

Table 1: Cascades Neighborhood (Urban) Interviewee Socioeconomic Profile

Name	Ethnicity	Location	Age	Time in US	Occupation	Education
Rachel	African American	Urban	55		Office Assistant	Some College
Reah	African American	Urban	42		Office Manager	Some College
Mr. Somers	African American	Urban	55		Pastor	Graduate Degree
Anna	African American	Urban	40		Teacher	College
Cheryl	African American	Urban	50		Office Assistant	Some College
Mrs. Wilson	African American	Urban	47		Medical Billing Coordinator	Some College
Mrs. Jackson	African American	Urban	48		Property Manager	Some College
Diane	African American	Urban	68		Technician	Graduate Degree
Mr. Joseph	African American	Urban	60		Business Owner	College
Ms. Blume	African American	Urban	65		Human Resources Administrator	Some College
Mr. Beacon	Jamaican	Urban	60	17	Journalist/Entrepreneur	College
Mrs. Marlene	Jamaican	Urban	60	9	Teacher	College
Ms. Herbert	Jamaican	Urban	47	17	Social Worker	College
Norella	Jamaican	Urban	49	21	Medical Billing Coordinator	Some College
Mrs. Kean	Jamaican	Urban	45	29	Administrator	Some College
Mrs. Roberts	Jamaican	Urban	61	20	Nurse	College
Cathy	Jamaican	Urban	75	57	Senior Microbiologist	Graduate School
Timmy	Jamaican	Urban	49	15	Real Estate Agent	College
Mona	Jamaican	Urban	61	32	Business Owner	College
Mrs. Bones	Jamaican	Urban	47	28	Accountant Supervisor	Some College
Noreen	Haitian	Urban	34	25	Program Manager	College
Edwin	Haitian	Urban	53	30	Garage Manager	Some College
Mrs. Jean Baptiste	Haitian	Urban	46	32	Teacher	Graduate Degree
Claudia	Haitian	Urban	51	22	Teacher/Student	Graduate Degree
Pierre	Haitian	Urban	47	37	Nurse	College
Mr. Herve	Haitian	Urban	45	41	Human Resources Supervisor	College
Josette	Haitian	Urban	35	12	Program Manager	College
Marie-Joseph	Haitian	Urban	44	31	Business Owner-Beauty Salon	College
Mr. Chery	Haitian	Urban	66	42	Production Planner	Graduate Degree
Mrs. Duvivien	Haitian	Urban	51	20	Nurse	College

Table 2: Great Park Neighborhood (Suburb) Interviewee Socioeconomic Profile

Name	Ethnicity	Location	Age	Time in US	Occupation	Education
Mr. Cherry	African American	Suburban	55		Teacher	College
Janet	African American	Suburban	48		Insurance Broker	College
Mrs. Hillman	African American	Suburban	57		Librarian	College
Arlene	African American	Suburban	51		Technician	College
Michael	African American	Suburban	60		Nurse	College
Lisa	African American	Suburban	46		Financial Manager	Graduate Degree
Paula	African American	Suburban	46		Financial Program Manager	College
Ms. Small	African American	Suburban	62		Administrator-Retired	Some College
Christine	African American	Suburban	48		Teacher	Graduate Degree
Hannah	African American	Suburban	52		Business Owner-Daycare	Some College
Mrs. Williamson	Jamaican	Suburban	40	17	Homemaker	Some College
Ariel	Jamaican	Suburban	50	US Born	Financial Manager	Graduate School
Robert	Jamaican	Suburban	65	US Born	Police Officer-Retired	College
Barbara	Jamaican	Suburban	51	30	Teacher Assistant	College
Theo	Jamaican	Suburban	53	33	Psychologist	Graduate Degree
Mr. Winter	Jamaican	Suburban	46	13	Engineer	College
Mrs. Commod	Jamaican	Suburban	53	21	Maintenance	High School
Mrs. Graves	Jamaican	Suburban	49	23	Nurse	College
Mr. Benedict	Jamaican	Suburban	51	US Born	Financial Manager	Graduate School/
Mr. Acorn	Jamaican	Suburban	50	US Born	Real Estate Agent	College
Geraldine	Jamaican	Suburban	80	57	Dietician	Graduate School
Antoine	Haitian	Suburban	45	30	Business Owner-Moving Company	College
Eulily	Haitian	Suburban	45	16	Nurse	College
Shayanne	Haitian	Suburban	49	39	Physician's Assistant	Graduate Degree
Claudette	Haitian	Suburban	59	41	Social Worker	Graduate Degree
Joey	Haitian	Suburban	50	26	Business Owner-Finance	Graduate Degree
Joseph	Haitian	Suburban	51	34	Medical Professional	Graduate Degree/
Crystle	Haitian	Suburban	49	30	Nurse	Graduate Degree
Frantz	Haitian	Suburban	46	22	Professor/Business Owner-Finance	Graduate Degree/
Kevin	Haitian	Suburban	47	17	Accountant/Nursing Student	College

Recruitment and Selection:

Middle Class Requirements

In Lareau's (2011) research on the patterns of childrearing in working and middle class families, she posits that middle class refers to having one parent in the household with managerial and professional skills. In Lacy's (2007) work on middle class Washington D.C., having an individual income of \$50,000, a college degree, and a consumption lifestyle that is in line with middle class tastes makes a household/family middle class. In Patillo McCoy's (1999) work on the black middle class in the 1990s, she defines middle class as having a median family annual income of \$40,000 in 1990, which was well above the family annual income of black in Chicago at the time.

In New York, a diversity of occupations can help one gain a significant amount of income without a formal college degree. Therefore, using just educational attainment or managerial authority as a measure of middle class status in this study is limited. Patillo's McCoy's lower income limit of \$40,000 is two decades out of date and puts a household in a working class bracket. Lacy uses socioeconomic indicators (individual income), lifestyle decisions and suburbanization as indicators of middle class status. In this study, a combination of these indicators have helped identify criteria for middle class status of African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans in eastern New York.

1. Homeownership. A primary indicator of middle class incomes and wealth acquisition is homeownership, particularly for blacks (Conley 1999). The average home in Cascades and Great Park costs at least \$300,000 and \$749,000. Therefore, in order to qualify for this study, parents must own their homes. Homeownership is a promising predictor of family stability in the neighborhood, which will allow me to make linkages between place and identity.
2. The median household income for blacks in New York was \$44,264, \$56,453 in Queens and \$78,092 in Nassau County (ACS 2006-2010). Household income must

be at or above the median household income for the county, making \$56,000 and \$78,000 the minimum requirement for qualifying as a middle class household in Queens and Nassau County, respectively. I am interested in examining the lives of core middle class members. Each of these incomes surpasses the median household income of the designated neighborhoods, and therefore, will capture individuals at the middle to upper end of the income strata.

I sought immigrant households where at least one parent was born in Haiti or Jamaica-x with a U.S. born or 1.5 generation child who is between the ages of 14 and 18. I choose 14 as the lower limit because it is a critical age when social identities are crystallizing and youth are becoming autonomous thinkers. I choose the upper limit of 18 because, based on preliminary interviews, many youth above the age of 18 were preparing to go away to college. Many who went away to college either returned home for a transition period at 22 before they pursued independent adult life away from the home.

I established key criteria for the selection of interviewees in order to control the variation in respondent generation and family characteristics. However, the social world is difficult to restrict and control. Many parents in these suburban/residential settings were 1.5 generation and 2nd generation, making their children 2.5 and 3rd generation immigrants. The other scenario was that parents were new arrivals as well as their children, making the parent's length of time in the U.S. quite short and their children first and 1.5 generation immigrants as well. Therefore, in some instances, I was flexible in my inclusion criteria and scanned the participant pool in order to strategically choose families that represented variability in generational background and length of residence in the United States in order to also control the number of respondents needed for each category.

I used various institutions, organizations and networks in order to recruit respondents. I primarily recruited adults and youth through public high schools, local

churches, civic/neighborhood association meetings, local businesses, non-profit organizations, and personal networks. In Cascades and Great Park, I canvassed the local high schools and targeted the central public schools which were presumably attended by teenagers in the neighborhood. This was the case in Great Park, a suburban district where the boundaries between school districts are visible and highly contested. However, in Cascades, the neighborhood public schools were rarely attended by neighborhood residents. Because of New York's school choice and districting policies, parents and students have the option to attend their local public school. If they deem this school to be sub-standard, they can apply to other high schools in other neighborhoods as well as other boroughs. Therefore, many students in Cascades High, for example, were from Brooklyn or other distant neighborhoods in Queens. Therefore, recruitment in this public school demanded a thorough pre-screening of potential respondents to ensure their residence in their neighborhoods. In schools, I gained access both through principals as well as teachers who lead student cultural and social groups.

Recruitment in churches took place with the help of administrators and clergy. I contacted specific youth, ethnic, bible study and choir groups in order to access the populations of interest. This proved to be an effective recruitment tool, and allowed me to build trust with parents, whom were more likely to allow their children to participate in church affiliated and approved activities. These sub groups within Catholic, Protestant and Methodist churches also helped weekly or bi-weekly meetings. The meetings and gatherings served as key sites for understanding ethnic and interethnic interactions in religious settings. Civic and neighborhood associations allowed me to recruit the adult and politically active populations within Great Park and Cascades. Businesses were also key

recruitment sites. Because the local resident population relied on the services of businesses on the commercial strip (particularly in Cascades), this served as a fruitful location to meet and observe potential participants for this study. Business owners were instrumental in this process, and I conducted interviews with over a dozen black and Latino business owners in Cascades and Great Park, as a result.

Local not-for-profit organizations were my initial points of contact with the neighborhood. Often, they provided me with a sense of the neighborhood. This understanding of the social order of the space allowed me to map out my recruitment plan. I spent my first weeks in Cascades and Great Park as a volunteer (afterschool teacher, grant writer) or observer within ethnic and non-ethnic organizations. I recruited participants from these organizations. Working as a volunteer for these organization provided me with some credibility and legitimacy when I approached potential participants in other neighborhood sites. Lastly, I utilized personal contacts through family members and friends for referrals to individuals and families who fit the criteria for my study. This was a more necessary strategy particularly in Great Park. The spatial layout of Great Park was such that it was less populated and geographically spread out.

Therefore, public spaces such as organizations, businesses, and churches were in less supply, making recruitment efforts difficult. Furthermore, the black population in general and black ethnic populations in particular were less visible and accessible. This socio-demographic and spatial realities made recruitment through referrals and snowball sampling a key tactic for increases the sample size for this study. This study does not seek to be representative. This sample is essentially a convenience sample. However, it does provide insights into an understudied population, and from their lived experiences we can

build theoretical insights into how race and class factors into the incorporation of middle class foreign and native born blacks in the United States.

The research schedule used for in depth interviews with the adult sample asked participants questions about their demographic background (migration timing, education, occupation, marital status, household structure), migration experience, class background, ethno-racial identity, perceptions of schools and neighborhood, aspirations for children and marital preferences (See Research Schedule in Appendix 1).

Reflections on the Research Process

Reflexivity is a cornerstone of qualitative work. The researcher, data and methods are intertwined entities in the qualitative research process (Mauthner and Doucet 2003). My background as a working class black, second generation Haitian immigrant woman inevitably shaped the research data collection and analysis process. As a New York native, I knew the lay of the land better than a newcomer would, although I worked in urban and suburban sections of New York I had never frequented before. As an American born researcher, the landscape was also different to me than it would have been to a foreigner. Furthermore, my status as an American born person of Haitian ethnicity meant that I had easier access and acceptance in the Haitian community, as opposed to the Jamaican or African American community. I speak Haitian Kriol, and often used my linguistic and cultural skills in conversation with potential Haitian respondents. I had also spent several months working the Haitian community in Queens for preliminary research purposes, therefore facilitating the trust, reentry, and recruitment process with certain members of the Cascades community.

My black identity, and in many ways my gender and status as a doctoral student facilitated my access to the African American and Jamaican community as well. Parent respondents, in particular were enthusiastic about helping a young black woman attain her doctoral degree and agreed willingly to let me interview them and their children. Parents repeatedly noted that they had children, nieces/nephews or neighbors children who graduated from Brown and other prestigious universities. Many times, I had the impression that they saw me as an extension of them, with one Jamaican mother stating to me “I am happy to help someone else’s child, because so many people have helped my children get to where they need to be”. Many parents were educated in the areas of the social sciences and research, and therefore understood the demands and rigor of attaining a graduate degree and extended themselves to help me in the research process. Along ethnic lines, however, I tried to conceal my ethnicity when possible in order to not bias the ways in which my respondents answered questions about ethnic identity and social interactions. Nonetheless, I did reveal my Haitian ancestry to Haitian respondents, because it served as a tool for increased access among a normally closed community.

However, my black identity, albeit a source of access in some spaces, was sometimes a hindrance to gaining access to schools and students in suburban schools and neighborhoods. For example, when I began fieldwork in Great Park, I decided to begin recruiting high schools to take part in my study. In order to access high school students, I carefully sought out the permission of administrators at two of the main high schools in Great Park: Jamestown High and Crosstown High. There were, however, distinctions made between these schools by residents and outsiders. Jamestown High was known as the better performing school and had a larger white population than Crosstown High. When I entered

Jamestown High, I saw an ethnoracially diverse pool of teenagers walking and running through the main lobby. I was introduced to a white female guidance counselor, who asked for my research protocol before she would ask the principal for permission. She sympathized with the doctoral process, having received an Ed.D. from a local private university. She said she would follow up with me, but I did not receive a reply from her after some time. After several attempts to contact her, she replied to me, indicating that the principal denied me access to the school for recruitment purposes. She provided no reason for this. After discussing this with a faculty mentor, I decided to be persistent and eagerly tried to visit the school again during one my day trips to the area. When I shared my research and problem with a black security guard who greeted me, he said to me that he was not surprised that they rejected my research cause the predominately white administration would not want me talking to the youth about race. It was a hot button issue and administrators at the school wanted to keep it silent. I walked away from Wynn school discouraged. But I knew Crosstown High was still an option.

Crosstown School, although less than 3 miles away from Jamestown High was historically a more racially diverse school. Crosstown High School also had a black principal who was well respected in the community for turning the school's academic performance record around. When I entered Crosstown High, I was welcomed, and was able to make a one on one appointment to see the principal, unlike Jamestown High, which had directed me to a guidance counselor who screened my project before it went across the principal's desk. In my one on one meeting with Crosstown High's principal, he welcomed my research and provided information for teachers and student groups whom I should contact. He also mentioned that Parent Teacher Meetings would be an ideal setting to

recruit respondents. I walked away from my meeting at Crosstown High perturbed by the stark difference in my treatment as a young black researcher. I strongly believe that my racial background in combination with my research topic were used as a reason to deny me access to Jamestown High while it was a source of cooperation and understanding in my experience at Crosstown High. If I were a white female researcher at Jamestown High that day, the research participants and findings in this project would have been noticeably different.

This research's goal is to extend existing theories (Burawoy 1998) around the black and immigrants middle class experience. Therefore, I engage with segmented assimilation theory (Portes and Zhou 1993) and the minority culture of mobility (Neckerman, Carter et al. 1999) and the black middle class toolkit (Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Lacy 2007) by investigating the particularities of specific cases, namely ethnic groups in order "to identify the general from the unique, to move from the "micro" to the "macro," and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory" (Burawoy, 1991, 2002). This project makes an empirical contribution by focusing on the black middle class, examining the different ethnic groups which comprise the black middle class and their lived experiences through a comparative lens across urban and suburban space. I examine the relevance of the African American culture of mobility to African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans in a global city, and plan to later analyze how their children manage racial, class and ethnic boundaries in comparison to their parents.

The Metropolitan Frame: New York, City of Migrants

From its early development, New York has housed internal and international migrants. The black population is no exception. The recent induction of the Slave Burial Grounds in lower Manhattan uncovers the ugly and disturbing history of slavery and exploitation in this northern city. While New York is well known for being an “immigrant city”, it was a part of the British colonial project, which used African slave labor to build its infrastructure and economy. The involuntary migration and settlement of African slaves has left an indelible print on New York’s history^{xii}, marking its origins as a city formed on the subjugation of African slaves first, and various other racial ethnic groups thereafter^{xiii}.

New York’s black community formed as a result of voluntary black migration from the south to the north began in large numbers in the early 20th century and lasted through the 1970s. The Great Migration was a strategy used by millions of rural (and urban) Southern African Americans to access work opportunities and realize their aspirations for social mobility and social equality in Northern and Western American cities. The Great Migration ushered in African Americans from the American South, creating an urban space where black culture, economic prosperity and political mobilization emerged. Right before the end of the Great Migration, the post 1965 Immigration act opened doors for an unprecedented number of black foreign born people to enter, making ethnoracial relations in American cities more complex. Through continued replenishment and the emergence of black ethnic identity, black immigrants from the Caribbean intensified the consciousness of ethnicity among the black population in a way that had not been experienced before. This is not to say that black immigrants were new to America. Black immigrants began to enter American cities in the early 20th

century (Kasinitz 1992; Watkins-Owens 1996). However, at that time an ethnic consciousness among black immigrants was trumped by racial identity, particularly as a result of institutional racism and the need for a collective black identified population to fight against racial inequality (Haynes 2001).

Upon arrival, African Americans and Caribbean black immigrants mainly resided in what is known as the ‘black capitol of the world’, Harlem. Overtime, they branched out to select spatial areas in Central Brooklyn, Jamaica, Queens, or the North/Central Bronx (see Figure 3.1-3.3). Albeit a multiracial and multi ethnic city, New York is one of the most segregated cities in the country, with its black-white dissimilarity index demonstrating that blacks and whites are rarely neighbors (Logan and Stults 2011). The segregation of blacks and whites is a long debated phenomenon, and is the result of the enduring legacy of institutional racism in the housing, occupational and educational systems (Omi and Winant 2000). The entrance of black immigrants into urban areas presented a new opportunity to examine whether race or culture determined the black-white segregation problem. Recent studies have demonstrated that, albeit clustering among African Americans and black immigrants (Foner 2001), they continue to be isolated in the same all black neighborhoods overtime. This is evident in the maps below, which demonstrate that Jamaicans and Haitians continue to occupy predominately black spaces in the New York Metropolitan area.

Figure 3.1: Black/African America Population, New York City (2000)

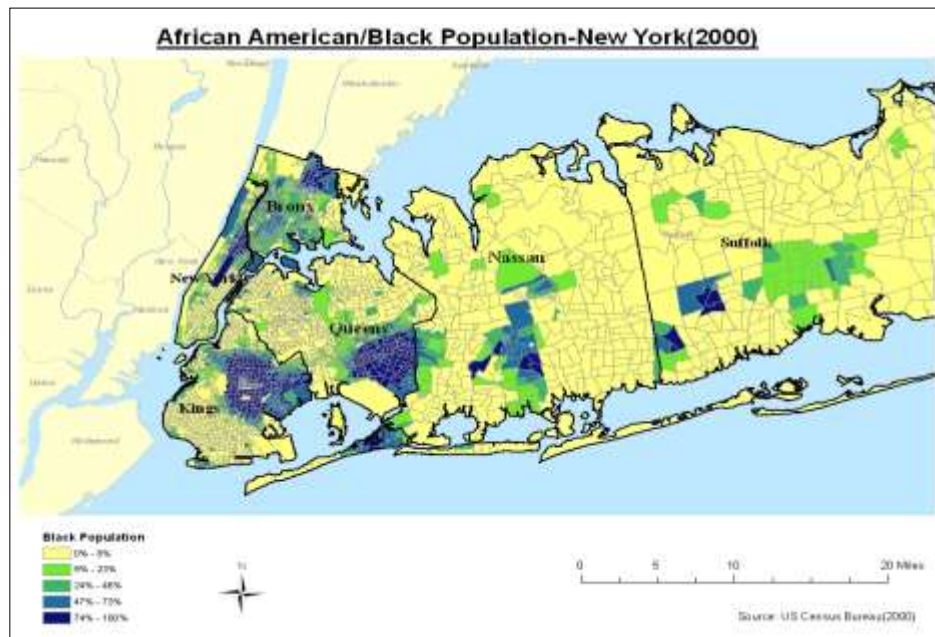
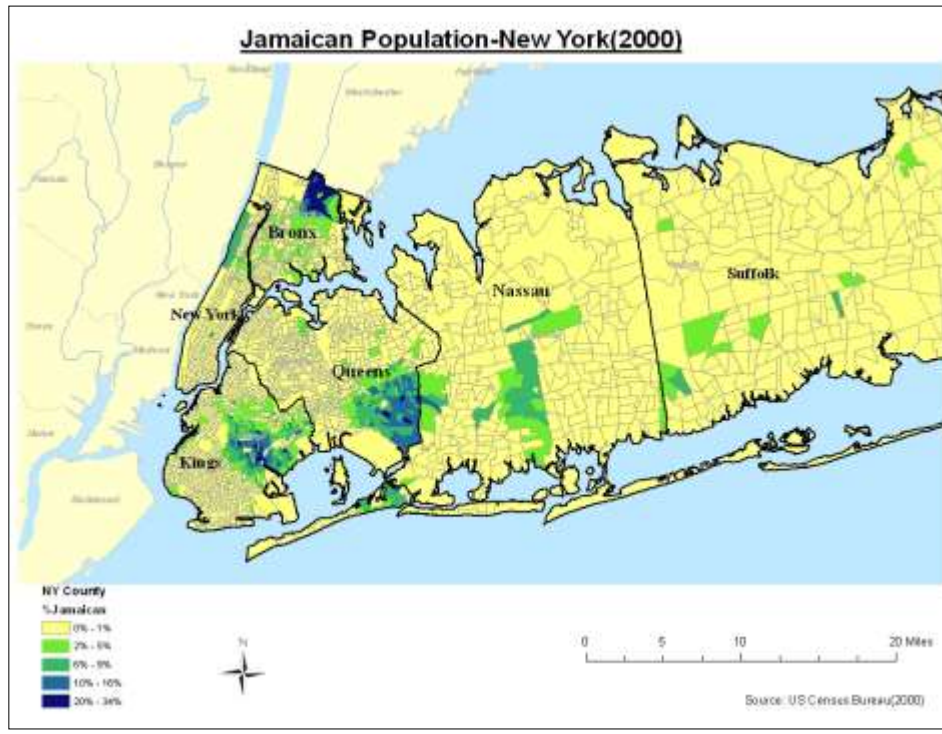


Figure 3.2: Haitian Foreign Born Population, New York City (2000)



Figure 3.3: Jamaican Foreign Born Population, New York City (2000)



New York Suburbs have experienced a significant rise in the black population. Nassau County, for example, has been a popular destination for immigrant homebuyers and families. The suburbanization of immigrants of color and blacks have changed the face of Nassau County's staunchly white demographic and political machine. While blacks in the metro area are experiencing continued high levels of segregation from other ethnoracial groups, segregation in the suburbs are also an important issue (Logan and Stults 2011). Nassau County, for example, is among the top 10 most segregated areas in the United States, and shares the list with New York City and Newark, New Jersey. However, some exceptions exist, such as towns along the southern shore which were once predominately white, but are now multiracial and multiethnic villages (see map for black population change overtime). Great Park represents an assortment of these multiracial villages.

Cascades

This dissertation is a multi-sited ethnography of two middle class neighborhoods in New York where black middle class families reside, work, worship, learn and play. The first area consists of select middle class neighborhoods located in Southeast Queens, New York (see Figure 3.4 for geographic layout of Southeast Jamaica, Queens neighborhoods). Southeast Queens is located directly above Jamaica Bay. It is in close distance to John F Kennedy airport, a provider of jobs to working and middle class families in the area. The area is comprised of lower, core, and upper -black middle class enclaves which are embedded in a larger middle income area. Southeast Queens is well known for its population of dual earner households, high incomes, bustling shopping districts and transportation hubs.

Until the 1960s, when urban decline spread across the country, Downtown Jamaica was an important, central urban district for commerce, entertainment and government institutions in New York City. Its equidistance from the expanding Long Island suburbs and the economic locus of Manhattan made Jamaica a key transportation port. As highways and mass transit expanded to and beyond Jamaica, it became the home of major banks and financial institutions, mega department stores such as Macy's, professional offices, the first major modern supermarket, King Kullen, and Loew's Valencia Theater which attracted thousands of movie goers from other parts of the city per year. Since the 1920's, Jamaica has also been home to one of the country's largest African American middle class enclaves, from which Jazz legends such as Lena Horne, intellectuals such as W.E.B. Dubois and professionals^{xiv} lived and worked.

Figure 3.4: Jamaica, Queens Neighborhoods

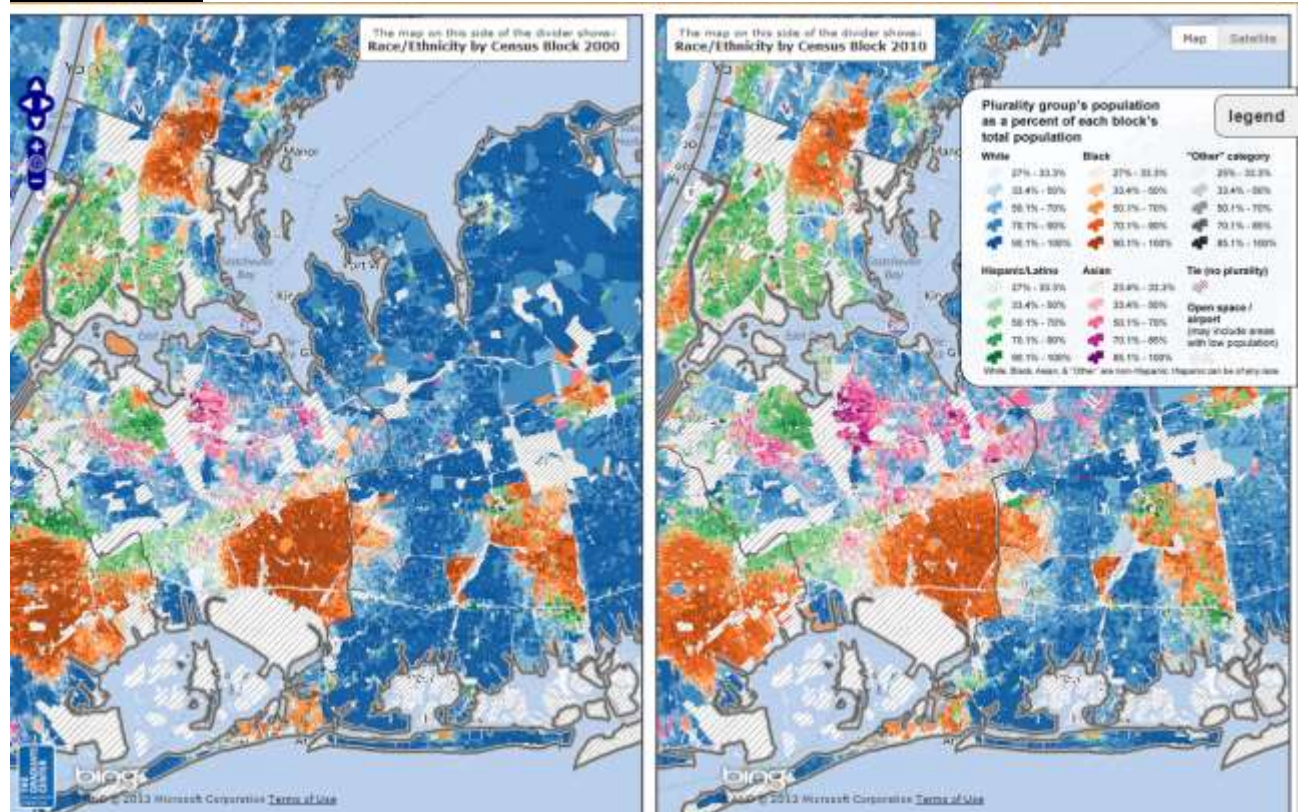


Located in the most diverse county in the country (also Colangelo, 2009)^{xv}, Southeast Queens is a hyper segregated borough that is adjacent to racially mixed neighborhoods, but embedded in areas with a concentrated black population (see Figure 3.5 for racial residential segregation). These spatial patterns emerge from half a decade of racial residential transition. The first settlers were predominately Jewish, Italian and Irish families escaping overcrowded neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Manhattan in the early 1900s. African Americans began entering Southeast Queens' neighborhoods in the mid-1900s during the civil rights era. As the Civil Rights era mandated an end to racial housing and school segregation, Southeast Queens felt the arising tensions, as working and middle class African American from Brooklyn, Harlem, and the Bronx began to move their families to Southeast Queens in search of better housing and schools, like the white ethnics before them. Archival newspapers from the 1960s highlighted the racial

violence and tensions that characterized the relationship between the new blacks on the block and white residents.

African American middle class residents endured burning crosses on their laws, rocks thrown at their newly purchased home windows, and social exclusion from white neighbors. Blockbusting and redlining of predominately white neighborhoods created the conditions for whites to flee their increasingly black neighborhoods. These behaviors were based in white anxieties about diminishing property values and social interactions with non-white neighbors (Frey 1979; Sanjek 2000). White flight ensued and white residents abandoned the area in search of white suburban settlement in Nassau and Suffolk Counties, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Settlement in the mid-20th century suburbs was facilitated by governmental subsidies and profiteering real estate agents (Roediger 2005)xvi. As a result, Southeast Queens neighborhoods today are 71% black, with a booming population of black foreign born residents melding into the fabric alongside a small but growing Latino population.

Figure 3.5: Racial Residential Segregation, Queens & Nassau County, New York (2000 & 2010)



Source: Data from US Census Bureau (PL94-171) analyzed and mapped by [Center for Urban Research, CUNY Graduate Center](#)

Within the disturbing racial history of the formation of this African American middle class area, exists stories of social mobility and rich African American culture and integration. Addisleigh Park, for example was once home to an exclusively affluent white community. Addisleigh Park, located in St Albans, is a community of brick and stucco Tudor and Colonial Revival homes developed in the 1910s and 1930s with racially restrictive covenants which prohibited the sale of any properties to African Americans^{xvii}. Overtime, whites sold homes to African American celebrities such as Lena Horne, Count Basie, W.E.B Dubois, Jackie Robinson, Ella Fitzgerald, just to name a few. Overtime, white flight occurred and Addisleigh Park, like other southeast Queen neighborhoods became predominately black, middle class enclaves in desirable

residential neighborhoods. These sites were racially contested, and their status as black and middle class spaces today illuminates the African American struggle for basic civil rights of homeownership.

Southeast Queens has an assortment of neighborhoods which are characterized by their wide, tree lined streets, modest Cape, Colonial and Tudor homes, and a vibrant African American and Caribbean business community. Cambria Heights, St Albans/Queens Village and Hollis were the main neighborhoods where participants for this study were recruited from. They were strategically chosen because of its high concentration of middle income and foreign born blacks in a non-inner city location. As a result, this study stands out from studies of middle class blacks in inner city areas such as Harlem, New York and Bronzeville, Chicago (Gregory 1998; Jackson 2001; Taylor 2002; Boyd 2008).

Cascades' Demographics

SE Queens is home to 108,006 non-Hispanic blacks (see Map A). Native and foreign born blacks made up 71% of the population in 2010 (see Map), decreasing by 2 percentage points since 2000. The black population in Southeast Queens is heavily concentrated, and the majority of Queens 19% black population live within its boundaries. The white population decreased by 22% between 2000 and 2010, falling from 6,853 to 5,314 persons. Many of the whites in the community are elderly, such as Daisy, my next door neighbor during my fieldwork stay in Cascades. Daisy, like several other elderly white residents, was sprinkled among the black population and was one of

few whites who did not participate in white flight in the 20th century. They have aged in place and many residents in the interviews stated that they, at some point, interacted with their elderly white neighbors, often times serving as a social support or resource to them.

Asians constitute 9.7% of the population and Hispanics make up 10.9% of the population, increasing by 18% in the past 10 years. The Asian population consists of Indo-Caribbean Indians mainly from Guyana and Trinidad. They are a growing population, and have increased visibility in neighborhoods which were once predominately Afro-Caribbean in the Northern corners of Hollis and Queens Village. The Guyanese population, which includes Afro and Indo Guyanese people, grew by 27% from 2000-2010, marking the increasing presence of this group. In terms of ancestry^{xviii}, West Indians constitute the most significant pan ethnic group in the community, making up 30%, of the population reporting their ancestry; this number is up from 24.5% in 2000. Haitians and Jamaicans dominate the ethnic population. In 2000, Haitians and Jamaicans accounted for 11, 358 and 15,096 persons. In 2010, the Haitian population increased by 41% and the Jamaican population increased by 25.8%. Jamaicans and Haitians are followed by Guyanese and Nigerian immigrant ethnic groups.

Figure 3.6: Jamaica, Queens- Percentage Black Population



Source: American Community Survey (2006-2010)

In 2010, the foreign born population was 42.7%, a lower percentage than Queens County's overall foreign born population which is 48.1%, but higher than New York's 21.7%. 9.2% of the population migrated within the neighborhood or from outside of the neighborhood. One of the major themes during interviews and focus groups with families who live in the area was that there was a growing population of people moving in from inner city neighborhoods of Brooklyn, Manhattan and the Bronx. They noted that these internal migrants compromised the middle class character of the neighborhood, causing internal class tensions among new, lower income and old middle income blacks in their neighborhoods. These community perceptions are not evident in the census. The poverty rate in the area declined between 2000 and 2010, falling from 9.7% to 7.1%. The median household income of the community tops off at \$68,890, with incomes as high as \$110,492 and as low as \$45,000 in select census tracts. The median household income of whites was \$60,482 compared to \$71,396 for black residents, \$68,077 for Asians and

\$61, 877 for Hispanics. Therefore, this area is mixed income, with a range of lower middle, middle-middle and upper middle class households.

The community is a highly residential. 72.3% of housing units were owner occupied. The asking price for homes in the neighborhood are moderate to high, and were between \$300,000-\$749,000. This is a significant jump from 2000, prior to the national housing bubble. In 2000, homes in the area averaged between \$100,000 and \$250,000. The economic recession of the first decade of the 21st century has left an indelible print on southeast Queens neighborhoods, with home prices surging and becoming increasingly unaffordable. Albeit a steady black middle class enclave, pockets of this area are lower class and working class neighborhoods located adjacent to well off areas. As a result, Southeast Queens has experienced exceptionally high rates of predatory lending projects and had one of the highest foreclosure rates in the countryxix in 2008. In 2010, St Albans' monthly rates ranked the highest in the U.S., in one area rising by 80% from one month to another. Therefore, Southeast Queens' affluence, yet vulnerability to racialized legislation and biased banking practices highlights the importance of understanding the state of the black middle class and their neighborhoods in today's problematic economic and political climate.

Since Southeast Queens is located on the eastern edge of New York City, it borders the urban-suburban boundary which separate New York City from the New York suburbs of Nassau County. This geographical boundary is meaningful because it defines who is an urban resident and has access to the resources that New York City provides and lower tax rates. Because of the thin boundary between Long Island and Queens, this boundary is often traversed daily by city and suburb residents. 'Suburban free riding'

occurs where Long Island residents frequent Queens neighborhoods for a plethora of economic, educational, and social services, while maintaining their loyalties to their tax base in their suburban villages and cities (de Graauw, Gleeson et al. 2012). Queens' residents too, enter Nassau County daily for work, shopping and leisure. This is facilitated by affordable transportation networks which connect the city to Nassau County.

The experience of living in Southeast Queens was a unique one. There are not too many environments in New York that are residential, tree lined, and that you can walk around for days and not see a non-black face. However, driving 10 minutes north, crossing the Hillside border one enters into a less black, more white and Asian neighborhood, which, from fieldwork observations, received more city services. For example, attention and response during the 2010 blizzard which took New York City by storm demonstrated that the boundary between the black and non-black world continue to define whose streets were plowed first.

Great Park

The second community of study is an upper middle class area which will later be referred to as Great Park^{xx}. Great Park is located in the Southeastern tip of Nassau County, approximately 6 miles away from Southeast Queens. Great Park is a mix of adjacent villages^{xxi} in the Southeast corridor to Nassau County. Nassau County is said to be one of the wealthiest counties in the nation. The median household income was \$93,613 in 2010, compared to \$55,603 for New York ^{xxii}. Great Park is a slightly more affluent area than the Queens neighborhoods in this study. They also have a significantly larger

proportion of whites compared to New York City. However, in recent years, this and other villages in Nassau County have seen an influx of minority residents, namely a black and Latino population. Like assimilation theories often predict, once immigrants and minorities gain economic and social resources, they are likely to move further away from the urban core. This has been facilitated by the movement of jobs from urban to suburban areas (Kasarda 1989). In search of a better quality of life (housing, schools, amenities), these areas of Nassau County have turned into hot spots for native and foreign born blacks and Latinos. This demographic change has been facilitated by both an aging and fleeing white population. Great Park is one of the most racially integrated areas in this suburban county. It remains to be seen if there will be a racial tipping point. However, in real time, these villages are interesting sites for understanding how native and foreign born middle class blacks are integrating into racially diverse suburban settings.

Great Park is currently a stably integrated neighborhood. However, many residents in my interviews pointed out that the recession may have impacted both the ability of more minorities to move into these formerly predominately white settings, and financial handicapped many whites from participating in white flight. Great Park is well known in the Nassau county area for having the most diverse populations. At times, this reputation often insinuated that the larger the minority population, the poorer the quality of the area. However, residents of these areas constantly fought against this reputation, stating that Great Park was a hidden gems for raising kids and having a good quality of life. However, as we know, these may be defined differently depending on what side of the racial boundary one stands.

Great Park is a harbor town. The eastern section, Jamestown, in particular has for generations attracted black poor, working and middle class residents for purposes of work and leisure. Jamestown is the home of the Nautical Mile, a popular strip of restaurants located in the southern section of the village. Nautical Mile is a source of entertainment for New York area residents interested in leaving the city behind and reveling in restaurant and entertainment in a harbor town. The Mile is home to dozens of restaurants, bars and boat cruises, which are predominately white owned.

However, Jamestown has historically been a site of the settlement of a small African American, economically diverse population. Since the early 1900s, Jamestown was a central location for black and white artists. Great Park's character has changed overtime. With the introduction of inter-county transportation, Great Park became a popular bedroom suburb which has been inevitably shaped by the racial and class politics of New York City. Recent segregation specialists have lauded that in the 21st century, neighborhoods are less 'lily white' than previous decades (Glaeser and Vigdor 2012). Previously white neighborhoods which were off limits to blacks and other minorities were now more minority than previously, such as Nassau County. Embedded in the larger, segregationist conservative republican political landscape, Great Park is an oasis of diversity in a county which is one of the most racially and class segregated in the nation (Logan and Stults 2011).

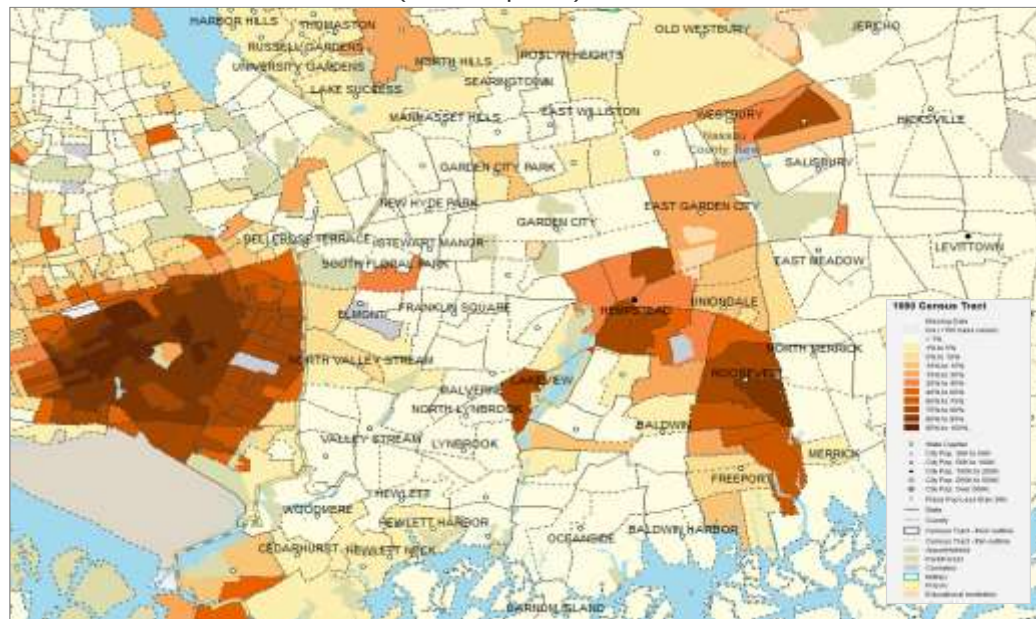
The homes in Great Park is a mix between luxurious half -to three quarter million dollar homes located in the southern sections of the village, to more modest and working class homes, coops, apartments and out of sight projects located in a hidden eastern rim of the area, out of sight from the happenings of the town. Great Park consists of 75, 106

persons. Blacks, whites and Latinos comprise the majority of racial groups in these villages, at 29%, 35% and 29.3% respectively. Asians are 4% of the population, but are a growing population in the area. Crosstown and Jamestown experienced considerable changes in neighborhood racial composition in the past 10 years. The white population steadily declined from 45.7% to 35%, while the black population grew from 25.7% to 29% of the population. Hispanics experienced a similarly large increase, growing from 23.9% of the overall population in 2000 to 29% in 2010. Therefore, blacks, whites and Latinos constitute roughly similar shares of the overall population, making this diverse research setting (Ellen, 1998, 2000).

Below (see Maps 1-4), we see the increase in the black population in Southeast Queens and Nassau County in the past 40 years. It's clear that the black population has increased significantly in both areas since the 1980s and have grown in presence in areas where they were once lily white spaces.

Figure 3.7-3.10: Great Park's Black Population Change 1980-2010

1980 Census Tract - % Black (Non Hispanic)



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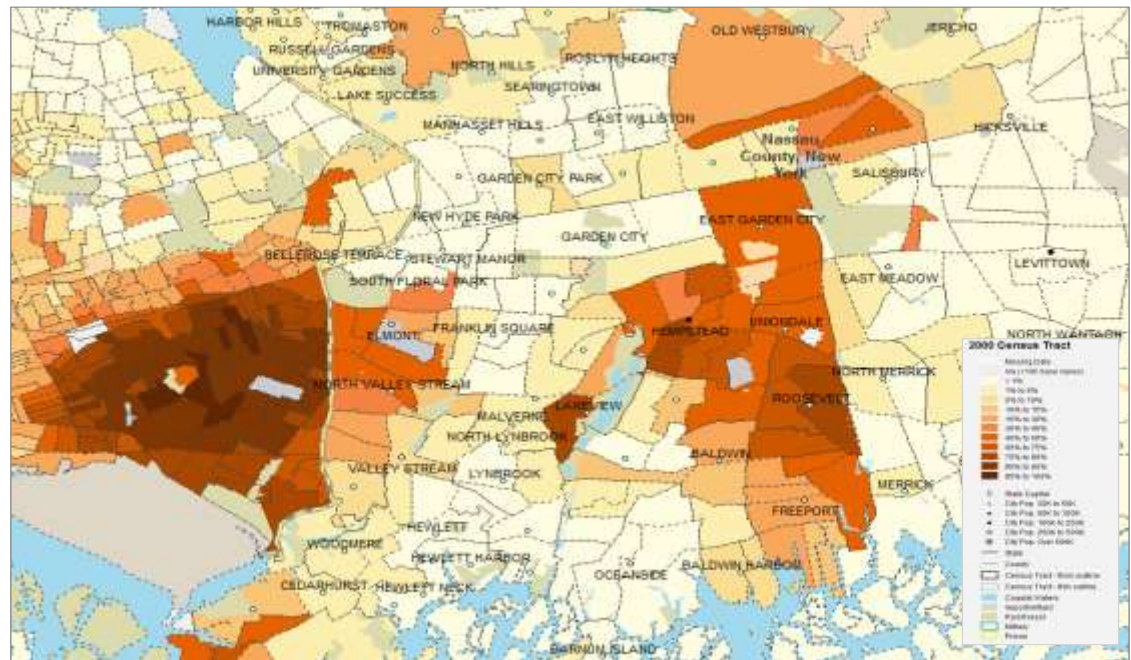
1990 Census Tract - % Black (Non Hisp)



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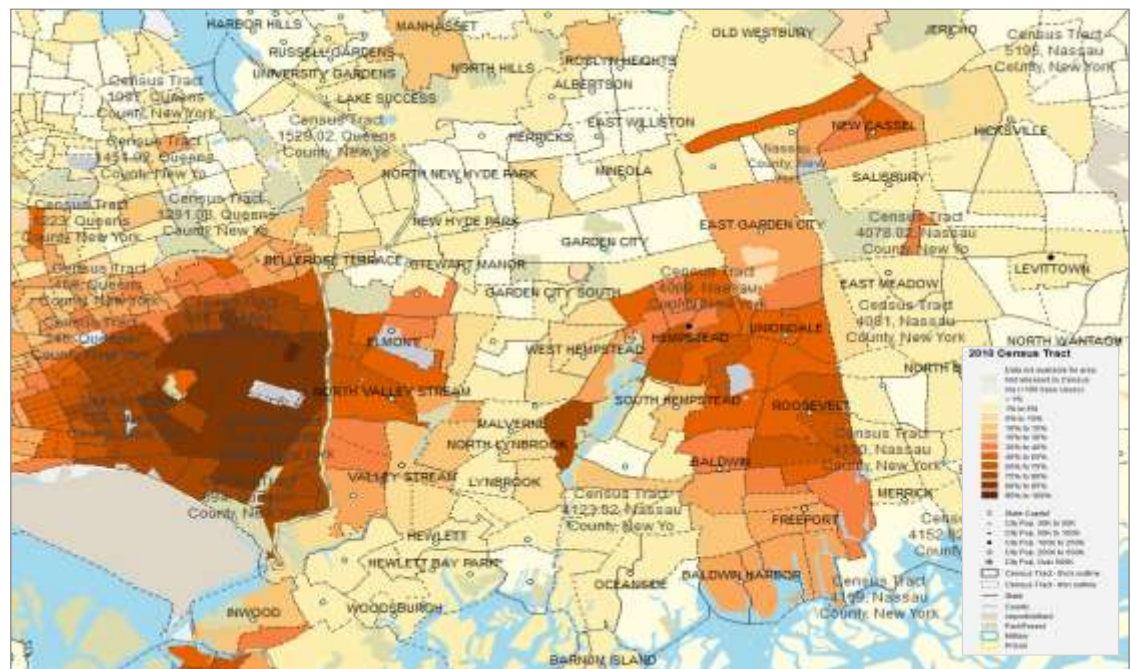
2000 Census Tract - % Black



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2010 Census Tract - % Black



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Because the white population is sizeable here compared to Southeast Queens, the largest ancestry groups in the area are Germans (4.5%), Italians (9.6%), and Irish (7.5%). West Indians, however, as a pan ethnic group have increased in number and percentage since 2000. In 2010, they made up 10.6% of the population, up from 7.6% in 2000. Haitians and Jamaicans together comprised the majority of the West Indian population. This is comparatively much smaller than the Southeast Queens' black ethnic population. However, this group is a critical mass in Great Park, which is made visible by the small businesses that cater to the cultural needs of these populations through restaurants, salons, churches and perfumeries.

In 2010, the foreign born population of Great Park made up almost 1/3 of the population at 30.7%, significantly higher than Nassau County and New York's 20.7% and 21.7% foreign born population, respectively. The West Indian influx which comprises a strong cluster of the black population in this area is driving this foreign born population increase as well. However, the biggest contributor to the foreign born population increase is the entrance of first generation Latino immigrants from the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Columbia who have entered these areas in the past 10-20 years. Through fieldwork in this neighborhood it became clear that Hispanic population who are entering the area are of mixed class backgrounds. Some are working poor, and mostly reside in the Northern perimeter behind the Long Island train tracks. In this area, one can find an assortment of apartment buildings, which are characteristically out of place compared to more residential areas of Great Park. More middle class Hispanics purchase homes, sometimes with above average numbers of persons per household, and establish a life for themselves and their children.

The median household income of Great Park is 80,639^{xxiii}, higher than that of Southeast Queens neighborhoods which hovers around \$68,000. This median household income is just below Nassau County's median household income which is \$93,613 and well above New York's \$55,603. Compared to the national median household income, however, Great Park can be deemed as well off residential setting.^{xxiv} The racial differences in median household incomes are striking in this area. Black^{xxv} incomes are \$10,000 higher than that of whites in the neighborhood, at \$90,240 and \$80,800 respectively. Hispanics follow with \$59,867, demonstrating that the Latino and white population in this area are significantly less affluent than the black population. Therefore, this provides some evidence that racial integration in suburban neighborhoods by blacks sometimes means that they pay a higher tax/price to live in racially integrated neighbors, than their less affluent racial counterparts (Alba, Logan et al. 2000). This has serious implications for understanding the class politics behind racial integration, and that class is uniquely important in defining what neighborhoods blacks have access to.

The housing makeup of this area demonstrates that Great Park is predominately owner occupied. The majority of homes cost between \$300,000 and \$400,000. Approximately 23.7% of homes were between half and 3 quarter million dollars, marking the high housing prices in this area. Like Southeast Queens, housing prices surged between 2000 and 2010. In 2000, most homes were valued between 100,000 to \$250,000. Many respondents reported that the housing bubble caused these home values to soar and even submitted that whites who moved in decades ago paid significantly less than today's white and minority buyers did. 8.3% of the overall population lives below the poverty

line and the foreign born population comprises 58% of the population who lives in poverty, marking their large contribution to the poor population.

Taxation Systems

High property taxes in Nassau County distinguish Crosstown and Jamestown from Southeast Queens. The property taxes in Nassau County are among the highest in the nation. Many residents noted that their property taxes are a significant financial burden which did not always yield comparable resources. The most interesting aspect of the property tax experience for Great Park residents was its relationship to schools and land use politics. Crosstown High, for example, gained a poorer reputation in the past several years, as more non-English speaking and minority students have entered the school. As a result, whites and black residents in Great Park have sought homes in a secret pocket on the border of Great Park village called The Park. The Park is an upscale, affluent area with New England style colonial homes, long driveways and front yards, reminiscent of Southern style homes. The Park, once a predominately Jewish area, sought to isolate themselves from adjacent growing black areas such as Hempstead and Roosevelt in the mid-20th century. They did this by drawing the school district boundaries around The Park to ensure that their children were zoned to the more white section of Great, Jamestown High. They and avoided the more racially diverse Crosstown High, and ensured that their taxes were not distributed outside of their preferred area. Therefore, within Great Park there are key historical divisions embedded in a taxation school system.

New York: One Community, Many Origins

African Americans

This research takes place in one of the most culturally rich cities in the world. New York has long been known for its large and active black population. In 2010, New York's black population was over 3.5 million. The largest clusters of blacks lived in Brooklyn, the Bronx and Queens. New York holds almost 9% of the US black population, and their imprint on the social order and culture of the city is undeniable. New York City began receiving large numbers of African Americans in the 1890's, as southern blacks began to leave the harsh conditions of unemployment and racial violence in the Jim Crow South which began in 1876. Life in the South was unlivable for African Americans. Political disenfranchisement, poor quality of education and health systems, racial violence and poverty provided key incentives for African Americans to leave the south in search of greener pastures in Northern cities.

The African American southern experience is embedded in a history of racial stratification and subjugation. America's despicable racial history developed with the genocide of indigenous peoples' and the transplantation of African slaves to work the plantations of the south in the 1500s. The transatlantic slave trade introduced millions of African slaves to the "new world", each of whom were distributed throughout the south, mainly through ports in Louisiana, Georgia, Virginia and South Carolina^{xxvi}. From its inception, the black society which emerged from American slavery was characterized by class and class consciousness. Class and status divisions are an old phenomena, with changing forms, symbols and expressions overtime (Frazier, 1954). Malcolm X, for

example, in his Message to the Grassroots^{xxvii}, argued that there were two types of blacks during slavery: the ‘house negro’ and the ‘field negro’. Malcolm X used these pejorative terms to criticize blacks who attempted to socially and culturally assimilate with their white slave masters, in an effort to critique contemporary blacks who supported integration as opposed to segregationist politics which did not overthrow white power structures. In addition to proximity to white masters, color defined class politics among blacks during slavery (Hunter 2002; Russell, Wilson et al. 2011). The “mulatto-elite”, for example, consisted of mixed black-white individuals. Their light skin color and blood relations with whites provided them with a higher social-class status compared to darker skinned blacks. Their mixed race status allowed them more political and economic privileges than blacks, but they were deemed racially inferior and genetically sullied by white society. They comprised much of the black upper class and held positions as professionals, entrepreneurs, bankers and funeral home owners. After emancipation, the mulatto elite worked to spatially and socially segregate themselves from free blacks, in the interest of maintaining close relations and proximity to whites (Graham 1999; Cole and Omari 2003; Graham 2009).

These color and class faultlines set the stage for the pre-migration and post migration experiences of African Americans during the Great Migration. The class makeup of the Southern-Northern black migrants is, however, an ongoing debate. While some argue that educated urban blacks in the South were a disproportionate part of the migration stream, others argue that the majority of blacks who moved to the north were impoverished farmers and laborers (Tolnay 1997). Migrants flocked to areas of Harlem, the contemporary mecca of black culture (Jackson 2001). Many blacks who migrated prior

to the World War were considered educated migrants. Another wave of black migration occurred during WW1. The war created an increasing demand for cheap labor since millions of white men were drafted for the war and European migration was halted by restrictive immigration policies in the 1920s (Tolnay 1997). This labor force shortage as well as the pre-existing black community made places like Harlem (as well as Chicago, Columbus, and Detroit) magnets for southern black migrants.

However, the second wave of black migrants from the south were said to be low skilled and undereducated compared to prior waves. Black migrants during and after the war experienced exceptional discrimination at the hands of white ethnics who deemed them as competition, but also from black middle class trailblazers who believed that the recent wave of southern rural migrants undercut the social class status quo of the black community. Dubois and other black scholars echo this sentiment, as many regarded the new black rural migrants as morally deficient, poor, uncultured, and destitute for poverty (Du Bois 1899). Therefore, class tensions characterized the intra-racial experiences of blacks in the south and was exacerbated in the North, since blacks were relegated to confined segregated spaces which had poor living and working conditions in an increasingly overcrowded city. Therefore, African Americans who entered New York came from mixed class, color, urban/rural context, causing variations in their ability to acclimate to life in New York and some became economically mobile overtime (Pattillo-McCoy 1999).

The majority of the African Americans in my study came from families of female domestics and male laborers, marking the salience of lower class origins and social mobility across generations among participants. However, despite these origins, they have

settled in middle class communities across the city and suburbs, essentially transcending the class of their parents and grandparents. The African American migrant experience is a unique one compared to other black ethnic groups. It has impacted the experiences of present day middle class African Americans in Southeast Queens and Nassau County, an experience that will be analyzed further in this dissertation.

Jamaicans:

Like the US, Jamaica's history is embedded in significant population movement across internal and international political borders. Jamaicans have migrated to international cities like New York and London in large numbers since the early 1900s (Foner 1985). Today, Jamaicans add to the ethnic and cultural complexity of New York's black and middle class population. Jamaicans constitute the largest black foreign born group in New York^{xxviii} and in the nation (Burden and Barth 1999; Mederios-Kent 2007). Large scale migration from Jamaica occurred in two periods: the first decade of the 20th century and after the Hart Cellar Immigration Act of 1965 (Horst and Garner 2009). The first wave entered in larger numbers to work as seasonal farm workers in Florida and the educated elite migrated directly to New York, and integrated into the growing African American population. The second wave entered the United States largely through family reunification visas. Currently, they number 238,501 in New York^{xxix} (638, 000 in the US overall (Thomas 2012).

Jamaican society is defined by a long history of slavery, colonization and migration. Jamaica's ethno-racial population began with the genocide of the Indigenous People's by European colonizers in the 1500s. Jamaica was a British colony and Africans

were brought in by the millions to work the plantocracy, specialized in sugar cane production. Jamaica's ethnic history began at this point. African slaves entered Jamaica from various ethnic groups such as the Ashanti, Coromantee and Congo people (Kopytoff 1976). The different ethnic African groups were forced into racial oneness by the conditions of slavery and colonization, and black racial identity was born and mobilized the Maroon resistance to European colonization (Price 1996).

The in migration of alternative labor sources from India, the middle east (Jewish) and China in the 1800's marks the creation of a stratified racial class structure in Jamaica. Black identity was grounded by the time of the entrance of Asians into the society as indentured servants. Race, became further embedded in class stratification, as Indians and Chinese laborers became the intermediary (middle men) between the African slaves and the British European colonizers. Indentured Asian laborers were deliberately segregated from Africans by the British, and also received sub-par treatment upon arrival. Although, at a lower position than the British, Indian and Chinese indentured servants were made to understand their position in the racial hierarchy as being higher than that of blacks, creating ongoing racial, ethnic and class tensions between these forced migrant populations.

Therefore, Jamaican society consisted of a 3 tier stratification structure. A small population of white elites dominated over the whole society, black slaves existed at the lowest strata and experience little or no rights, albeit the drivers of the economy, and an intermediate strata which consisted of black-white mixed people, Indians, Chinese and Jewish indentured servants. Whites hoarded social privileges, intermediary racial groups experienced less privileges than whites, but had more access than blacks, and blacks

occupied a completely disadvantaged lower class position in Jamaican society (Vickerman 2001). The economic ascendance of these once indentured servants to commerce elite elicited the bifurcation of blacks and non-blacks on the island. This “creole” population, although of outside origins, developed distinct identities as Jamaicans, adding to the racial pluralism national project. However, as the Independence movement demonstrated, well defined distinctions between blacks, Asians, Jews and whites were significant^{xxx}.

Jamaican independence was achieved in 1962. As a post-independence strategy to quiet potential racial uprisings within the country, Jamaican political elites built notions of racial democracy as a form of conflict control. Politics became deracinated by transcending ideas about race and color in political interests, despite the real tensions that existed within the population. Black political collectivity movements in Jamaica can be characterized by the highly controversial and classed Rastafarian movement. This was a pan African movement which advocated rescuing Ethiopia from Italian colonial rule which also became an international counter movement to the subjugation of blacks across the world. The existence of this type of black collectivity is a direct subversion to the Jamaican national identity of racial pluralism/non-racial nationhood (Barnes 1994). This black power movement was invested in eradicating international racial subordination, but also the internal economic stratification which occurred along racial lines. One of Jamaica’s largest export industries, Bauxite-Alumina was and still is a white dominated economic sector (Beckford 1987). The ascendance of multinational companies in many Caribbean countries in the 1960s caused tensions for black Jamaicans, as they were left out of decision making and lucrative capital accumulation related to production.

In the 20th century, Jamaicans migrated in large numbers to the US and London. A strong workforce was required in both countries because of the labor shortage and structural damages set by the world wars. American workers and soldiers were brought in from the black rural and urban south, as well as from the Caribbean to fill jobs in the booming manufacturing and service industries. Upon arrival, Jamaicans are said to “become black” or encounter the negative associations attached to their darker skin color. However, this minimizes the reality that race is meaningful in the Jamaican context, albeit different compared to the United States. Vickerman states: “In America, “blackness” signifies a whole continuum of negative attributes, ranging from low intelligence to criminality. In the West Indies, negative attributes have also long been attached to black skin, but significantly, these have tended to be less all-pervading and have not acted as an absolute bar to upward mobility” (1999), p.26)^{xxx}.

As a result, Jamaican immigrants experience an adjustment and negotiation process when they encounter racial discrimination and black ethnic groups in places of work, worship, leisure and residence. Many of today's middle class Jamaicans came from post-Independence Jamaican society. In post-independence Jamaican society, a paradox exists around race. On one hand, Jamaican society historically developed as a racially and ethnically stratified society where lighter skin color accessed and dominated social advantages and privileges. Intermediary, mixed racial groups and some blacks could access whiteness, if they had the right combination of wealth and skin color, they could “become white”. These racial cleavages were the result of slave and colonial historical origins and in some ways continue to pervade post-colonial nations like Jamaica today. However, Jamaica experienced significant transformations in its quest for independence.

Decolonization and economic restructuring in post-colonial Jamaica was characterized by an emergent black political power elite and access to upward mobility for black Jamaicans (Stephens and Stephens 1986). The move towards a more democratic-socialist political economy brought many lower class black Jamaicans into the mainstream and bolstered a middle class. Therefore, blacks in Jamaican society, compared to the US, have a demographic and ideological advantage compared to African Americans (Vickerman 1999). First, Jamaica is majority black, making mass-oppression difficult to achieve by a small white population. Furthermore, the black Jamaican population believe that education is a strong predictor of upward mobility and an assortment of successful black Jamaican professionals have created a group of role models for youth to aspire to. In the US, the overwhelmingly white majority and the deep correlation between success and skin color create a more rigid racial boundary than we see in Jamaica's more fluid social system.

Therefore, Jamaicans come from a society where racial politics is muted, albeit the black population is disproportionately poor and non-blacks are disproportionately affluent (Stone 1976; Alexander 1977). The muting of racial politics in Jamaica has created a populace that does not believe that race is a hot button social issue. Upon arrival in the United States, Jamaican immigrants have to readjust their perspectives of racial neutrality. Therefore, race matters in the Jamaican and African American experience. However, their varying experiences in their home countries causes tensions and cooperation in how they understand the relationship between race, ethnicity and class in their everyday lives. Vickerman states: "For Jamaican immigrants, the key fact, here, is that they perceive race to be a virtual nonissue in Jamaica, and, in contrast, to be a very salient issue in the United

States” (p.45). This difference in experiences in the Jamaican and US contexts creates integration challenges for Jamaican immigrants in middle class New York today, which will be explored in subsequent chapters.

Haitians:

In 2010, there were over 157,542 Haitians^{xxxii} in the New York Metropolitan area.

Haitians, like Jamaicans, began entering the US in significant numbers in the post-Civil Rights era. However, the social conditions under which Haitian and Jamaican migrations was initiated have important differences. Haitians and Jamaicans entered the US in the mid-20th century as a result of the lifting of restrictions on immigration laws and quotas. However, while Jamaica was experiencing decolonization, Haitian society was characterized by years of continued foreign occupation and a socially crippling totalitarian dictatorship (Schuller 2007). Haitians, particularly upper class professionals began to flee Haiti in the 1960s in large numbers, establishing small communities in Brooklyn, Queens, Miami and Quebec (Zephir 2001). They were leaving behind repressive political and economic instability at home, which was largely the result of the Duvalier regime. Many arrived in the United States, hoping to return home when the dictatorship fell. For many, they would never return to Haiti due to the poor economy and slim prospects for prosperity (Laguerre 1998).

The Duvalier Regime was one of the most devastating political regimes in the Caribbean and Latin America (Nicholls 1996). Tens of thousands of lives were lost during the 31 year -rule of Papa Doc and Baby Doc. The dictatorship which has contributed to the large scale demise of the Haitian state, the blocked mobility of the majority black

masses and served as an impetus for the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Haitians is rooted in Haiti's complicated racial and class history. Haiti, once known as Hispaniola, was one of the many receiving islands of African slaves during the Transatlantic slave trade. Haiti's slave history, compared to other countries was short lived. It was the first free black republic in the world defeating the French and Spanish control over the territory of Hispaniola. Prior to independence in 1804, Haitian society had a four tier racial system consisting of white elite land owners (*grand blancs*), poor white laborers (*petit blancs*), mixed race (*mullatto freedman*) and African slaves (*noirs*). Since the inception of Haiti as an independent state, categories of color have been embedded in the distribution of resources and social class formation. These historical classes have endured since Independence, and has created a bifurcated society based on race, color and class.

Haitian contemporary society has become more complex with the emergence of the mixed race mulatto elite, the black African middle class, the black peasant class (Averill 1989). Political and social movements on the part of the black middle class in Haiti have caused racial and class tensions between them and the urban middle class mulatto's continue to have strong political and economic control over resources and Haiti's affairs. Conflicts between the Franco-Haitians and Afro-Haitians solidified with the rise of the black middle class in the mid-20th century (Averill 1989). The black middle class in Haiti emerged as a result of educational reform in the 1920s, the expansion of governmental services and jobs, and an increase in the negritude movement in Haitian social and cultural circles. The development of the black middle class in Haiti thwarted the existing political domination of the upper class mulatto urban elites. When the Haitian state began to collapse and chaos ensued under the Duvalier regime in the 50s and 60s, the

majority of Haitians who migrated to the US arrived from the mulatto upper class and black middle class. Lower class blacks and peasants began to enter urban areas and bolstered education for their children in order to gain middle class status, many of whom, have used migration to the US, France, and Canada as a strategy for social mobility. As the black middle class gained more political dominance in the 1980's (many through institutional corruption), Haiti experienced the highest waves of out migration. The class of migrants changed over time, as the black peasantry and urban poor began to find avenues to enter the US by plane and by boat in order to escape the closing opportunity structure and abject poverty.

New York's Haitian population, therefore, constitutes a mixed class population of mulatto elites, black middle class, and black lower class/ population. Each of these populations has a habitus for understanding and performing racial and class identity. As the black middle class advocated for Haiti's African traditions of voodoo, Kreyol language and peasant culture as authentic Haitian cultural identity, this created a dissenting group which rejected external French European identity that is based on French language, comportment, light skin and long hair. Therefore, Haiti's bifurcated racial and class structure has left an indelible print on its class diverse migrant population, impacting their social and economic integration in the United States. Like Jamaica, Haiti's majority black population has been able to ascend into middle and some upper class positions. The struggle for racial inclusion has seen some political improvement. However, Haiti's nation state is marred by racial and class conflict which has shaped the racial consciousness of the population in a way that Jamaica has not experienced. While Jamaica purports itself as a racially neutral state, Haiti is a racially divided and contentious society. Similar to the

African American experience, race has been at the center of struggles over political incorporation and the social mobility of the black population, creating a more similar racialization process between the African American and Haitian population than the Jamaican population. How these social cleavages manifest in the social identities and experiences of these black ethnic middle class groups in New York will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4: The African American Middle Class: Perspectives on Race and Class

Introduction

The black middle class is said to have a “cultural toolkit” which encompasses the identities and boundary work needed to manage racial discrimination and social mobility simultaneously (Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Lacy 2007). While previous studies of the black middle class look at the experience of navigating black and white worlds (Feagin and Sikes 1995; Haynes 2001), this dissertation expands upon this perspective by unpacking the African American middle class experience in New York City’s multiracial and multiethnic settings. On a given day in New York City, an African American middle class person may work in a Jewish firm, shop in a Korean business store, live in a mixed ethnic black ethnic neighborhood, attend an African American Baptist church and send their child to a Hispanic and white school. While they may be selective about how involved they are in these spaces, social interactions in these multiracial and multiethnic settings matter to the identities that they adopt, reject, or call into question.

In order to examine the dynamics of the African American middle class experience, I analyze how African Americans construct their identities, belonging and boundary work in racial and class terms. I use the framework of ways of belonging and ways of being (Levitt and Schiller 2004), the black middle class toolkit (Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Lacy 2007) and boundary work (Barth 1969; Lamont 1992) in order to frame the experience of being black and middle class in urban and suburban neighborhoods for native born African American. Although the terms *African American* and *black* are often used interchangeably, I use the term African American (or black American) to describe native-born blacks (with not recent history of foreign born ancestry). Therefore, I see

African Americans as an ethnic group who fits under the ‘black racial umbrella’ (Butterfield 2004). How the African Americans in this study see themselves, talk about their identity, interact with outside social groups and social structures paint a portrait of how they see themselves in the American social hierarchy and their strategies for navigating discrimination and incorporation simultaneously.

I explore how racial and class identities are conceived by African Americans in the two social settings Cascades and Great Park described in Chapter 2. The status and racial composition of where people live has been found to be related to their identities and behaviors (Lacy 2007). Neighborhoods are an example of ‘boundary sites’, or the places where individuals build rules and expectations of insiders and outsiders of that space. Therefore, studying experiences across these residential contexts adds to our knowledge of the importance of space and place to the African American middle class experience.

I use data from interviews with 20 African American adults^{xxxiii}. I interviewed 10 adults in Cascades, 8 females, 2 males. I also interviewed 10 adults in Great Park, 8 females and 2 males. The average age of respondents was 50. I find that the neighborhood, schools, public space and church are key sites of racial and class identity formation and boundary work. In these spaces, African Americans encounter, blur and erect boundaries with white neighbors, black middle class friends, black immigrants, Latino lower class residents, and lower class blacks. Findings from this chapter serve as the foundation for understanding the experiences of Haitians and Jamaicans, who will be discussed in subsequent chapters. The identity work of African Americans in this study will be the basis for understanding that of Haitians and Jamaicans. The same analytical

approach will be carried out for the Haitian and Jamaican middle class, with special emphasis on the ways in which they are becoming similar or remaining distinct from the African American middle class (Neckerman, Carter and Lee, 1999). In the concluding section, I will connect my findings to existing sociological understandings of the black middle class.

Identities among the Black American Middle Class

Identity is a system of narratives about the self and one's relationship to various social groups. Identity is, therefore, contextual, situational and fluid, and is expressed through behaviors and practices (Nagel 1994; Levitt and Schiller 2004). The basis of identity occurs at the intersection of self-categorization and how one is categorized in the social world. Categories through which people understand themselves and others include race, class, and ethnicity. These labels are cognitive schema that people use to understand self and those around them (Jenkins 1994; Jenkins 1996) making them central to identity formation processes. Individuals attach different social meanings to these labels and categories, depending on who they are, where they live and whom they interact with. The constructions of social identities are based on boundary work, or the symbolic boundaries individuals and groups build around themselves and outsiders (Lamont 1992).

Racial categories in particular are imposed as well as ascribed identities that blacks in the middle class must manage and prioritize in their everyday social and political lives. The outcomes and identities of blacks has been the preoccupation of sociology since Dubois noted the peculiar social status of African Americans in white America. Dubois (Du Bois 1965) aptly noted that African Americans had a double

consciousness. They see their identity through their own eyes and that of the white world. The negotiation between self-identified blackness and the imposed master racial status requires a particular cultural tool kit for managing public discrimination and maintaining one's self worth and racial pride in the process (Feagin and Sikes 1995; Lacy 2007). Dubois' theoretical understanding of blacks in America is as relevant today as it was in the late 1800's. However, the meaning and expression of black identity and belonging has taken on different manifestations since that time.

De-facto segregation created black communities in cities, towns and rural areas that were spatially, socially and politically cohesive. Class divisions as well as ethnic differences existed within the black community before desegregation. The master status of race and strong racial boundaries, however, overshadowed these cleavages. Race was the dominate tool of social organization in the black community, primarily because racial injustices subjected all blacks to severe levels of social discrimination and violence at the hands of whites. Class and ethnic divisions within the black community tended to emerge in particular moments, but were often overshadowed by the quest for racial justice, equality and political representation. In Haynes (Haynes 2001) study of the black middle class in a Westchester, New York suburb, he finds that the common experience of racial subordination muted ethnic and class divisions in the black middle class community. Although ethnicity and class were used to demonstrate one's social status within the community, they were not powerful enough to become a basis for collective organization and significant boundary work among blacks.

However, in the post-Civil Right Era, social transformations such as the expansion of the black middle class and the increase in black immigrant populations have

called into question the master status of black identity. Wilson began this debate about the relative importance of race and class when he submitted that class is becoming an increasingly important faultline in the experience of blacks in America. Qualitative scholars have sought to understand how the black middle class experience race and class in their neighborhoods, workplaces and private settings (Feagin and Sikes 1995; Lacy 2007). Race is no longer a definitive status. There is a great deal of agency in how tied blacks are to their racial identities and how they (re)produce these identities for their children.

Recent studies demonstrate that the black middle class employ distance from their black identity in particular social settings to assert their class and ethnic identities (Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Waters 1999), but also limit their interaction with the white social world in an effort to remain associated with the black identities (Lacy 2007). In this chapter, I treat the African American middle class as a distinct ethnic group and explore how living in neighborhood contexts of New York shapes their identities and boundary work. I use the previous work on the black middle class in Washington D.C., Westchester, New York, and Chicago in order to assess the similarities and differences in the African American middle class experience over time and space.

Racial Belonging:

Racial Pride among Pioneers

To be a part of black America in today's society continues to be associated with being poor, disadvantaged, socially stagnant, and culturally inferior. In spite of these

stereotypes, black Americans in Cascades and Great Park derived great pride from *belonging to the racial group* and passed on positive elements of black culture to their children. They were also adamant about providing their children with the cultural tools needed to defend themselves against racial assaults on their black identity. Janet, a 48 year old black American insurance broker and 11 year resident of Great Park exemplifies the perspective of Cascades and Great Park respondents. She submits that black identity is meaningful because it shapes who she is and how she interacts with the world. Janet articulated that “it’s very important that we know who we are and I think it’s very important that we all identify [with being black].” Janet’s primary identities are at the intersection of her racial and gender experiences. She expresses that she “love[s] being a black woman” and her racial and gender identity has influenced who she is, her choice in marrying a black mate and how she raises her 2 children.

Arlene, 51, a single mother of 3 boys and technology manager, also derived great pride in identifying with the black community. Like other respondents, she cited key moments during her coming of age process when she realized the joys and sorrows of her black identity. Her black identity evolved as she grew up in a middle class racially integrated suburban neighborhood during the Civil Rights movement. Like the majority of middle aged African Americans in this study, her family started off living in inner city, predominately black neighborhoods in Harlem, Queens and Brooklyn. When the family acquired enough financial resources, they migrated east to predominately white middle class residential neighborhoods like Cascades in Queens or the suburbs of Long Island in the mid-20th century. The majority were black pioneers of neighborhood and school desegregation who were 45 years of age and older. Arlene arrived in Great Park “right

around the time that Martin Luther King was assassinated” and governmental efforts to desegregate public spaces were in full swing. As a young child, she witnessed national racial wars that were taking place on her television screen as well as within her neighborhood. These experiences shaped her as a black woman and how she made sense of her place in the world. She states:

“I remember thinking how, there were people that felt they were better than us [because we were black], but we never did. And my mother used to tell us how beautiful we were and what we had with all our flaws or whatever, and I remember thinking how sad it was that when someone would say, ‘all you black people look alike’. And I would say, ‘no we don’t’. There are so many different shades of us.”

Pride and attachment to black identity was formed as a key part of the experience of belonging to one of the early cohorts of black children to enter all white schools and neighbourhoods. Although black identity formation occurred in response to racial exclusion experienced from their peers, counter movements such as the “Black is Beautiful” or “Black Pride” campaigns shaped African Americans’ solidarity with their black community from an early age.

Arlene remembers that her mother “wore the big Afros and all” and instilled pride in her and her sisters dark complexions. Her racial identity formation occurred at the intersection of the social problems of race experienced by black Americans and her lessons about black beauty and sophistication which she learned at home. Despite the residential integration and economic mobility of her family, racial barriers to full integration into predominately white spaces persisted. Arlene recalls having white friends that she was only allowed to see in school. She also remembers when “black guys started dating white women in high school and it was a pretty big deal.” Today, Arlene’s

attachment to her black social identity is typical of Cascades and Great Park African American residents. Their racial identities, formed during contentious socio-political historical moments, are strongly tied to the black community, and being black is expressed through their child-rearing practices and attachment to black spaces.

The “Black” Umbrella: Who fits? (Cascades)

Cascades African Americans in this area defined their black identity in opposition to foreign born Caribbean’s such as Jamaicans, Panamanians, and Guyanese immigrants, who comprised roughly 30% of the neighborhood (ACS 2005-2009). When walking through the streets of Cascades, one will pass the African American Methodist Church, hear the sounds of Reggae streaming from a passing car, and can watch a Nigerian movie through the African media shop’s store front window. In Cascades’ multiethnic black context, African Americans defined their black identities in relation to foreign born blacks.

Foreign born blacks were constructed as ethnic Jamaicans, Trinidadians, Haitians and Basians. African Americans in Cascades have strong attachments to black identity, but define the boundaries around who is black more sharply than Great Park residents as a result of this diversity. Cascades residents preferred to live in this predominately black neighborhood setting, however, often lamented in interviews that “there weren’t many of us left around here.” The racial composition of the neighborhood reportedly provided comfort, the urban location diverted heavy suburban property taxes, and many inherited property from their parents and loved ones. However, many African Americans were

displeased with the dramatic rise in the immigrant population and tighten the boundaries of black identity to exclude them.

Rachel, a 55 year old manager and single mother provides the representative opinion of Cascades residents which is that “the blacks are moving out and the Caribbeans are coming in.” The description of African Americans as black, Caribbean immigrants as non-racial and underlying tensions between who is black came up frequently in in-depth interviews and participant observations. Rachel tolerantly describes the neighborhood demographic shifts taking place. Like Great Park’s African Americans, residents like Rachel were black pioneers of what was once a predominately white neighborhood in the 1960s. Rachel notes that today:

“The blacks are leaving, but the Jamaicans, Indians and Mexicans are coming in.”

Rachel is a longtime resident of Cascades and has lived in her present home intermittently since her parents purchased it. Like most of the other African Americans in this study, she inherited her home from her deceased mother, and has witnessed the neighborhood change from predominately white, to predominately African American, to racially and ethnically mixed. Her deracialization of black immigrants marks tensions around who qualifies as “black” in this multi ethnic context.

Mr. Somers notes that “the tension is there” between African Americans and Caribbean immigrants. His involvement in a Cascades religious community sheds light on the faultlines which defined insiders and outsiders of black identity from the African American perspective. He states:

“You can tell how the lines are drawn relationally and when you conduct business and take care of all things political. You know when I moved here, um, a person in the community made a comment to me that there are only a few of us blacks, you know, Southern blacks, African American blacks left in the neighborhood. Because of the number of Caribbeans and more specifically the Haitians who moved into the neighborhood...The challenge is can we find some unified purpose, so we can actually work together.”

Mr. Somers’ observations in addition to the accounts of the other Cascades residents suggests that black Americans conceptualize themselves as genuine blacks. They erect boundaries against the rising foreign born black population in their neighborhood in conversations about the undesirable decline in the African American population^{xxxiv} (ACS, Census, 2009). Other interviewees inquired if I was black American during interviews so that they could identify if I was a black American insider or outsider. What became clear from these interviews was that being black for African Americans meant being a part of the native born black population which had a historical legacy in the neighborhood. Foreign born new comer blacks were almost never described as black, suggesting that African Americans did not see them as being culturally connected to the black-African American community.

These dynamics demonstrated the underlying tensions around being black in this multiethnic black neighborhood. Racial identity was a competing ethno-racial identity in the face of increasing black ethnic diversity for African Americans. Therefore, racial identity formation for the black American middle class in Cascades is characterized by defining who is black in nativist terms more so than it was in Great Park. Although recent scholars have noted that the term ‘black’ is an umbrella racial term under which different black ethnic groups can fit (Butterfield, 2004), the multi-ethnic structure of their

neighborhood created conditions to draw boundaries around black identity tightly so that non-African Americans were left out of the category.

Part I: Racial Identities:

How do middle class African Americans conceive of their racial identities?

The African American middle class in this study has strong black identities which are salient to their conceptions of self and behavior. By strong, I mean that they ascribe to black identities in everyday life and also practice their black identities through symbolic connections to black history and participation in black social groups and cultural activities. They claimed to be black and “proud of where they come from”, demonstrating that their racial identity was an anchor for their lives. Black identities were cultivated through symbolic connection to affirming black historical and social traditions. African Americans drew upon positive social and cultural images of black culture.

In everyday life, a black identity also posed challenges to the wellbeing and incorporation of middle class African Americans. Each respondent reported that they managed problematic interactions with non-blacks who made negative assumptions about their character because they had black skin. Cascades and Great Park residents alike recounted racial discrimination battle stories. Therefore, their black identities were also formed in relation to the negative, subversive popular images of blacks. The major distinction between African Americans who resided in Great Park and Cascades was that in Cascades, black identity was experienced in a multiethnic milieu where African Americans interacted daily with Nigerian, Haitian and Jamaican neighbors. This multi

ethnic black context caused African Americans to question who they defined as being black beyond their native born African American group. For Great Park African Americans, racial identity was more so embedded in the racial boundaries they encountered with non-blacks in their neighborhood setting. Furthermore, Great Park residents used black parallel organizations in order to cultivate social spaces of racial belonging more so than Cascades residents.

How do African Americans perform their black identities?

Being Black:

Food, Humor and Positive Black Imagery

Great Park and Cascades respondents define being black by ones' social and cultural behaviors. "Respect for elders," the "foods that [they] cook," attending "family reunions," "spirituality" and the "jokes" they made with others emerged as the concrete practices which signaled respondents' connection (belonging) to the black community (Levitt and Schiller 2004). For example, Anna represented the model African American experience. Anna lives in Cascades and is a public school teacher. She describes herself as a black woman with deep southern roots from South Carolina and North Carolina. Like many other respondents, she expresses belonging to the black community through her southern style cooking, (although she "likes to have Italian food some nights") as well as participation in black comedy with her friends. Therefore, being a part of the black community for all African Americans required them to actively participate in cultural and social behaviors which reinforced one's insider status in the community. Some African Americans (2) expressed that they were black, but were opposed to

practicing black identities through what they envisioned as “fight the power black movements”, namely political groups such as the NAACP or campaigns for black politicians. Christine, 45, for example, notes that

“I think we live our lives, but not like we are black. We do things that make us people. We are not trying to break the black mold. Some people tell us “oh that’s what white people do. Like our vacations, we try to do them nice. But we don’t think that we are the “it” black couple. We are just doing what we can within our means.”

Therefore, there is some evidence that black identities are not always actively cultivated by respondents. In fact, the stereotypes around being and belonging to black identity is perceived as confining or limiting.

The majority of African American parents in Cascades and Great Park pursued membership in the black community in order to transmit their ideas about what it means to be black to their children. For example, Reah, a 42 year old supervisor and mother of two and Cascades resident echoes the sentiment of other respondents when she stated that blacks should “know where they come from, so they will know where they are going.” Her black identity is central to her social identity; she believes that when people look at her “all they see is [her] race” and treats her accordingly. Like other respondents, in spite of the discrimination that she faces because of her black identity, Reah posits that knowledge of black cultural traditions and figures is central to how she connects to the black community and extracts the meaningfulness of her black identity. One strategy Reah uses to belong to the black community (and also offset the racial discrimination she experiences because of her black skin) is her active emphasis on the positive aspects of black culture. This is especially important in the context of how she has raised her young black sons. She strategically transmits positive cultural images of blacks to her sons in

order to counteract the negative representations of black identity that they encounter in schools and the media.

“I try to teach them what it means to be black. I think that they see a lot of negativity amongst our people, and not enough positivity. The gangs the shootings, the killings on the street. As opposed to a positive thing on the news. I’ll say “look what our people are doing! I have a high school reunion. And one of the guys who graduated with me was one of the soldiers in “Black Hawk Down”^{xxxv}. I introduced him to my son so he can see that perspective. [Also they] had a big debate at school, and I had them look up Debbie Allen. I said look go look up Colin Powell and Debbie Allen. Go Google them and tell me who they are in a book report. My son always calls me racist. They both went to diverse school. Queens Prep: everyone went there. They (white students) will be on the football field saying racial slurs like its nothing.

Like many other African American parents, Reah is a strong-willed and intentional parent. She spoke with passion and enthusiasm about her sons’ achievements. Her eldest son is a successful student at an elite military university. Her youngest son is a junior in high school, and struggles with his grades. Reah has worked hard to encourage them in their academic studies but is also particularly invested in their personal development as young black males. She teaches them the advantageous social and cultural meanings behind being black in order to offset the popular social construction of blacks as criminals and low achieving. She instructs them on what it means to “be black” as she defines it in moral and behavioral terms. She instills a spirit of perseverance in them so that when they enter non-black racial settings and hear anti-black commentary, they will be able to handle the assaults and negative reactions. Reah notes that her eldest son has to navigate the relations with white students from different backgrounds in school. She states: “At [my son’s military college] [his roommate] is white. He grew up on a farm. But he has met some really different people, homeschooled white; don’t see black folks,

that kind of white.” Aware of the challenges that come with this type of interracial interaction, Reah encourages racial pride in her sons in order to offset the potential racism that they will confront in public social settings, and help pave the way for their social and academic success.

The irony in the strategic cultivation of black identity employed by black parents is that their children sometimes saw their parents as hyper sensitive to race and racism. For example, Reah’s sons see her as a racial extremist or a “racist.” While many young people in this study noted having problems in their interracial interactions, the general viewpoint was that they tried to blur racial boundaries between themselves and other racial groups in their neighborhood, schools and places of work. Black American parents even noted that their children had “more white friends than I did” or “now they go to each other’s houses often,” marking the shifting nature of racial boundaries in interracial friendship formation across generations.

However, for older parents and elders, black identity was something to be both enjoyed and strategically managed in relation to non-blacks. Christina, a black American school teacher in Great Park echoes the preparatory talks that the majority of African American parents initiated with their children. She teaches her son and daughter that “sometimes things are different for black people. Sometimes the world sees you different and you need to be aware of that.” In light of these racialized outcomes, black American parents attempt to counterbalance the disadvantages of racial exclusion by developing positive cultural, social and moral narratives about “being black,” black identity and the contribution of blacks to mainstream society.

Social Group Membership: Worship, Finances, Play and Education

Despite the pride that urban and suburban black American respondents had in their black racial identity, they made different choices about belonging to the racial black group for themselves and their children. Black Americans in Great Park, for example, reportedly chose to reside in a racially integrated neighborhood. They preferred to live in neighborhoods with a significant, but not dominant black population. This is in line with previous studies which have found that blacks prefer to live in racially integrated neighborhoods more so than whites (Zubrinksy-Charles 2009). In tandem, Great Park residents, more so than Cascades residents, wanted social spaces and groups where they and their children could actively interact and fellowship with other blacks. Cascades residents, on the other hand, lived among a significant population of blacks, and therefore, had little need to cultivate interactions and connect with a black community in the same way that Great Park residents did^{xxxvi}.

In Lacy's (2007) study of middle-middle and upper middle class blacks in Washington D.C., she finds that they selectively assimilate into the white mainstream. Blacks who lived in racially integrated settings limited their interactions with the white world, and actively participated in black social groups and networks in order to foster and cultivate black identities in themselves and their children. They did this more so than blacks who live in predominately black suburbs. Great Park residents followed this pattern of behavior. Great Park residents actively sought out black parallel organizations and spaces more than Cascades residents. For example, black Americans in Great Park attended all black churches inside and outside of their neighborhoods. Churches served as a place of worship, but also provided a black space for African American middle class

suburbanites to bring their children and help them experience interactions with other blacks (in a later section, I will also discuss that the church is also a site of interclass social contact among blacks). Scholars have demonstrated that the black church is a focal social, political and networking space for black Americans (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Pattillo-McCoy 1999). For black Americans in integrated spaces, their options for all black churches were limited compared to urban black Americans. There were significantly more black churches of different denominations in the urban core, which is not surprising given the density of the black population there. As a result, several Great Park black American respondents either attended a nearby black mega church in the suburbs or traveled long distances on the Belt Parkway to attend black churches in black urban neighborhoods in Queens and Brooklyn.

In the interview with Janet, she expresses the sentiment of many other Great Park respondents that the church was a key site of racial belonging. Janet's black Baptist church is an important space where racial identity is reinforced. She sees great value in cultivating interracial experiences for her children in school, however she also intentionally provides her children with exposure to the black world in church.

Interviewer: Are there certain things that define you as being black?

Janet: "Well I think very much with the involvement with our church. We go to a Baptist church, it's all black, and I think that's very important. But not just because the black because of spirituality they need also, they need that in their lives also."

Janet's children, who attend the racially integrated Great Park high school, are introduced to other black youth and adults in their church. Their Baptist church provides a central location for her children to connect with their black identity through regular interactions

with black people, culture and worship. This is a tactic on the part of many suburban parents to actively transmit their black identity to their children through social interaction with other blacks. This socialization is not present in among parents Cascades because they had black neighbors, businesses and churches at their doorstep. While Cascades residents live in black spaces, Great Park residents have to actively seek out or create black social spaces for themselves.

Perhaps, Janet could worship in a non-black church in Great Park. There are several within the vicinity of her home. However, worshipping with other blacks was an important way to belong to the black Baptist church, which activated her and her children's connection to the black community every Sunday. Sunday mornings include the most racially segregated hour of the week (Hadaway, Hackett et al. 1984). African Americans in Great Park contributed to this segregation by attending all black churches mostly outside of their neighborhood because they believed that the "worship is more alive" or the "pastor really speaks to [them]" and think that their spirituality is a central part of being black. Choosing a black church provides evidence that belonging to black racial identity is not simply a response to racial boundaries. It is also about strategic choices to remain in communion with other blacks who provide significant social and emotional support (Lacy 2007).

Membership in organizations such as all black investment groups and bowling groups were also popular practices of belonging among black Americans in Great Park. One example is an all-black investment group. The president of the Great Park Civic Association, whom I met when I was a sit-in observer of their monthly meetings, invited me to an investment group meeting she held at her home:

Fieldnote: I was dropped off at the house. It was Saturday evening, and dark outside in February. I promised Cheyenne that I would attend. She called me two weeks ago and was eager to explain to me that she was going to make really great money through an investment group. When she called, I thought to myself “I have nothing to invest, I’m just a student.” But I decided to go in order to gain an inside look on what the excitement was all about. When I arrived in her home, which was couched on a quaint, tree lined and well maintained street, I was given a warm welcome by Cheyenne and her husband. There were about 5-7 people already sitting in her living room when I entered. Six more people trickled in and the event began. The attendees were all black, the recruiter was a single black woman who lived in the neighborhood, and the meeting turned out to be a marketing scheme. The group recruiter, a well-dressed, eloquent young black woman discussed that she made six figures, and that “we know that people like us have to work twice as hard to make that kind of money” especially in this economy. What fascinated me was the presence of entrepreneurs in the group, who came to learn of new opportunities to make money but also to market their own products. For example, there was a middle aged black man who worked as a Karate instructor, but also created/patented a microphone for children, which had built in music beats and was also a candy dispenser.

This group served as a space for black Americans in Great Park to convene with other blacks to primarily increase their wealth through idea sharing, financial support and networking. However, these groups were also spaces of fellowship, where black Americans discussed the private affairs of their lives, shared their battle stories of discrimination and established friendships. People were friendly at this meeting, and I heard numerous people say “give me your number, I’ll give you a call, let’s keep in touch.”

These social groups were mediums for consciously connecting with the black community, but they also served as sites of boundary work. Arlene, for example, participates in a Black Women’s bowling group in Great Park. Tensions over who belongs in this black group have flared up. Recently, group leaders have allowed white

women to join the group, to the contempt of existing, older black female members.

Arlene states:

“We’re all black women.... I do have a bowling group. We are always bowling. We are a group of ladies primarily all black, but interestingly enough there’s been an influence of white ladies [who] are with us. But we have a common, we bowl, but it’s interesting the lady who started the group is very disappointed that we are letting white ladies into the group. So it’s interesting, and again she’s older so I can understand that about her. She wanted this to be a historic group of black women. These women have been together almost 30, over 40 years they’ve been together. So I guess yes, that’s how they saw themselves as that group. Probably just those two, the Investment Programme and my Alumni Group, were the only groups exclusively.”

The original mission of these parallel black organizations was to cater to black suburbanites when white public and private spaces were off limits to them. Belonging to black social groups has historically carried significant meaning to its older black members. Anti-black sentiment created the basis for the formation of all black social, religious, and political groups. In a study of race consciousness and group development among the black elite in the pre-war era, Hine (2003) states:

“Parallel institutions offered black Americans not only private space to buttress battered dignity, nurture positive self-images, sharpen skills, and demonstrate expertise. These safe havens sustained relationship and wove networks across communities serves” pg. 1280.

White strategies of hyper segregation provided African Americans, particularly the African American middle class with ample opportunity to form instrumental black social groups which would rally political support for racial justice, and also serve as safe havens for blacks. Overtime, these groups have served as important sites of black identity development, maintenance and resistance. However, contemporary racial dynamics have shifted. Omi and Winant (2000) remind us that the meaning of race and racism transform

over time and across space (but continue to reproduce the racial power structure in sophisticated ways). Today, in what many have deemed a racially progressive and even post racial society, parallel organizations like the black women's bowling group are being asked to rethink their early objectives of self-preservation and separation and redraw the boundaries around their social spaces as whites seek membership in these groups.

Middle class blacks whom throughout their life course operated in segregated social worlds now have to reconceptualise the racial composition of once all black spaces which provided them with a social escape from the abuses of the white world. For the younger generation of middle class native born blacks, having white members in once all black groups is less startling precisely because they came of age during desegregation. Members of the black women's bowling group have allowed non-blacks to enter, but older leaders are finding it difficult to adjust to the blurring of the racial boundary which has defined their social group for decades. Arlene's membership in this black women's social group demonstrates her belonging to a black social identity. However, the entrance of whites into the group is subverting the original intent of racial closure among this group, leaving Arlene and others to question the logic behind belonging to black spaces.

Another organization which has been central in the Great Park's black American experience was the Teachers in Black group. Teachers in Black is an instrumental-expressive voluntary association group (Woodard 1987). It was founded 25 years ago as a social and watch dog group. They tackled racial injustices in the suburban public school system such as the achievement gap between black and white students. The group was reportedly more active in its beginning stages. Currently, there are fewer finances available for programming; however, the yearly scholarship for graduating black seniors

was offered yearly. The continued existence of the group, however, demonstrates that belonging to this group was a politically and socially instrumental practice for African American parents in Great Park. Black administrators and parents use the group to address the educational and social inequality that black youth suffer from. They attempt to provide supplemental spaces and programs for their enrichment. Many African American parents claim that school wide resources such as scholarships often are disproportionately awarded to white students. They believed that white administrators claim to be open to diversity, but they backhandedly sabotage black children's academic advancement. Hence, Teachers in Black serves as a political intermediary group between the public schools and the parents. Mrs. Hillman, 57, a leader of Teachers in Black states:

“I came into leadership about 25 years ago, and the Teachers in Black as I said were very very active. We used to have dances. We used to have a lot of fun raisers. And all of the activities and proceeds that were done throughout the year goes towards our scholarship programme in June. And we still have that. We used to do all kinds of things. We used to have meetings once a month at different people's homes just to talk about how we could improve everything for our black students, as well as our black teachers, as well as black administration. A lot of those people left, retired. All we can do is, see basically the organization is, people say that to us all the time, ‘what does your organization really do?’ I said, ‘well the focus of what we do is mainly to be visible and to be, to let people know that we are there in case there is some kind of a problem’. If you feel that you’ve been discriminated against in some way or a student is not treated right you know, we as an organization can resume in the magnify and take that to the powers to be. We don’t consider ourselves to be militant or some people think that that’s what we’re here for. It’s not that. It’s just basically to be visible as an organization. To let people know that we’re concerned about our own.”

Teachers in Black serves as a racial watch group. Great Park African Americans are a part of this group because it nurtures and protects black student academic development, but also provides an additional space for cultivating black identity and belonging to a

black community through social interaction, political mobilization and cultural expression. Teachers in Black, however, have suffered from generational dissolution overtime. Black teachers and administrators have decreased in number; existing black educators are overwhelmed with work-family obligations, and there is limited funding. The emphasis on the black-white divide has also dwindled over the years, making Teachers in Black a less instrumental group and more of an expressive black group. Nonetheless, Teachers in Black is an important site of racial belonging for blacks in this integrated suburban space, providing social as well as political resources to organize blacks and black identity. In comparison to Cascades residents, African Americans in Great Park use black spaces such as church, sport groups, financial initiatives and political groups to practice group-preservation, limit their assimilation into the non-black world, protect their social mobility opportunity and fellowship with other blacks. I have provided specific examples of these social groups in this section. I will now turn to the boundary work done by Cascades and Great Park residents.

Boundary Work

What type of racial boundary work do African Americans engage in?

Boundaries Encountered: Schools, Neighbors and Public Space

Schools and White Neighbors

Like most middle class blacks, middle class African Americans in this study do not function exclusively in black spaces. They travel between the black and white world everyday for work, school, and leisure. Despite the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of many American cities, the black-white boundary persists, and blacks continue to experience high levels of social exclusion at the hands of whites (Lee 2002). Middle class

African Americans in New York encounter whites as well as Latinos in everyday life. In their interactions with these different types of racial and ethnic groups, they do different types of boundary work in order to both define and defend themselves against discrimination.

Racial residential segregation is a long standing measure of the physical and social distance that whites have historically orchestrated in order to remain a separate, distinct and powerful group compared to African Americans (Massey and Denton 1993). Many urban and suburban black American families noted that they were the first black families to move into their neighborhoods. They were pioneer families, whom participated in the desegregation movement which turned lily white neighborhoods into biracial environments. While Cascades reached its tipping point in the 1970s and turned into an all-black neighborhood, Great Park used its racial steering and redlining tactics to keep the suburb all white for as long as possible. In the past 10 years, the racial composition has shifted, and the population is now 1/3 white, 1/3 black, and 1/3 Latino. Despite the varying racial composition of Cascades and Great Park, African American adults in both settings encounter an interesting mix of racial boundaries inside and outside of both spaces.

Where people live is a key part of the black middle class tool kit. In Great Park and Cascades, racial boundaries characterized the everyday life of African American residents, albeit in different ways. In Cascades predominately black setting, residents only interacted with non-blacks when they ventured out of the neighborhood for schooling or work purposes. Mr. Somers, 46, is an example of one type of Cascades

resident who works and resides in the neighborhood. He is a religious leader in a local Cascades Christian church and states:

“For the most part I don’t interact with people who are not black during a regular work day because I am the pastor of a predominately black church in a predominately black neighborhood. I mean, I interact with non-blacks when I am dropping off and picking up my children. They go to St Jean over in Bellerose, ok, so I interact there. The Reformed Church of America has a number of Korean congregations so when I got to executive committee meetings for our classes or for accordingly to class meetings, I interact with them.”

Cascades African Americans reside in a hyper segregated area of Queens. The spatial-racial boundary was predetermined by the social order of Queens. Therefore, Cascades residents had to put forth effort to make interracial contact outside of their residential setting. Mr. Somers is an example of a person who works and lives in Cascades. However, a large portion of Cascades residents work in other neighborhoods and/or boroughs, and return to Cascades in the evening for refuge and respite in their black middle class community. Great Park residents, on the other hand, were embedded in a stably racially mixed neighborhood setting.

Despite its’ interracial composition, African Americans in Great Park reported experiencing significant racial boundaries to social interaction in their neighborhoods. They reported the techniques used by their white neighbors to establish micro-level segregation. Like many U.S. towns, there is a south side and a north side. Great Park is no different. The railroad tracks separated the predominately white residents in south Great Park from the growing black and Latino population in North Great Park. Mrs. Hillman, a long- time resident of Great Park highlights the reoccurring theme among

respondents of experiencing internal separation of racial groups within the boundaries of Great Park among African Americans in this setting:

“A lot of, I would say the white population still live in South Great Park. North Great Park is more African-American and Hispanic.... You know you come to find that almost everywhere you live there’s an area where there’s some kind of segregation. You know what I mean? Just like a lot of people tell me now that when they started looking for a house on Long Island, and if you’re African-American, the real estate agent is going to show you areas like Great Park.... They don’t just necessarily go to areas that have more of the white population. They’re going to show you homes that have more of a black population. That’s just something that kind of happens automatically. And hearing about, and reading about, and learning about the history of Jamestown. Jamestown’s research of course is a part of what I do. Jamestown used to be the home the Clan.”

Mrs. Hillman perceives finding a home in Long Island as a naturally racialized process. Real estate brokers steer black families to homes in non-white areas, and Mrs. Hillman seems resigned to this larger racial reality. She cites the history of Jamestown as being tied to white supremacist groups like the Klu Klux Klan in an attempt to explain preset day patterns of exclusion within Great Park. Like Mrs. Hillman, Great Park African Americans managed the micro segregation patterns in their neighborhoods with a sense of acceptance of their outsider position in the neighborhood. There was usually an “it is what it is” attitude among African Americans in Great Park when discussing the racial boundaries they encountered from their white neighbors. This suggests that they felt a sense of helplessness or resignation in the face of formidable interpersonal racism.

“If one were to drive through the streets of North and South Great Park, they would notice that the North side consisted of many more people of color and the Southside was predominately white. But from block to block, one would find pockets of racially integrated streets. Despite the increase in black-white –Latino neighborhoods, micro segregation within Great Park was palpable. Even on the most racially integrated streets, African Americans had white neighbors who wanted to keep their

residential and private home lives separate. African Americans noted that many of their white neighbors send their kids to private school to ensure social distance between their white children and incoming black and Latino student. Arlene notes: “it was the white parents who sent their children to private schools outside of the district. Janet provides a concrete example of this boundary. She states: “Like I said, I don’t think, not this street, I don’t find it to be a close knit...But I think in the schools...Because the kids on this block, the kids that live next door to us they didn’t go to [the local high school]...They went to Catholic school, I think the daughter...The daughter went up until in Great Park school until fourth grade....She went to fourth grade and then she went to catholic school and their son never went to Great Park schools. ...So that kind of put a little wall...”

Great Park African Americans reported that their white neighbors made little attempts to make social connections with them. For example, on an average day, Janet’s white next door neighbors avoid greeting her and her family. They’ve never engaged in social conversations in the years they have lived there, and their children, who are the same age, never play together. Like many white families who have chosen to stay in Jamestown as it has become more racially diverse, they opt out of sending their children to the local school which has also become more diverse over time. The local public school has seen the “white student population drop significantly and the black and Hispanic population soar. The white students seem to drop off and go to private school once they get into junior high school” Mrs. Hillman notes. The pattern of switching schools may be related to the interest of white parents in exposing their children to larger social networks outside of the school. However, if the history of white flight informs the actions of whites in the present, it is safe to assume that the magnitude of the white student population movement is a response to the influx of the minority families in Great Park.

In situations where black parents make contact with a dwindling white parent population in schools, racialized assumptions about blacks emerge during casual conversation. African American parents noted that white parents whom they interacted with made remarks which demonstrated their narrow views of blacks. Christina, an educator and mother of 2, provided a story which mirrored the experiences of other Great Park parents. She notes that her interactions with white mothers of her son's football teammates were disturbing experiences.

Christina actively participates in her son's football team activities. She cooks meals for her son's football team, participates in parent groups and attempts to attend all of her son's football tournaments. One day, a white coach commented "Christina, how do you do it. You work, you come to all the team functions and you look fabulous in the process. How do you do it?" Christina frustratingly shared this story because she knew "in [her] gut that the white woman who does the exact same thing for her family as [she did] would not be asked that question. But because [she] is black, they think that [she is] doing something special, like black parents don't do what white parents do." Christina notes that she is treated like an anomaly and an outsider by the white parents, but reconciles this by noting that all that matters is that she works to "help make [my] children successful and to support them." While African American parents value the diversity of Great Park and its local schools, the experience of racial exclusion from their neighbors and parents reminds them that the costs of integration are high. They learn to navigate sophisticated, new forms of racial boundaries in order to extract the benefits of living in a diverse environment will have for their children.

Public Space

Public space was also a site of racial boundary construction for Great Park residents more so than Cascades residents. While the white population has dwindled in Great Park overtime, African Americans note that many whites have remained in South Great Park and crafted out their own physical spaces for leisure and entertainment. Maritime Way is a commercial strip with several seafood restaurants and tourist attractions, located where the town meets the ocean at southernmost tip of Great Park. While this is an open public space, Great Park African Americans believe that there are social and psychological signals that the area is not a black-friendly environment: Mrs. Hillman notes:

“The white businesses, a lot of them are on the Maritime Way. And they’ve been, a lot of them are eating places. But you know, really big restaurants and many of them have changed ownership, but they continue to be white. I don’t think there’s any black, not that I know of any black business owners on the Maritime Way. ...I mean you know what; *we do have the option to go there*... I’ve lived here so long, and I hardly ever go down there.... I really still think that that area is a big draw for whites more than us.”

The Maritime way is a boundary site of racial exclusion for African Americans in the area. Despite the interracial composition of the neighborhood, this space serves as an additional reminder of micro-segregation patterns between white and non-white residents. African Americans feel unwelcomed in the space. There are no African American businesses which could signal that their presence would be esteemed. The types of psychological boundaries around public spaces have characterized racial exclusion patterns in American for centuries. Although legal codes have removed de facto segregation practices of separate water fountains, pools, parks and train carts, the nature

of race and racism in contemporary societies thrives on social signals of “us” and “them” or “insider” and “outsider.”

Racial boundaries operate in complex ways in integrated settings like Great Park. This section has discussed the boundaries encountered by African Americans in Great Park. White neighbors and parents limit their social interactions with African Americans by sending their children to private schools outside of Great Park’s increasingly black and Latino public school. In the block by block context, white neighbors discourage social contact between their children and their black neighbors. Whites are also seen as maintaining a psychological hold over a public space of leisure in Great Park, as evidenced by the discomfort blacks report feeling towards frequenting Maritime Way, an area which is said to be open to all. In situations where African American parents interact with other white parents, racialized comments reminded African American parents that whites continued to see them through a racial lens. Great Park African Americans receive significant social signals that, even if they live among whites, the boundary between blacks and whites continues to be bright.

Boundaries Erected: School Choice and Latinos

School Choice

Great Park and Cascades African Americans also erected boundaries against other blacks, whites and Latinos. For example, decision-making processes around their children’s schooling demonstrated that there was a desirable and undesirable method of orchestrating your child’s access to a quality education and their interactions with other

racial groups. The primary strategy for many parents in Cascades was to send their children to racially integrated schools. However, Cascades and Great Park parents had different motivation behind this. Cascades parents believed this was the best option for their children to ensure that they received a quality education that they believed their children would never receive if they attended all blacks schools in Cascades. Great Park parents, on the other hand, chose integrated schools for their children in order to teach their children how to interact with non-blacks in settings where they were not the “token” black child in the classroom.

Great Park parents erected boundaries against all black settings by way of their residential location and school choice. The main reason why Great Park parents purchased a home in the neighborhood was because of the public schools had a solid reputation and their children will be zoned to a racially diverse school. Cascades residents, on the other hand, chose their neighborhoods based on the homes or inherited the property from deceased relative. Cascades schools had a poor reputation and were predominately black. Cascades parents, therefore, were more likely to pursue schools outside of their neighborhood to expose their children to interracial environments (which was synonymous to better quality to them). Like other Great Park African Americans, Janet feels strongly that her children need to navigate multiple racial worlds and builds boundaries against black parents who send their children to all white or all black schools. Similar to other respondents, she works with whites and Latinos in her office and her husband often manages projects with Asian brokers and clients. Therefore, she believes that exposure to non-blacks would help them cultivate the cross-racial/cultural skills needed to succeed in an increasingly diverse labor force.

“I wouldn’t want to be in a place where it’s a—you know too many black, too many white, that I wouldn’t want, I like Great Park and --Because that’s not how life is and I wouldn’t want them to – I think by them being in Great Park high school they get a mix of different things and when they go out hopefully to college they know how to mingle with everybody...Not just that one group or class, one group of people that they are used too. I have friends, we have friends, that their kids grew up in Valley Stream with where majority of the kids that they went to school with were white, well now they are—their daughter goes to Howard University and she dare not look at a mix school because that—she had the majority of white people [in her old school] and she had no desire to experience that again—.”

African Americans parents, particularly those in Cascades, are also preoccupied with socializing their children in interracial spaces to ensure that they receive a quality education. Cheryl, in her 50s and a manager and mother of twins and Cascades resident notes that she sends her children to interracial schools in Northern Queens because there “is a mix of white and Asian middle class families and the schools are better there.” For Cascades residents, schools in interracial settings are a proxy for better resourced schools (as opposed to the low performing all black schools in Cascades). While African American parents actively pursue schools which will provide their children with the skill set needed to be successful, they also built boundaries against black parents who sent their children to schools that were racially homogenous. African American parents in Cascades and Great Park were sensitive to the discrimination, trauma and psychological problems that their children will experience if they attend an all-white school and avoided these settings.

African American parents across the neighborhoods believed that immersing a black child in an all-white world created anxieties and tensions which were difficult to reverse. Although it may equip their children early on with cross racial social skills, it

may also encourage their children to avoid all white spaces and institutions as evidenced by Janet's friend, whose daughter only wanted to attend a historically black college because of her negative experiences in an all-white high school. Lacy (2007) calls this strategic assimilation, where black parents actively negotiate between exposing their children to the non-black world so that they gain the social skills needed to be successful in multiracial environments; but also try to ensure that their children interact with other black children so that they know how to "speak to their own people." In line with their interest in being blacks who "remembered where they came from" but also wanted to ensure the social success and reproduction of class status in their children, Cascades and Great Park parents mostly engaged in strategies which helped their children enter settings that were racially diverse, neither all black or all white. Cascades African American parents avoided predominately black schools in an effort to erect boundaries against lower class black in their neighborhood schools and wanted to distance their children from lower class students.

Blacks on Latinos

The majority of African American parents realized their preferences for interracial school settings for their children. The diversity of Great Park, for example, made attending a racially mixed school facile. However, the influx of a mixed income Latino population posed problems for some African American parents. In Great Park, the Latino student population increased dramatically in the past five years. African American respondents discussed the boundaries that they encountered with whites, but they erected boundaries

against Latinos. Although Latino families in Great Park were a “mixture” of “very few affluent” “middle class or below middle class families,” they were seen as a “problem” in schools by African American parents who posited that “that [Latino] population, is what unfortunately brings our numbers down in terms of statistics, in terms of test scores” said Mrs. Hillman. Mrs. Hillman is an educator in the school system and provides key insights into ethnoracial dynamics within the school.

The Latino population in Great Park is reportedly transient and many students return to their home country of El Salvador, Columbia or the Dominican Republic for extended periods of time during the school year. As a result “they don’t graduate with their cohort. And that’s how the state looks at...everything. So they kind of hold us back. When you look at the statistics, African Americans do very well, in terms of test scores” an African American school worker explains. This conversation demonstrates that some African American parents are building moral and socioeconomic boundaries against the incoming Latino population by stating their shortcomings or failures as students while highlighting the achievement of African American children.

The Latino population is also constructed as a challenge for African Americans in Cascades. The Latino population in New York has surged in the past decade (ACS, Census, 2009). In once all black neighborhoods, Latino stores, restaurants and churches are emerging. Some African Americans, however, report problems with an increasing Latino population, whom, upon arrival, cannot find work. Cascades residents expressed frustration with the changing ethnoracial and class character of the neighborhood. Rachel provides an archetypal example of the sentiments of Cascades respondents:

“I just don’t like the Mexicans, they park their car. There are a lot of them. They are here during the day just hanging around. I know there are not jobs for them but they have to find things for them to do. They are just been sitting in the park and drinking for the last two years. It’s happening all over.”

African American and Latino relations have historically been wrought with socio-economic and political problems over resources (Marrow 2011). These tensions are more so present in studies of the black working class, who are often in competition over space and jobs with incoming Latino groups (Waldinger 1996; Lamont 2000; Kaufmann 2003). The black middle class are almost never portrayed as interacting or engaging in boundary work with this group because residential segregation or their middle class status keep these groups in separate residential, work and social settings. However, the increasing number of Latinos in formerly all black and white middle class urban and suburban neighborhoods calls us to pay attention to the social contact and ethnoracial boundary work between these groups. Furthermore, Rachel references a sharp ethnoracial boundary which has important undertones demonstrating that ethnoracial boundary erected by African American middle class respondents against Latinos cannot be disentangled from social class boundaries when understanding their relations with Latinos in these urban and suburban contexts.

Linguistic boundaries between the African American middle class and Latino immigrants also emerged in their public interactions. The African American middle class in this study noted that they frequently experienced discrimination from Latino service workers and expressed frustration about the use of the Spanish language “to talk about

[them] in front of [their face].” Reah shared an example of this problematic encounter in the city.

Fieldnote: Reah noted that one day during her lunch break, she went to a discount store near her workplace. She picked up an item, and brought it to the cashier, who happened to be a Hispanic woman. The wrong price for the item rang up and Reah corrected the Latina cashier’s pricing mistake at the counter. Reah said: “She started speaking Spanish to the other cashiers about me, and my Puerto Rican coworker who was with me, but who looks white and speaks Spanish defended me in Spanish. That’s how a lot of the Spanish cashiers are, I can’t stand it.”

Reah recounts a reoccurring frustration expressed by many African Americans in their public interactions with a Latinos. Cheryl exclaims “why can’t they just speak English. This is America, but now everything is in Spanish. What’s up with that?” In these instances, the African American middle class harbors similar resentments around the lack of assimilation of Latino immigrants as working class whites do (Lamont 1992). In metropolitan cities where Latino populations are replacing a decreasing black population (like in the South), it is increasingly important to explore boundary work and relations between these two volatile minority groups. Relations with Latinos are an additional instrument of self-definition and boundary work in the black middle class toolkit.

Part II: African Americans’ Class Consciousness

How do African Americans define the middle class and conceive of their class identities?

Seated in her one family home in mid-July in Cascades, I asked Rachel how she perceived the middle class in America today. She summed up the beliefs of several respondents when she candidly stated:

“I thought there was just rich and poor (laugh). There used to be a middle class but I don’t see a middle class. Either you have it or you don’t., for me I am... middle class. There are people who don’t have what I have so I guess I am middle class. But I still consider myself as poor, as ok, not all the way up there. I just have a little more than they do. They probably didn’t have opportunity to be given what I have. I am just trying to make it happen day to day. No distinctions in middle class. With the economy, I think you’re poor, you can’t afford it, you can’t buy it.”

Concerns about the state of the American middle class—that is, as it relates to the foreclosure crisis, downturn in public sector and service jobs and poor quality of public schools—define how Black Americans perceive their position in the stratification system and their ability to pass on their middle class status to their children. In New York in particular, the intensification of land prices, decline in middle income jobs, and governmental interests in attracting wealthier residents undermine the ability of working and middle class people to maintain and reproduce their status. The language of the “disappearance” of the middle class emerged in numerous conversations, marking the perceived vulnerability of both Cascades and Great Park respondents’ personal class status. Their vulnerability was a relative concept, which was defined by not having the financial security that the rich or wealthy do, but having better life chances than the lower class. However, the class ladder was such that a series of slipups—the loss of a job, increase in mortgage interest rates, a family member’s illness—could compromise the middle class status of African Americans, and maybe even lead them into “the poor house.”

In Lacy (2007) compelling text on middle and upper middle class blacks, she encourages social scientist to reconsider previous measures of the black middle class. She posits that much of the work conducted on the black middle class emphasizes the experience of those in the lower class. She submits that there is an upper black middle

class which lives in suburbs separate from lower class urban neighborhoods. As a result, we cannot continue to use the experiences of blacks who reside in mixed income black neighborhoods and confront the same social ills as lower class blacks as the standard of what it means to be black and middle class in America. While this argument is valid and true, the state of the American economy has led to an increased vulnerability of once solid middle class families and neighborhoods, leading us to reorient our perspectives on the black middle class and their identity work.

As evidenced by Rachel, many middle class blacks are just trying to “make it day to day” in an economy which has ravaged occupational, educational and property acquisition opportunities; especially the opportunities unto which the black middle class in the post-civil rights era built their base. This has inevitably shaped the conflicts behind black Americans class consciousness, participation in activities that protect and reproduce their class position and how they build boundaries with other class groups, each of which I will illustrate in this section.

Belonging to the Middle Class

Despite repeated references to their troubled class status, black Americans definitions of what it means to be middle class varied. Similar to contemporary studies of the middle class, black Americans measured middle class in terms of one’s income, education, home ownership, debt and a modest disposable income.

Mr. Cherry, 55, an educator and father of 2 thinks that in order to be middle class, one must “own a house, [be]college educated, [have] kids in school, both parents are working.”

Arlene, a technician and mother of 3 posits that middle class families have “two working adults usually, with a family consisting of two children or

more. A mortgage, possibly a condo. Maybe some student loans, still for themselves or possible for their kids. And just working, trying to enjoy the little things, maybe not a big vacation. Maybe a family reunion where they drive the car.”

Reah, a manager and mother of 2 states that she describes her class position: “I consider myself middle class because I have a house, a car, a job and we make good money. My bills are paid. I don’t have to worry about where my next meal is coming from. Don’t feel like it but I know I am.

The social and economic order of New York City is characterized by intense land prices, high taxes and income inequality. In order to be a part of the middle class, families have to earn wages significantly higher than the national average. Consciousness of this class ladder lead many respondents to argue that being middle class in the city and suburbs of New York were inflated because of the exceptionally high cost of living. Reah echoed the belief of other respondents when she stated: “To be middle class in New York you have to bring in at least \$150,000 to 200,000 a year and that is not living within your means and that is with debt.” This was the resounding income point for several respondents, marking their acute awareness of the financial constraints involved in being middle class. If a family of 4 in Queens earned \$200,000, their household earnings would be approximately three times higher than New York City’s and the United States’ median household income^{xxxvii}. The price of basic necessities such as food, transportation and utilities is higher than the national average. Aware of these financial realities, middle class African Americans construct city/region specific standards for being middle class and leading a corresponding lifestyle.

To Be Middle Class

How do African Americans perform their middle class identities?

“You are middle class because of what is on your W-2 form, some appreciation of the arts, some understanding of bourgeoisie culture, formal education, access to technology and use of technology, and [entrance] into learned professions.” –Mr. Somers

While many of the class markers that defined the middle class are economic in nature, we shift the focus to the non-economic indicators of class status from the African American perspective. Cultural sociologists have encouraged a more holistic approach to understanding the expression of class status: through a cultural analysis of tastes, behaviors, and social group belonging (Lamont 1992; Lamont 2000). Lacy and Lamont have expanded the ways in which we operationalize class consciousness and performance among blacks and whites. They both argue for a more cultural, interactional approach to understanding how groups signal, contest and reproduce their place in the class hierarchy.

The social class behaviors and groups of African Americans were central to understanding how blacks asserted their membership in the middle class. Social signals such as home upkeep, being “decent,” and locational attainment determined African Americans middle class identity and belonging. Lacy states: “like income, occupation, and education, an individual’s ability to convincingly portray distinct identities as a way of signaling social position is an important element of social class” (2007, p.39). For the black American population, the performance of class status has its roots in the post-slavery south. Blacks, socially excluded from formal modes of work, education, and earnings, used cultural markers in order to define and express their class distinctiveness from lower class blacks (Frazier 1957).

One marker used by African Americans to signify their middle class status was their locational attainment. Cascades and Great Park black Americans perceived their

residential locations as middle class spaces. These neighborhoods were spatially and qualitatively distinct from the inner city. Cascades African Americans, in particular, prided themselves on the fact that their neighbors cared for their property, kept the neighborhood clean and were invested in community life. Anna, 40, has lived in Cascades all her life. She inherited her home from well off entrepreneur parents, provides an example of this overall sentiment. She states:

“I know that most people care for their homes...it’s like, and it’s really kind of – comes up a bit too nice – everybody’s –. Yeah, and it’s pretty much the most quiet place...it’s very *decent* and you know, everybody keeps to their home.”

The main criteria used by Cascades residents for defining the class position of the neighborhood is its decency, which is expressed through how neighbors religiously upkeep their homes and property. Many Cascades residents which I spoke to repeatedly expressed that the neighborhood was well known for its well-manicured lawns and tree-lined streets. Decency emerged several times in Cascades African American’s construction of class identity and belonging. It is defined by one’s civility and represents the absence of “street” or lower class values and behaviors for African Americans (Pattillo-McCoy 1999). One’s ability to maintain a decent lifestyle signified their middle class values^{xxxviii}. Great Park residents did not report decency as a main criterion of their neighborhood’s class status. The fact that Great Park was located in a desirable, expensive suburb of New York, perhaps, automatically made it a desirable upscale area to live in.

Cascades’ status as a long time African American enclave was also seen as middle class because it housed homeowners who took pride in owning their property and

the community life. One group through which these class identities were expressed was the Cascades Civic Association. The Cascades Civic actively worked to maintain and bolster the neighborhoods middle class image. Diane, 68, an African American civic leader and longtime resident captured this group's importance in reproducing the areas middle class status. Diane states that the Cascades Civic "helps maintain Cascades as one of the most livable urban communities in New York." Through political representation at various levels of government and community projects, Cascades Civic collectively resolves social and economic neighborhood problems which attempt to undermine the neighborhoods class character.

"Our strength [is that] we have tight partnerships, we provide access to [political] people and we turn out. If you talk to people that are in Queens Congress, which is an umbrella organization for Queens, they always talk about how Cascades Civic turns out. And if you say that you are on the board of the Cascades Civic, they sit up and they take notice, cause we have a good reputation. We turn out, we celebrated our 75th anniversary 3 years ago. We had a big celebration at Antonio's. It's viable and its one of these little organizations [that] works."

Major conflicts over land use and elder services emerged when I attended regular monthly meeting and interviewed members of Cascades Civic Association^{xxxix}. The Cascades Civic Association succeeded in representing their interests through collective action. One land developer was deterred from building a commercial unit in the community, and a senior center which was slated to close due to city budget cuts was spared. Therefore, the neighborhood's level of collective mobilization and political involvement (which are made possible by the economic and social networks of its residents outside of the neighborhood), its ability to defend its use values, and involvement in its own affairs (Logan and Molotch 2007) was apparent, and made Cascades a middle class place in the imaginations of African Americans who lived there.

Great Park, on the other hand, was considered middle class because of its presence in the suburbs of Long Island. Although there has been a significant rise in poverty in the inner ring suburbs. African Americans posited that if you live in Long Island “you have arrived.” This is also evidenced by the fact that several African Americans in Cascades preferred to shop in Long Island suburbs like Great Park because “they had better, fresher groceries” and there were “malls where you can get what you need.” In the minds of African Americans and many New Yorkers, Long Island represented the quintessential middle class space. Its distance from the urban core, high property taxes and relatively high number of whites compared to central city New York qualified it as an affluent and exclusive space to African Americans. Therefore, living in these spaces qualified one as belonging to the middle class.

In addition to residential location and political influence, membership in particular social groups was a key indicator of middle class status for African Americans. The social reinforcement and reproduction of class status among middle class African American youth was of particular importance to African American adults in Cascades and Great Park. For example, Mademoiselle and Mister were black social groups that were founded in Great Park’s local public suburban high school. The goal of these groups was to instruct young black teenage girls and boys how to be “proper”, “engaging” and successful. The tension between being “decent” and “street” emerged here as well. Group leaders were invested in reversing the behaviors of “hootchie mamas” and “boys with their pants sagging” in the school. Mademoiselle taught their black student-members manners, etiquette, aspirations, appropriate gender relations and speech. I spent a significant amount of time in Mademoiselle and Mister meetings, collecting information

about how African American educators transmitted ideas about middle class behaviors and manners to black teenagers between the ages of 14 and 18.

Mademoiselle and Mister programs were structured in a style reminiscent of traditional black elite social groups such as Jack & Jill and Cotillions/Debutante cultures of the southern blacks. Mrs. Hillman, an African American suburban resident from the South co-founded these groups. She migrated to New York in the 1970s and brought with her the cultural traditions of the African American middle class and elite. She was the product of a historically black college and African American sorority, each indicating her social class position in the upper ranks of Southern African American society. She created Mademoiselle and Mister as projects that would help black youth who were coming of age grow socially and express their class status. She states that many black students come from middle and upper middle class homes, but they:

“need mentoring, they need, and we need to talk to them about how they speak. How they dress, prepare them for the world of work... They have young ladies who don’t know how to set the table. We do this whole thing on etiquette with them. They don’t know how to sit at a table. They don’t know which fork to use. They don’t know how to set a table because they don’t sit down and eat with a family.”

Mrs. Hillman, from the perspective of an educator, laments the lack of class socialization occurring in the homes of many young middle class women whose parents are trying to keep up with the “joneses.” She also expresses the popular feeling among Cascades and Great Park residents that today’s youth do not ascribe to or practice middle class behaviors. Middle class parents, according to Mrs. Hillman, were more invested in maintaining their middle class position through wages, homeownership, and acquiring increased disposable income. However, this occurred at the expense of transmitting social

class values and behaviors to their children. In African American parent's quest for economic stability and mobility, they lacked the time and capacity to cultivate the status behaviors in their children which defined middle class people from the lower class. This was a significant boundary to reproducing middle class culture and behaviors in the next generation. Mrs. Hillman states,

"You know we've had girls who say that their parents are so busy working trying to *keep up with the Jones' that they don't have time for them*. You know? And they just, they don't seem to think it's important. And the girls say that the way they tell them is that 'why am I here working for you, trying to give you all of this? Now don't complain.'"

In order to fill the gap between being and belonging to the middle class, Mademoiselle and Mister meet weekly with students for specialized programs and activities. In one of the Mademoiselle meetings I attended, I witnessed the "Learn how to walk" exercise. This introductory activity instructed young black women on how to "walk like a lady," "to curtsy" and "sit appropriately."

Fieldnotes: I sat in the Library of Great Park High and waited for the meeting to start. One by one, young black women walked into the library, some tall, some short, some light skin, some dark skin. They seemed tired after a long day at school. They each greeted Mrs. Hillman with a smile and hello and looked at me with a slight air of confusion. When everyone arrived, Mrs. Hillman talked about the agenda for day, and introduced me as a guest speaker. Shortly after, she asked all the girls to line up for the walking exercise. I was a bit confused and did not know if I should get up as well. We sat at a round table and all the girls pushed their chairs back, and walked to the front end of the table where we were sitting in order to form a straight line. The young women lined up, about 15 of them. One by one, they walked about 10 feet ahead of them where Mrs. Hillman stood with one chair facing them. As the first girl walked, she was encouraged by Mrs. Hillman and another group leader to "walk tall," "slowly." When she arrived at the chair, after what seemed to be about 20 seconds of drawn out walking, which reminded me of a slow motion scene from a

fashion runway show, she was instructed to “turn around with grace,” in front of the chair. She was then told to “sit yourself slowly back with legs closed” into the chair, so as to be in perfect accordance with being a “lady.” After each group member completed this task, the girls in line gently clapped, expressing their support. Group leaders provided words of encouragement, but also let each girl know how they could improve the way they walk and seat themselves the next time.”

This seemingly mundane exercise carried important cultural meaning for older African American group leaders. They were invested in teaching their members social tactics which expressed their cultural refinement, graciousness, self-respect and most importantly, class position. Because class position is expressed most effectively in social interactions and presentations of self in everyday life, the walking exercise described above signaled to others that a young woman who walks “proper” comes from a middle class family and has a future in that class group as well.

Mrs. Hillman measures the success of the group by the young women who have graduated and now lead middle class lives.

“So many of the girls who have graduated and they come back and thank us for doing those kinds of things. And these girls are successful. We have a girl, one of our girls who graduated; she owns her own catering business. And we have girls who have gone to medical school, law school. They come back and talk to the girls and talk about all the trouble they used to get in here. How Lady was a big help to them because they didn’t have anybody to talk to or you know, all those kinds of things.”

Mademoiselle and Mister are social groups which invest in the reproduction of class status among black middle class youth. Economic challenges and higher class aspirations of many African Americans have propelled many black families to take on more hours at work or have multiple streams of income. A byproduct of this labor force activity is that

many middle class black families lack the time and resources to ensure that their children learn how to belong to middle class culture and express this culture in their personalities and social interactions. Mademoiselle and Mister, unlike the Debutante and Cotillion cultures of Southern blacks, attempts to fill a void which middle class African Americans are unable to, either because it was never cultivated in them, are not interested or because they do not have the time-resources to instill it in the next generation. Nonetheless, the existence of Mademoiselle and Mister and parallel middle class black youth organizations like it help us understand how African Americans socially and culturally conceive of middle class identities and belonging.

Work ethic also emerged as an important indicator of belonging to the middle class. Once more, Great Park and Cascades African American adults reference that the younger generation who are growing up in middle class households lack the long standing principles and behaviors which they believe allowed the previous generation of the black middle class to flourish. Being someone who “worked hard in order to make it” defined who belonged to the middle class. Middle class African Americans in other studies held the American belief that working hard and being honest was a prerequisite to being and maintaining a middle class status (Lacy, 2007, Patillo McCoy, 1999). Therefore, African Americans moral obligation to work automatically allowed them to have a middle class lifestyle. Like many other parents and adults Mr. Somers noted that this generation of middle class youth do not have this attitude towards work and he attempts to use his church’s youth group as a space to discuss and transmit these middle class ideals. His hope is that membership in this group will bolster African American

middle class youth's interest in "working their way up the ladder" and "valuing working hard." He states:

"You know trying to instill values, when you have all of these other media that has a system that is contrary to your home. There is the issue of the corrosion of work ethic, because of the lack of the appreciation for delayed gratification. We have a group of students that meets every week. And we talk about what's going on with students. We talk about work ethics issues. And one young lady in the group said that certain types of labor are beneath her. And this is someone who has had no former type of work experience at all. Never brought home a pay check. (laugh)...but she has resolved that there is certain things she couldn't do. And, you know, I was just happy to be working and making money. And I have done the whole gamut. I have worked in the fields, I have mopped floors, I flipped burgers, I have taken out the trash, you know, all of that stuff... Yeah, it's difficult, so what is going on with a lot of our youth and the children today, is that they see people who have made it. But they have no appreciation for the road that this person has traveled.

Mr. Somers's concerns about work ethic and delayed gratification echo the perspectives of middle class African Americans. He defines belonging to the middle class as valuing the work that they do to achieve that status. For children of middle class black families, he argues that middle class status is not something that is received from one's parents, but something that is earned through moral behaviors and respect for labor.

Cascades and Great Park African Americans define their belonging to the middle class by their residential location, socio-cultural interactions and moral obligation to work. Social behaviors such as property maintenance, political participation in neighborhood affairs, and the transmission of middle class values and behaviors in social group settings were the principles underlying how they constructed, maintained and reproduced their middle class identities. Many respondents noted that their initial ideas of what it meant to be a part of the middle class were not reflected in the behaviors of middle class youth. As a result, they used social groups in school and religious settings as

spaces to teach youth who were coming of age how to participate in middle class culture. Their hope was that by creating these spaces for learning to be middle class that the next generation will be better equipped with the socio-cultural skills needed to attain and maintain the middle class lifestyle that their parents worked hard to secure.

Class Boundaries

How do African Americans do class boundary work?

We have established the economic and cultural codes of being and belonging to the middle class from the African American perspective. Now, we turn to a discussion of how African Americans in the middle class define themselves relative to groups “from above” and “from below” (Lamont, 2000).

Boundaries Encountered

The primary challenges to maintaining a middle class lifestyle for African Americans are racial in nature (Landry and Marsh 2011). To be an American citizen or middle class in America is equated with whiteness. The volumes of literature on race and class in the social sciences make that clear. However, blacks have managed to attain middle class status through their occupational attainment, transfer of wealth (mainly through property), educational achievement and participation in cultural groups which previously excluded them on the basis of race. There continue to be key racial barriers which compromise the ability of African Americans to reproduce their class status such as hyper

residential and school segregation (Massey and Denton 1993; Orfield and Eaton 1996) and labor market discrimination (Waldinger 1996).

Romantic Partner Selection

Social class position shapes whom people engage in romantic relations with and marry (DiMaggio and Mohr 1985). In the realm of romantic relationships, Cascades and Great Park singles experienced significant class boundaries to romantic relationship formation. A quarter of the sample of African American adults were single with children. They, like their married counterparts, drove nice cars, owned homes, vacationed and had disposable income. However, single parents often noted that class boundaries, namely between them and partners from a lower class status, characterized their relations with the opposite sex. Women were more likely than men to encounter lower class partners on the marriage market.

Class consciousness and boundaries as it relates to romantic partners and relationships is interesting for several reasons. Economic position and cultural sophistication are key indicators that people use to define the attractiveness and appropriateness of a partner (DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985, DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Kalmijn 1998). While love may be at the heart of their romantic relationships and marriages, class status plays a key role in whom people choose to participate in intimate relationship with in explicit and implicit ways. The Great Park and Cascades African Americans who were married realized their aspirations for middle class spouses. Those who remained single noted that this class boundary impeded their ability to find an appropriate mate. For Reah, a married woman in Cascades who grew up in a middle class

home and neighborhood to a single mother and grandmother, established early on the type of mate that she would marry. Like other African Americans in this study, she dated across class, but knew that she wanted her husband to have a higher socioeconomic status. She expressed:

“I needed someone who would spoil me. We married young. He was 20 and I was 21. Someone going in the same direction, house, kids, garage...I guess he was middle class, I didn’t give that a thought. *When you grew up a certain way you want someone who was the same way. Although I dated and hung out in the projects, that wasn’t the status I wanted at the time.*”

For Janet, a married mother of two and insurance broker, her husband’s current middle class status (as opposed to his working class upbringing) was an important indicator of his ability to provide for her and her family. Janet and her husband went to the same local state college together. Janet, however, hailed from a solid middle class family in Queens and her husband came from a working class family in inner city Brooklyn. Like the other African American couples in this study, despite their disparate class origins, Janet and her husband’s college education served as a social, economic and cultural equalizer. She wanted someone who had money, worked, and had aspirations. Janet also wanted to be with someone with shared experiences. Attending the same state college served as an important common socio-cultural experience for Janet and her husband.

“I think money was important, is important. Working, yea and somebody to have a good time with, someone you can relate to. Like we went to college together so we had history, friends and stuff like that, so that was important.”

Janet and Reah were able to realize their class aspirations, overcome class (origin) boundaries and enter into endogamous marital unions like other married couples in the

sample. However, for middle class African American single mothers, this was not the case.

Anna exemplified the experience of African American single middle class mothers. Anna was born into a solid middle class family, has an advance graduate degree and an educator states that the marriage market for black men is challenging because many black men she encounters are lower class. She jokingly states that, “if he’s broke, [she’s] in love, Mr. Broke, I love you” To characterize the class boundaries that she navigates in the dating world. Despite the jovial nature in which Anna expressed this, status and class commonality for black couples is today considered a challenge in the black community because of the number of “unmarriageable” black males (Conley 1999). However, because of the economic struggles that black men experience as a result of racial boundaries in the labor market, Anna doesn’t think that they should be “counted out.” Despite her sympathetic perspective, she has yet to find a partner with equal financial or human capital. When asked if it was important for her partner to be middle class. Anna notes:

“Black men occupy the lowest position on the "totem pole.” They have to be excellent like Obama in order to be accepted. They are considered threatening because they have strong opinions and voice them freely, coming from slavery they are feared by society.”

“The whole thing with black men being on the bottom of the totem pole, they do have it harder than we do. And I don’t think you can totally count them out, just because, you know they are sort of struggling a bit. Of course I’m not going to jump into somebody else’s frying pan whose completely in the red, burned completely in the red. But, you know if you’re not, you know exactly as established as I am, I’m not going to totally count you out. And I think there’s another thing to that, like the establishment does to black families— and then they give black women chances that they don’t give black [men]. And it further divides us — and financial strains on relationships can be—can break your heart.”

Although Anna erected boundaries against lower class black partners, she also blurred this class boundary in the interest of short term companionship with black males. Rachel, a single mother in Cascades, too, encounters the class boundaries to developing a fruitful relationship with a black partner. Unlike Anna, however, she adopts a strategy of “waiting for the right man who God has in store for her. There is no sense in getting out there and meeting the wrong person who will waste my time.” The disconnect between partner class preferences and the availability of what sociologists have called “marriageable black men” (Conley, 1998) characterized the experience of many African American women in the sample (the one single African American father was a widower) and was a major concern for black married couples with female children. The increasingly bright class boundary between black men and women is rooted in the gendered racial biases present in the labor market and accounts for an additional barrier to many African American middle class people’s ability to form or maintain solid two parent family structures.

Class consciousness among black partners also served as a boundary to the formation and maintenance of marital relationships. Arlene was an anomaly among respondents, but her story provided an interesting context for understanding how middle class black navigate class boundaries in their relationships. Arlene, a divorcee and mother, describes her relationship with her ex-husband as one characterized by underlying class tensions. She believes that the difference in class origins and class aspirations between her and her ex-husband were the reason for their marriages dissolution.

“So it was a whole different distraction with him because black men, educated, very talented, had very good jobs. But still seemed very low class, very insecure about his class and I was really surprised about that. And he intended to be impressed with me because of all my accomplishments and where I had gone to school and everything. He was impressed I could speak French, and that I had the exposure. And I was like we came here to Jamestown the same exact year. But our past was different. I understood that it was very different, but yes.One of the things he did want [ex-husband] to move to South Carolina. He wanted to move back to where his family was from. But he wanted us to live in a trailer. A small town and he wanted to live like a farmer, and sit and talk with his friends... he wanted to live in a log cabin.... It just wasn't me. I was a girl's scout when I was in school. I liked going camping and lived in a structure, I didn't like the primitive world of chance, make a dream type thing, so. That was when we started to have really our differences.”

Arlene's marital problems stem from the different class origins of her and her African American ex-husband. “He grew up poor, saw crosses burned on his front lawn” and “he and his family were always so impressed that [Arlene] went to an [elite liberal arts college].” Arlene, Rachel and Anna recounted that many black men were “intimidated by her success.” Black women have climbed the social class ladder through disproportionately higher levels of educational achievement than black males (Cohen and Nee 2000; McDaniel, DiPrete et al. 2011). As a result of experienced class inequality between black men and women, the ability to form stable relationships and economically secure families has become an increasing problem for African American middle class women in particular. Furthermore, Arlene's story demonstrates that class boundaries in relationships where partner's current class positions are equal, insecurities about one person's class origins relative to their partners matters in relationship dynamics. This class boundary between black partners in private settings was heightened by racial exclusion in public settings, placing significant strain on the formation and maintenance of black families and relationships.

The gender barriers to middle class status and racial boundaries to family formation for the African American population have been well documented. Historical and social conditions from slavery to contemporary social welfare policies undermined the African American family structure (Du Bois 1899; Allen and Farley 1986; Wilson 1987). In *Inequalities of Love* (2011), Clarke interviews 58 African American middle class women in order to demonstrate that the lived experience of racial barriers to family formation or sustainability are also embedded in issues of class identity for black men and women. Clarke finds that the middle class black women's motivations behind remaining single are to wait for a socially acceptable partner and avoid out of wedlock births (which helps middle class black women separates themselves from the stereotype of lower class black women who cannot control their fertility). However, the increasing rates of single middle class African American female parent households also demonstrates that their aspirations for middle class black male partners are not being realized because of the racial and gender boundaries African American men encounter, which is evident among respondents in this study.

Boundaries Erected:

“I think the people that are coming in are coming in with a different ethic, you know, like, people are, uh, people are letting their kids, just, they hang out with anyone. They don't seem to be stepping up to the plate. Um, and I don't know, maybe they don't have any aspirations for their kids. Maybe it is less educated people that are moving in. I mean you get people that run the gamut, but *it is not necessarily so middle class. You don't see as many people valuing education.* I have had neighbors that move away, they have been to grad school. But now you don't see that. Like my neighbors now are not college graduates. You know, so, there has been a change. There has definitely been a change.”

Cascades residents actively built class boundaries against lower class new comers to the neighborhood and Diane provides a snapshot of this perspective. Diane, a retired

computer scientist, yoga instructor and longtime resident of Cascades, is troubled by Cascades incoming residents. Diane has lived in Cascades for over 50 years, and remembers when white families outnumbered black families before white flight changed the racial composition of the neighborhood. Today, Diane laments that this once staunch middle class neighborhood “is not necessarily so middle class” anymore. Diane is a divorced retiree, living alone, and actively participates in art and dance circles in Manhattan’s cultural institutions such as the MET and Alvin Ailey. She was raised in an elite black family and has launched two daughters successfully into the upper middle class. Therefore, Diane’s worldview is shaped by her upbringing; she essentially defines herself (and her former neighbors) as members of a core middle class, and constructs her new neighbors as people who are below her class status.

Cascades African Americans noted that the demise of the economy has turned some formerly owner occupied homes into rental properties, consequently attracting “undesirable” new tenants. Reah, notes that in the past several years, the class composition of the neighborhood has changed intermittently. Reah, like many other Cascades residents, is frustrated that new renters do not ascribe to the social and moral codes of the neighborhood such as home upkeep and child-rearing practices and builds social and moral boundaries against them. She states:

“This neighborhood is very overcrowded. When they started slabbing up houses, and they couldn’t sell them, we had an influx of people from Brooklyn. Queens *was the dream place to live*. These renters are coming in from Brooklyn and they don’t care about the neighborhood and the house the same way. There is a woman up the block who has a house full of foster kids, like 5. She worked nights, but the kids were running a muck. Kids were out all times a night running a muck and we couldn’t say anything. That was the thing going when we were young, people here were allowed to snatch the kid up. The woman said that she doesn’t want

anyone to say anything to my kids. So I told her to keep her kids over there then. She ended up packing and left and we were so happy to see her leave.”

Reah and several other black Americans confessed that the middle class status of the neighborhoods was being threatened by incoming residents from lower and working class neighborhoods in Brooklyn and the Bronx. These new residents were often renters who saw the quiet and tree lined suburb like streets of Cascades, Queens as “dream places.” However, many were renters from the inner city whom did not ascribe to the middle class lifestyle of existing residents.

African Americans in Cascades lamented that the new residents to the neighborhood don’t value education, have low aspirations for their children, practice a “different” work ethic, and have poor childrearing practices. Like Diane and Reah, they erect moral and class boundaries against new residents of Cascades, perhaps in a different way than previous studies of the middle class have noted. The black middle class is known for erecting moral boundaries against people who do not work and live off the social welfare systems (Lacy, 2007). However, Diane and others note that “you have many people with many jobs. So that’s the, it’s not necessarily, when they say middle class, there may be a different value system so you have many adults and they are working. That is why you can’t park, it got crowded. See I remember in 1966 when I could park in front of my door.” Therefore, Diane defines the boundaries around being middle class as having one or few jobs which provide middle class incomes and Reah believes that working at night undermines a parent’s ability to rear their children effectively. The traditional model of boundaries built around moral obligations to work does not fit the experience of African Americans in this study. Instead we see a different

perception of how work and household composition matters in class boundary formation for African Americans. Type of work, work shift, number of jobs and the number of residents in a household define who is and is not a part of the middle class.

African Americans in Cascades were more actively involved in boundary work with the lower class than Great Park residents were. This distancing is likely the result of their proximity to the urban inner city core and lower class residents and the changing nature of the housing market, public space and schools. Some African American Americans in Cascades noted that they avoided certain nearby public spaces that were frequented by the lower class, such as Honchdale. “They have their own element in Honchdale and I don’t go through Honchdale. Although it’s not a project they act like it. Some of them folks are quite ghetto.” The presence of lower class and working class blacks in nearby commercial and residential areas caused middle class African Americans to build moral boundaries towards them and avoid social interactions in that space all together.

Few African Americans in Cascades and Great Park also erected moral boundaries with “people from above.” My fieldwork took place during a historical moment when class inequality was at the center of the news and everyday small talk all over the country. Wall Street’s financial mismanagement, Obama’s bank bailout program, and the Occupy Wall Street movement brought issues of poverty and the decline of the middle class to the fore. African Americans made strong judgments towards wealthy celebrities and businessmen. As many middle class families were “scratching and surviving” stars such as Kim Kardashian were seen as morally inept for orchestrating a million dollar weddings and then divorcing her husband days after the

ceremony and bank CEOs were criticized for taking out million dollar bonuses when their employees were being laid off. “Like today I was thinking it’s such a waste. And I try not to be so judgmental but [how] can this actually be, now all of a sudden she’s divorcing? 17 million dollars on like one reception already? And people are just trying to get by with not even a quarter of that.” African Americans criticized the nation’s “one percent who controls 90% of the wealth” because they make “the whole notion that a middle class even exists is... farcical and superfluous.” The class consciousness of African Americans is constructed in reference to the moral and class boundaries that they erect towards the lower class and the upper class.

Boundary Blurring

Select African Americans in Great Park and Cascades also engaged in the blurring of class boundaries. For African Americans in Great Park, being couched in a suburban neighborhood with relatively few low income households compared to Cascades meant that interactions with the lower class occurred mostly outside the neighborhood in social spaces such as church. The black church is an important black social space, as discussed in the section on racial group belonging. However, it is also a place where African Americans in Great Park interact with lower class blacks. Janet provides a model example of this interaction. In her black Baptist church, Janet is perceived by others as being well off and affluent because of her class status and comportment. However, Janet tries to blur these perceived class differences by expressing a modest and spiritual perspective:

“When we go to church I don’t think anyone sees us like we are all this well to do I think we’re all basically there for one purpose. . . . we don’t carry ourselves like we are these [rich] people, you know I’ll tell you in a minute you know I don’t have it and I’m not going to try to act like I do when I don’t have it.”

“My mother would always say you would never know that Janet didn’t have a dime in her pocket because I’m not going to walk around like I don’t have a dime in my pocket. *I am always going to try and I guess that’s like the spirituality in us where we get that from going to church and believe that it’s all temporary.*”

She uses a spiritual narrative to affirm her beliefs that money and material possessions do not reflect a person’s worth. She has a subversive attitude to conventional definitions and signals of class status and emphasizes that her status is based on spiritual/religious blessings and beliefs. This is in line with the accounts of many African American, who use religion and church as a blue print for their worth and morality. The historical importance of the church and spirituality to the black community is well documented (Patillo McCoy, 1999, Dubois, 1899). Lamont (2000) finds that working class black males repeatedly reference their religious beliefs as a basis of their social worth and believe that religion and success are interdependent. In Janet’s case, her spirituality is a source of blurring boundaries between herself and people in the lower class. She posits that everyone, despite their worldly possessions attend church for one purpose and “are equal in the eyes of God.” This commonality among disparate class groups allows Janet to blur the boundaries between her and other class groups and portray herself as down to earth, approachable and spiritual.

Mr. Cherry provides another example of class boundary blurring which emerged among respondents. Mr. Cherry worked in corporate America for several years and later decided to become a public school educator. He is the father of 2, a widower and lives in

an affluent section of Great Park called Weitztown. When he pulled off in his 2 door, late model convertible with his teenage son after our interview in a local recreation center, he struck me as someone who had expensive tastes and valued expressing his status through his material possessions. However, from our discussion about his class identity, a different story emerged. He expressed that he tried to conceal his material possessions by keeping his work and home life separate:

“I wouldn’t invite certain folks to a party in my house. When I was working corporate, I invited people to my house and they were jealous of me.”

When Mr. Cherry invited his coworkers (white and black) to his home for a private function, they commented on the décor of his home and material possessions so as to question how he was able to afford them. Mr. Cherry was sensitive to these presumptions about his class identity and belonging. He repeatedly told me that “I’m not bougie” in order to convey that he did not have an elitist, separatist attitude and was averse to erecting class boundaries with people who did not have the money or possessions that he does. Mr. Cherry was raised poor, the son of a drug dealer absentee father, and single mother of 6. Perhaps, his attempts to erase the boundaries between himself and “people from below” were shaped by his modest upbringing and interest in remaining connected to his class origins. This pattern of boundary blurring was more likely to occur among Great Park residents than Cascades residents. Perhaps, this was because Great Park African Americans residence in suburbia inspired heightened assumptions about their personality. They were uncomfortable when their affluence was highlighted. Consequently, they strategically blurred class boundaries to minimize potential tensions in their interclass relationships.

Blurring of class boundaries also occurred in interactions with more privileged groups for one respondent. Like Mr. Cherry, Mr. Somers had humble beginnings. He grew up poor and was raised by his grandparents because his mother abused alcohol and abandoned him and his siblings at a very young age. Despite the odds, Mr. Somers was able to climb the class ladder because of a mixture of luck and hard work. Throughout his life, he encountered racial and class boundaries which sought to undermine his advancement. However, he never “knew his place” in the stratification system and constantly challenged people in power who attempted to socially exclude him:

“Part of the problem for me is that I don’t ever know my place. So, even in going you know being this impoverished kid, being a kid on food stamps and living in a very poor area in South Carolina, to a boarding school in Massachusetts, then to an Ivy League undergrad institution and to New York, I have never really known my place. People try to tell me my place. But I don’t know my place. So people who discriminate against me, or what have you, doesn’t work. I mean, I have been called arrogant because I refuse to know my place. You know, I am not one who just goes along to get along. And the fact that someone has considerably more money than me has not been able to put me in my place. Or the fact that someone maybe more handsome, gifted, athletic than I am, never put me in my place. By the grace of god I have been able to come to appreciate what lies within me and to value that. Therefore, I don’t feel like I have to subordinate myself to another human being.”

Like Janet, Mr. Somers evokes a religious narrative to subvert class distinctions between him and others. He manages these class distinctions by placing value on one’s spiritual existence, not their wealth and class position. As a result, these particular African Americans engage in class boundary blurring in order to create egalitarian social interactions with the lower and upper class.

Conclusion:

Studies of the African American middle class have found that they have a distinct cultural tool kit that they pull from in order to successfully navigate racial and class boundaries in everyday life (Neckerman, Carter et al. 1999; Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Lacy 2007).

Specifically, African Americans in the middle class negotiate challenging interactions in interclass and interracial settings. They adopt specific identities which help them a) convey their class status to whites who assume they are lower class and uneducated and b) maintain connections to a black community that questions their racial authenticity. In this chapter on the racial and class identities of middle class African Americans in New York, I find respondent narratives to be consistent with the culture of middle class African Americans in other regions of the United States. However, we also come across racial and class dynamics that are particular to African Americans in this New York based sample.

Residential context mattered for some dimensions of interracial, interclass and interethnic relations, and not for others. Cascades, a middle class predominately black neighborhood and Great Park, a middle class suburban racially integrated neighborhood, housed African American residents who were pioneers of racial residential integration. They had salient black identities and each cultivated positive black identities in their children. They were also class conscious and were invested in reproducing their middle class status in their children.

Because Great Park African Americans resided in a racially integrated neighborhood, they cultivated a black community for themselves and their children through membership in all black churches and social groups. This behavior was not

apparent among Cascades residents. Great Park residents also differed from Cascades residents because they experienced significant racial discrimination in their racially integrated neighborhoods. The micro-segregation tactics of their white neighbors and public spaces demonstrated this. Cascades residents on the other hand, interacted with whites and non-blacks outside of their neighborhoods, and were more likely to report problems with interracial contact at work or in their children's schooling experiences.

In terms of interclass interactions, African Americans in Cascades were more likely to conduct boundary work and defend the middle class status of their neighborhood than individuals in Great Park. Cascades' proximity to lower class residents in the urban center and the increasing entrance of renters into their neighborhood compel them to defend the middle class character of their neighborhood and themselves, unlike Great Park residents. Ethnic boundaries with foreign-born blacks were also more prevalent among Cascades residents, who lived in an interethnic black context. Therefore, racial boundaries were more prevalent in everyday life in the interracial location of Great Park. Class and ethnic boundaries, on the other hand, were more salient in neighborhood interactions of Cascades' all black milieu.

Black identities were central to the social identities of middle class African Americans in Cascades, a predominately black neighborhood in Jamaican, Queens County, New York and Great Park, a racially integrated suburb in Nassau County, New York. While this identity was formed in light of significant racial exclusion from whites, it was also a source of positive cultural identity and significance. African American parents actively cultivated constructive racial identities in themselves and their children by emphasizing examples of resilience and achievement in black history, black culture

and prominent black social role models. This was particularly the case for parents who wanted to instill self-esteem in their children in order to ensure that they were able to navigate the racial boundaries they encountered.

African Americans were also involved in defining the boundaries of blackness. This was particularly the case for Cascades residents whose neighborhood was comprised of a significant foreign-born black population. Cascades residents defined black identity as tied to being a native born black person; consequently they considered Caribbean immigrants to be outsiders of authentic blackness. African Americans also erected and encountered racial boundaries with Latino residents who were increasing in number in their neighborhoods, schools and other public spaces. These boundaries were primarily ethnoracial in nature, but were also characterized by underlying linguistic and class boundaries. Previous studies of the black middle class glance over ethnic variation in the black middle class experience and their interactions with non-white racial groups. The increasing ethnoracial diversity of cities calls for a more complex understanding of the racial boundary work conducted by the African American middle class in these contexts.

Participation in all black spaces and social groups was also a strategy of belonging to the black community which emerged among African Americans in this sample. The level of involvement in black social groups, however, differed between Cascades and Great Park residents. Because middle class African Americans traverse the black and white world frequently for work, worship, residence and schooling, they seek black spaces which cultivate and sustain their connections to the black community. Great Park residents were more likely to seek participation in parallel black organizations because they lived in a racially integrated setting which inhibits frequent interactions with

a sizable black community. Therefore, Great Park residents use black churches and social clubs such as investment groups and sports teams as practical venues for interacting with other blacks. Cascades residents, on the other hand, see their neighborhood as a space which provides symbolic connections to the black community.

Interclass boundary work is also a key experience for African Americans in the middle class. They are more likely than the white middle class to interact with the black lower class in their neighborhood, kin and friendship networks and church (Feagin and Sikes 1995; Landry and Marsh 2011). African Americans in this sample expressed these same encounters with the black lower class. They erected social and moral boundaries in order to highlight their middle class identities and belonging relative to lower class blacks. Cascades residents, in particular, protect the middle class image of their neighborhood by erecting these boundaries against lower class newcomers, whom they construct as outsiders of the middle class space and culture. Great Park residents, on the other hand, do not defend the middle class character of their neighborhoods. This is perhaps because Great Park is couched in an elite suburban county where pockets of poverty (mainly in peripheral public housing complexes) are located on the outskirts of the neighborhood.

Class status was conveyed through social, cultural or material signals of their middle class identity and belonging. African Americans express their class status through their economic position, location attainment, but also through practices such as work ethic and cultural behaviors. Emphasis was placed on cultivating middle class identities and behaviors among youth, who were said to participate in lower class behaviors and lacked effective middle class socialization. Social groups were also used to transmit

socio-cultural middle class values and behaviors to black youth who grew up in middle class and working class homes. Class boundaries were also encountered in the context of romantic relationships, impeding the ability of middle class female respondents to find socioeconomically comparable black male partners. Therefore, class consciousness was formulated in gender relations between African American middle class women and African American lower class males.

In some cases, African Americans blur the class boundaries between themselves and the lower class in an attempt to create egalitarian social interactions with “people from below.” They use narratives of religiosity and spirituality to diminish class distinctions between themselves and lower class blacks. They emphasize that one’s moral value is embedded in their spirituality, which places people who are from different positions in the socioeconomic ladder on an equal terrain. One respondent engaged in class boundary blurring with “people from above” in order to affirm his self-confidence in interactions with people who had a higher racial or class status than himself.

Great Park and Cascades African Americans manage, create and contest racial and class boundaries. These boundaries are navigated strategically. They engage in complex boundary work such as a) conveying their class identity in order to distinguish themselves from lower class blacks b) blurring class boundaries when in mixed class social settings c) asserting their social worth to the upper class/wealthy and d) remaining tied to and policing the boundaries around an authentic black identity. The hope is that this section demonstrates that the neighborhood, church, public space, home and school are key boundary sites where African American class and racial identities manifest in old and new ways. The complexity behind the socioeconomic boundary work that African

Americans do will serve as a basis for understanding how middle class Haitians and Jamaicans conceive of their place in the stratification system. Lastly, African American teenagers and young adults were also interviewed. In a future research project, the experiences of their African American parents will serve as a departure point for analyzing the ways in which middle class African American youth negotiate their racial exclusion and economic integration, with particular attention to the ways in which they define being black, African American and reproduce middle class status as they come of age in the context of New York.

Chapter 5: The Racial and Class Identities of the Jamaican Middle Class

Introduction

The black Jamaican middle class is said to have a distinct set of racial and class identities in comparison to other groups. The same way in which the African American middle class has a specific cultural toolkit, the Jamaican middle class has their own. In the African American middle class toolkit, African Americans have identities and boundary work needed to manage racial discrimination and social mobility simultaneously (Patillo McCoy, 1999, Lacy, 2007). Jamaicans have been found to have a strong sense of national identity, black consciousness; however, they build bright boundaries against African Americans which are embedded in cultural racism and classism. In Waters's seminal text on West Indians' racial, ethnic and class experience in New York, she finds that black Caribbean immigrants have a distinct tool kit which explains their more favorable outcomes compared to African Americans. When West Indians come in contact with American race relations, they are said to lack oppositional identities, expect and counter structural racism and have a low radar for interpersonal racism (Waters, 1999). These identities are a part of their West Indian cultural toolkit, which encompasses the ideas and behaviors around race and racism.

In order to examine the Jamaican middle class experience, I investigate how Jamaicans construct their identities, belonging and boundary work in racial and class terms. In similar fashion to the previous chapter on African Americans, I use the framework of ways of belonging and ways of being (Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2004), the black middle class toolkit (Patillo-McCoy, 1999, Lacy, 2007) and boundary work (Lamont, 1992, Barth, 1969) in order to frame the experience of being black and middle

class in urban and suburban neighborhoods for first and second generation Jamaican immigrants. Although the terms *Jamaican*, *West Indian*, *African American* and *black* are often used interchangeably, I use the term Jamaican to describe native-born and foreign born blacks with recent Jamaican ancestry. Therefore, I see Jamaicans (some calls themselves “Jamericans”) as an ethnic group who fits under the ‘black racial umbrella’ (Butterfield, 2004). How the Jamaicans in this study see themselves, talk about their identity, interact with outside social groups and social structures paint a portrait of how they see themselves in the American social hierarchy and their strategies for navigating discrimination and incorporation simultaneously.

I explore how the racial and class identities are conceived by Jamaicans in the two social settings Cascades and Great Park described in Chapter 2. The status and racial composition of where people live has been found to be related to their identities and behaviors (Lacy, 2007). Neighborhoods are an example of ‘boundary sites’, or the places where individuals build rules and expectations of insiders and outsiders of that space. Therefore, studying experiences across these residential contexts adds to our knowledge of the importance of space and place to the Jamaican middle class experience. I use data from interviews with 20 Jamaican adults. I interviewed 10 adults in Cascades, 8 females, 2 males. I also interviewed 10 adults in Great Park, 6 females and 4 males (see Table 5.1 for generation details for the adult sample).

Table 5.1- Respondents’ Generation and Neighborhood Information

Neighborhood	Total-Adults	1st Generation-Adults	2nd Generation-Adults
Cascades	10	10	0
Great Park	10	6	4

The average age of respondents was 53. I find that, like African Americans, neighborhoods, schools, public space and church are key sites of racial and class identity formation and boundary work. In these spaces, Jamaicans encounter, blur and erect boundaries with white neighbors, other middle class blacks, lower class Jamaicans, Latinos and blacks. Findings from this chapter serve as evidence for understand the ways in which Jamaicans are becoming similar or remaining distinct from the African American middle class. The identity work of African Americans in this study will be the basis for understanding that of Haitians and Jamaicans. The same analytical approach will be carried out for the Haitian middle class in the final empirical chapter, with special emphasis on the ways in which they are becoming similar or remaining distinct from the African American middle class (Neckerman, Carter and Lee, 1999).

Racial and Class Identities among the Jamaican Middle Class

Racial Identity

The Evolution of Black Identity among Jamaicans:

In the three waves of West Indian migration, Jamaicans have been a significant part of this group. The first wave was characterized by bright racial boundaries, as it occurred between 1899 and 1932, when racial antagonisms were high and African Americans were actively fighting for racial equality in the South and North. Caribbean immigrants were leaving their home countries to escape repressive colonial systems and the rapidly declining sugar industry. The working class migrated in large numbers to Central America, while the middle class were in better financial positions to migrate to the United States. Jamaicans settled in Southern Florida, New York and Boston in the

largest numbers. During the second wave, which occurred in the post war era, racism continued to create a common political cause for racial equality among the black native and foreign born populations. The restrictive immigration policies of the 1920s dramatically reduced the number of Jamaican immigrants entering the United States. The harsh economic conditions of the post-depression era inspired many to return to Jamaica. Nonetheless, a strong Jamaican population specifically had formed, and they were actively engaged in the black political structure and at the forefront of the civil rights struggle alongside African Americans. The reality of racial oppression muted ethnic differences among the black population, creating an atmosphere for black collective political identity to form. The children of this first wave of Caribbean immigrants were coming of age, and further becoming an indistinguishable part of black American.

However, in the third wave of Caribbean migration, which occurred in the post 1965 era, the ethnic consciousness of an increasing Caribbean black population surged in an unprecedented manner. West Indians, who were once at the forefront of racial equality struggles, were not being replaced by African American democratic leadership in New York (Kasinitz 1987). The class structure of the black community was also shifting, as the expansion of service industries; educational opportunities were increasing the black middle class population in the United States. This study, taking place almost half a century after the civil rights movements asks the question of where are we now? How is the Jamaican population understanding their racial and class identities, practicing them and doing boundary work in an era when ethnicity has emerged in importance and some are even arguing that we live in a post racial society?

Kasinitz's seminal book, *Caribbean New York* (1992) describes the emergence of the ethnic consciousness of West Indian identity and politics in New York in the 1980s. This text was fascinating precisely because it accounted for the ways in which historical shifts in race, the political economy and ethnicity shaped the West Indian community. Kasinitz finds that ethnic identity is a legitimate resource by which West Indians rallied for political interests. Race, once a bright boundary which organized African Americans and West Indians onto the same side of the political boundary, was increasingly complicated by ethnicity as a competing political identity.

In previous chapters, we discussed the particularities of the Jamaican political economy in terms of race and class. Jamaican immigrants enter the United States with notions about how race and class operate. For one, class is the most significant faultline in Jamaican society in the imagination of Jamaicans. It is visible, disturbing and a reality which the Jamaican poor struggle with every day. Robert, a 61 year old, second generation Jamaican immigrant and Great Park resident describes Caribbean nations like Jamaica as having a well delineated class stratification system.

“One of the biggest issues that I've found in the countries that I've been in the Caribbean, there's a cast system over there. Nobody ever tell you about that. But you could be a yard dog or you could be one of the aristocrats.”

Therefore, upon arrival in the United States, class strata and mobility is at the forefront of the minds and motivations of the Jamaican immigrants. However, the Jamaican middle class also enter the United States with latent, taken for granted assumptions about how race operates, hence shaping their black identities, or the lack thereof. Several respondent purported that race was not an important predictor of life chances. Jamaica's black population is the overwhelming majority, however, whites, Asians and Latinos make up a

sizable minority of the population. Because of this demographic reality, as well as the post-colonial Jamaican government's proliferation of racial democratic ideology, multiculturalism is the mainstay of Jamaican society. However, underneath the surface, racial hierarchies persist (Waters, 1999)

Part 1: Racial Identities

How do middle class Jamaicans conceive of their racial identities?

Transnational Notions of Race and Color

In interviews with Jamaican middle class respondents, interesting differences were uncovered in the ways in which first generation Jamaicans thought about race and identity in comparison to the second generation adult respondents. First generation immigrants expressed that race as an identity was a new phenomenon which they learned during their time in the United States. This is not a new finding. Waters describes the reluctance West Indians felt towards the low social status tied to blackness (1999). They were not opposed to being black, however, black identity as it was prescribed in the United States was not a core identity in which they used in everyday life or was a part of their cultural repertoire in Jamaica. Waters also finds that this reluctance is all the more acute among middle class West Indians, who absorbed the American construction that to be black or African American is to be poor and experience downward assimilation.

The Jamaican first generation each noted that their encounters with the American racial system were startling. They professed that class boundaries trump race in Jamaica. This reoccurring theme demonstrates the centrality of sending nations' ideologies, power

in influencing the experience of middle class immigrants in the United States. Mrs.

Commod, 53, states:

“Growing up in Jamaica, it wasn't about race. Never. Because our motto is: Out of many, one people. Because we have a lot of interracial marriages, relationships and all of that, so it was never about your race. It was just about class. You know you have the upper class, the middle class and the poor. And everybody get along. Nobody looked at you because of the color of your skin or stuff like that, no.”

Mrs. Commod reported being troubled by the negative emphasis placed on race in America. As a part of the Jamaican post- colonial nation building project, the ideology that race was no longer a factor (albeit, in a country which was built on racial domination) permeated the national consciousness. Jamaicans of different colors absorbed and acted on these decreased racial boundaries in everyday life. Mrs. Commod reminds us that “so many people of different races marry each other and mix up.” Intermarriage is a strong indicator of social integration between ethnoracial groups (Lee and Bean 2004). Although race is not a primary faultline by which social identity in Jamaica operated, race was a political identity which some Jamaican immigrants noted forming while in Jamaica. Timmy, a 49 year old first generation property manager in Cascades shares that before he came to the United States, he was passionate about international racial equality. The fight for racial justice, however, was not a part of his everyday life. Timmy shares

“I'm from Jamaica and I heard about racism and all that. I'm in Jamaica in the 70s. When we heard about Apartheid, oh man we were outraged. We were outraged. Going to class, we are upset. We wanted to go over there, and fight and then you see these people in America, fought against the thing and helped get Mandela free and all a dat.”

Some respondents noted that they saw glimpses of racial discrimination while in Jamaica. Timmy professed that he experienced racial discrimination when he arrived in America. However, he was informed of and an active participant in the international agenda to end South African Apartheid while coming of age in Jamaica. Media, therefore, was a powerful mirror through which Timmy and blacks in other countries and continents could see the ugly remnants of colonialism and racial domination. However, in the ways in which many first generation immigrants recount their experiences in Jamaica, one would believe that Jamaica was a society not very stratified by race. Therefore, the Jamaican middle class had a racial consciousness which was based on global, not domestic affairs.

In other interviews, although race was not as bright and aggressive as what is observed in the U.S. and South Africa, we uncovered that race, color and class operated in latent terms, and was an important faultline in the lives of Jamaican immigrants. Few respondents provided a glimpse into the ways in which Jamaica was stratified by class as well as race. Norella, 49 year old, first generation human resources manager and Cascades resident, noted that the most significant cultural shock she experienced upon arrival in the United States was white poverty.

Respondent: “See I traveled before I came here, only to the Cayman Islands but still it’s different and so I was used to the only thing that shocked me were potholes. I never expected them and some of the neighborhoods and then I saw homeless people white folks homeless on the street and I’m like those were shockers for me because I’m thinking, “Oh white people homeless? Potholes no, are you serious” I’m not sure those qualify as shockers but yea white folks, homeless, drunk.”

Interviewer: It they shock you they do. Why does that shock you? You never saw anything like that in Jamaica?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: What are white people in Jamaica like?

Respondent: You hardly saw them. They live in the neighborhood—we don’t even go up there. We work for them, you know what I’m saying like we are the folks that go to clean their houses, take care of their kids,

because my mom did that since she were little you know so yeah shock. That was my biggest shock.

Norella articulated that racial stratification was a fact of life real in Jamaica, even if racial tensions between racial groups were low. Norella and other respondents demonstrated that the relationship between race and class was well defined, particularly in regards to the concentration of whites in the upper class and segregated segment of Jamaican society. However, this seemingly taken for granted reality is exposed once Norella confronts the American socioeconomic system where whites were poor and engaged openly in perceived deviant behavior. Therefore, first generation Jamaican middle class immigrants entered the United States with a latent racial consciousness, which is re-negotiated in their interactions with the realities of race and class in the United States.

Because Jamaicans come from a more tri-partite Latin American racial system (Bonilla-Silva, 2004), the realities of color, class and race are deeply interconnected. However, only one respondent noted that color shaped her life chances in Jamaica, and it was actually in America that she was able to aspire for more. Geraldine, an 80 year old first generation Great Park resident and active member of the local civic association has lived in the United States for 57 years, and was a part of the second wave of West Indian mass migration. She came to the United States to attend college in and later went on to become a clinical dietician as an ivy league graduate. She noted that while growing up in Jamaica, her dark skin was used as a reason to block her mobility. Therefore, color matters to how much first generation respondents see and experience racial and color boundaries in the Jamaican context.

“ I graduated in accounting and there wasn’t any, I don’t know if I should tell you that, in Jamaica, although it’s a “black country”, dark skin people

were not expected to aspire a certain way. So as you can see I am no borderline case. You see there was another girl, graduated with me, she happened to be my friend she is light complexion. The job that I would have gotten, she got, and see it was all based on skin color. Yes, yes. When she came to America, I was sorry for her, cause as I said, I am no borderline case. People used to do at that time something called passing, if you were a little light. You know, you try to get away with it. She thought she could. But some of the people down there really have the features that they could really fool you. You have to get into their business to find out where they are from. So.”

Geraldine’s friendship with a lighter skinned woman helped her uncover the discrimination which occurred in the Jamaican occupational system in the 1950’s. Geraldine felt the pain of colorism in Jamaica, and used migration as a mobility strategy. She, more than any other respondent highlighted the color stratification system in Jamaica. Because Geraldine left Jamaica during the pre-independence epoch, she may have felt racial and color discrimination more than before. Although it can be argued that the brightness of the color boundary has decreased, color, undoubtedly continues to shape how Jamaican society and the immigrants who leave it think about race, racism and identity.

Identifying v Belonging

When asked how they define themselves, the majority of Jamaican middle class respondents ascribed to black identities. However, the reasons behind identification with blackness differed from the first generation to the second generation, and from Cascades residents to Great Park residents. Some expressed that they used black or African American as descriptors of their identities, but that blackness was just about skin color and did not define their everyday lives. This response was the most prevalent among the

first generation respondents, who often noted that race and racial identity in Jamaica were not primary. For example, Mrs. Commod says that on formal applications “I put black.” Mrs. Commod notes that her black identity is not an important aspect of her life. However, although she is a black person, social interactions are more so about being a human being.

Interviewer: I'm wondering how important your black identity is to you?

Respondent: Very important.

Interviewer: Why?

Respondent: Because it's who I am, and am not going to shy away from it, you know I can't change that and I have no qualms about being black. It's not about being black, it's being a person, and black is only the color. It doesn't and shouldn't take away from who you are.

Mrs. Commod, like other respondents dialogues with the popular notion that one's race is interpreted in social settings as a physical representation of inferiority or superiority. In order to subvert this common approach to skin color, she posits that one's personhood or their humanity is not dictated by their skin color.

On formal, structured applications, middle class Jamaican immigrants grapple with fitting their ethnoracial identities into neat categories. Some respondents were willing to do this, while others challenged the exercise as subversive and counterproductive. Barbara, a 51 year old first generation Great Park resident and mother notes that on the census, for example, she identifies herself as black or African American because these are the options that are available to her. When asked how she identifies herself, Barbara states that

Respondent: I usually say black. The choices that are given, I just say African-American based on what they ask. ..But it's not white, it's not Black....You know to be honest I don't have a problem but my daughter does, I guess when you do sociology you get into the intricacies of you know... – because I am mixed. My dad was white and my mum is black.

Interviewer: Okay, so you're technically bi-racial.

Respondent: Technically, yes.

Interviewer: Do you ever say, do you ever use that term or are you just, okay?

Respondent: No, I'm just black.

Barbara is bi-racial; however, she adopts a “just black” racial identity as it is prescribed to her. She does not see the need to report her mixed-racial ancestry because it uncovers a level of social complexity which Barbara is not interested in highlighting. Therefore, black identity is more about a racial category to be checked, which simplifies the complexity of ethnoracial backgrounds. Although Barbara acquiesced to American racial categorization and reinforced the ‘one drop’ rule in her answers, Ms. Marlene, is a 60 year old, who has been in the United States for 17 years, expressed the frustration that many Jamaican middle class respondents felt about the reduction of their racial identities into the “black” box, the “other” box and or a line to describe their ethnic background.

“We are very mixed, we are very mixed. His grandmother is as white as it gets. She is so white it’s not even funny. She was born in Scotland, married his grandfather (he was a very dark Indian) and stayed. My background is Irish, Indian and Black. My grandfather is Irish, grandmother is American Indian and my other grandmother was black. And we are a big mix. And if you look at my children, they are all mixed. You see us and we look, myself and another brother of mine, we look more like our dad and then the other siblings have features like my mother. So we are mixed, we are very mixed. But I find that people here tend to so embrace or not embrace their heritage. But I always let me children know the different parts of them. But I also encourage them to do that. And I say that no matter how small a part that is of you, you embrace that because that is you. And of course we have a strong part of is that is black but we also have a great part of us that is something else too. And there is no way that you are going to tell me to not embrace that. There is a big problem when they come to classify you as African American.”

Ms. Marlene expresses disdain for the American racial category system. The multiracial Jamaican society, particularly for those who came from middle class origins, are

exceptionally diverse, with European, indigenous and African heritage. However, this racial complexity is overshadowed in the United States. Ms. Marlene attempts to subvert the racial classification system, but not only honoring her African heritage, but also valorizing her Scottish and English heritage so that no one heritage is over or under valued. Therefore, Ms. Marlene has a difficult experience transitioning into the American racial system, and cultivates this type of anti-reducing approach in her children. Therefore, while some first generation Jamaicans adopt a black racial identity, they do so for different reasons, and there are competing racial identities which are being negotiated simultaneously. The adult second generation, however, was more likely to adopt strong black identities and were concentrated in the suburbs of Great Park.

Belonging as Embrace-the 2nd Generation Adults

In the Jamaican sample, there were 2nd generation adult respondents who were born in the United States of Jamaican immigrant parents. The Jamaican second generation adults all resided in Great Park, perhaps providing evidence that successive immigrant generations are more likely to suburbanize. The second generation Jamaican adults demonstrated different patterns of racial identity formation and attachment than the first generation Jamaican adults. As opposed to identifying as blacks because of their phenotype or based on existing racial categories, many believed that their black identities were important to their social selves and influenced who they are and their behavior. The second-generation were a qualitatively different group from first generation respondents because they came of age in America, and were consumers of black culture in the form of music, history, and politics. What was also distinct about the second generation was that

they were all the children of pioneer^{xi} parents. Therefore, from an early age, they lived in neighborhoods with whites and white immigrants and encountered racial discrimination. This has caused them to identify primarily as black, but also willingly acknowledge their Jamaican ancestry. Mr. Benedict exemplifies the perspective of second generation Jamaican middle class immigrants, all of whom resided in Great Park.

Interviewer: How do you guys talk about your own identity?

Mr. Benedict: I'm black.

Interviewer: You're black, okay. You don't say that you're African American?

Mr. Benedict: No.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Mr. Benedict: I just—look I think people make it a little too complicated you know trying to get very granular about I'm Scandinavian American. Look it's clear from everybody looking around that you are black and it's clear that I am black and it's clear that you are white, you are Hispanic, whatever. I just think it does a disservice to us living here in America to try to associate with something else. Now having said that, I'm from Jamaica, I love the fact that I'm from Jamaica and all of my friends know that I am from Jamaica. I talk about the fact that I'm from Jamaica. I'm not trying to hide that at all. Everybody knows that. That's a part of me and I talk about it but where I am today I am a black man living in America and it is clear to everybody that sees me that I'm a black man. To say that I'm African American or I'm Caribbean American, I just I don't think that label is necessary.

Like other second generation respondents, Mr. Benedict displayed stronger attachments to a racial identity than the first generation. He notes that the emphasis on ethnic origins is secondary in importance to one's racial identity. He believes that highlighting a person's ethnic identity compromises their "American" identity, and creates unnecessary sub groupings in a culture where one's phenotype shapes social interactions. Mr. Benedict is a representative example of the second generation Jamaican middle class identity formation.

Second generation Jamaicans in this study demonstrated what scholars defined as “assimilation” into black American life. The second generation demonstrated that they were abandoning their parent’s ethnic affiliations, and adopting purely black racial identities in order to operate in the American social structure. They were reluctant to call themselves African American or Jamaican American, but welcomed black as their primary and definitive identity. They expressed great pride in a black racial identity, and noted that “being black” was accompanied by social and spiritual rewards. For example, Mr. Acorn is a second generation Jamaican who lives in Great Park, and father.. He grew up in Brooklyn and experiences dignity from his black identity. When asked how he identifies himself in everyday life, Mr. Acorn shares:

“Just a black man, I’m just a black man...[It is]very important because that’s who I am and you know out of all the you know we don’t realize this but one day I’m looking at the you know reading the bible and I’m reading Genesis and I’m reading about Adam and Eve and they talk about you know they were in the garden and they start to describe the setting in the garden and you know the river Euphrates and Payson and Tigress and it goes over everyone’s head you know Adam and Eve they were leaping around Africa, it’s just weird you know we overall when we don’t, if look at your opinions away from Greece, oh I want to go back to Greece, Nobody every... oh I want to go back to Africa, nobody does that. When you look at that that’s important it’s like man I know who I am, I am a prince. You know a child of the most high King and you know we don’t realize that, so it’s very important. You know you start to have a conscious like you see things, you just see things politically and stuff going on and you see it and there’s a you know it’s like why, why, why is always you know they got to get the black man, why do you got to do that, you know but we got to step up we got to know who we are. You know I don’t want to be conceited but we need to realize that we’re it; we don’t realize that we’re it but we’re it. Not to say I’m better than anybody but I’m it.”

Mr. Acorn demonstrates the strong attachment to black identity that second generation middle class Jamaicans express. He believes that blacks often doubt their value as a racial

group and believes that reverence for African and biblical history is at the heart of a black identity. He also uses a spiritual and moral framework for arguing the importance of black identity. Therefore, unlike first generation immigrants who are learning about how racial identities and backgrounds operate upon arrival in the United States, Mr. Acorn and other second generation immigrants have stronger connections to their black identities, marking the importance of generation in black identity racial formation of the Jamaican middle class. Studies of the second generation often look at young adult's identity formation.

However, the middle class second generation adults, many of whom are middle aged, demonstrate that strong ties to black identity persist into the second generation, unaffected by their class or presence in a mixed race neighborhood. This lends evidence to scholars who have purported that the subsequent generations of black immigrants will simply become black. Furthermore, there is a type a form of assimilation occurring as the second generation asserts a positive perspective on their black identities. They are invested in positioning their black racial group into a strategically positive light, therefore, shaping how race works in the minds of blacks as well as in interracial social interactions. The pre-theorized distancing between Jamaican immigrants and African Americans was not supported in this sample.

The one exception to the difference between black identity formation and attachment lies in a first generation immigrant woman, Mrs. Graves, whom, upon arrival circumvented inner city, predominately black neighborhoods, and settled in Great Park's predominately white neighborhood. This is an increasing phenomenon, where upon arrival, first generation immigrants are bypassing enclaves and ghettos and settling

directly in suburban neighborhoods (Alba, Logan et al. 1999). When asked how important racial identity, Mrs. Graves replied:

“It's very important...I don't know, it didn't matter before I came here, like I said before, nobody ever told you that you are black or whatever, there are people in Jamaica that like light skinned but it wasn't that -- I know when I came here you have to stick to something and you stick to your roots or your blackness more here.”

Mrs. Graves is a first generation immigrant who demonstrated that exposure to racial boundaries early in her living and work life in the United States lead her to see her racial identity as important, meaningful and a basis of racial collective identity. Like her first generation peers, Mrs. Graves harkens that she came from a country where class was the primary faultline. However, in her time in the United States, she developed a racial identity as a means of racial belonging and group identification. However, from Mrs. Graves tone, her black identity is more about choosing a group to affiliate with as opposed to expressing pride in her identity as a black person. For Mrs. Graves and other first generation respondents, race is managed as a boundary which only emerged as real and important in the context of America's system of racial inequality, despite the fact that race as well as color is an important predictor of life chances in Jamaica (Alexander 1977).

Racial Practices: Politicizing Black Identity

Jamaican middle class immigrants each have a black consciousness, although that consciousness varies in intensity and experience. Unlike African Americans, middle class Jamaican immigrants are less active participants in what is termed black life, culture and institutions. Cascades Jamaican immigrants are couched in a black community and are

content with being surrounded by other blacks. Therefore, unlike African Americans, first generation Jamaican middle class immigrants did not participate in many racial social groups. However, second generation and few first generation Jamaican immigrants in general displayed more of an interest in cultivating black identities through their participation in black political groups.

Ariel, a second generation Jamaican practiced her black identity through black political groups in Great Park and her place of work. She exemplified the racial belonging of many Great Park residents, who exhibited their belonging to black life through groups which helped remedy racial inequality and/or ensured the inclusion of black voices in institutional decision making practices. Ariel recounted many examples about black oppression in the United States, much of which she learned during college courses on African American History. In her current work environment, she has been an active member of a black professional group. Ariel stated:

“I’m involved with the employee network for the, I like; I prefer the phrase black, but the company I think, we change the name whenever the company changed the name; we had to change the name... the original organization that we formerly were Foldfan it was called, and I came up with that name and everybody voted on it. Black Leading Company. And then we became ABP, Connecting Black Workers.”

Ariel’s participation and leadership in the black professional organization within her company demonstrates her active relationship with her black identity and other blacks in the interest of being a recognized racial subgroup in the company. Professional associations have always been an important medium for blacks and other minority groups to convene and organize their interests and place pressure on institutions to include their voices in corporate company matters. This has been a particularly important venue

through which West Indians in previous waves of migration to the United States have joined the African American population in the struggle for racial justice. However, many of these “political” groups are social support groups in nature, demonstrating the decreasing of collective groups for racial justice.

Robert, also a second generation Great Park resident notes that his black identity influenced his interest in making neighborhoods and communities practice fairness towards blacks and minorities. Robert grew up in the pre-integration south when “we blacks had to sit at the end of the table, or we had to come in through the back door.” When he moved to New York as a young adult to live with his brother who was attending university, he learned of the unfair treatment that blacks were experiencing at the hands of law enforcement in the 60s and 70s. These issues shaped his desire to become a law enforcement official and make a difference from the inside of the police force. Robert shared:

“I joined the police department, maybe through ideology. At one point I was in a black student union in college. I decided that, if you are going to really try to make a change, you got to do it from the inside. So aside from the medical benefits, the salary benefits, which wasn’t that much? \$11,000 when I started. I wanted to try and make a difference. I saw some of the atrocities that was happening in my precinct...The police department, is the microcosm of the rest of the country. The only way you can change some of that is by you being the guy that’s out there. If you catch a kid that you know is not a bad kid, and you don’t give them a sermon. And it’s within your discretion. You know what I am saying, it’s like the power of the pen is so important, I can write you a J card. I give you summons.”

Robert demonstrates that in some cases, experience with racial discrimination engenders a sense of purpose for improving the conditions of the black community-police relations. Robert, like first and second generation Jamaican middle class immigrants reported the atrocities which were being committed against blacks and black communities. However,

the second generation was the most likely group to mobilize their time and resources in the name of their black identity and practice belonging to the black racial group through their support for black political interests.

The one exception was a first generation immigrant, Theo. Theo, 53, entered the United States as a student and attained a Ph.D.. During his time in graduate school he took part in several on campus initiatives which were in support of black student and faculty interests. Theo, a doctor, Great Park resident noted that his sense of racial exclusion as a graduate student compelled him to join other foreign and native born blacks in the quest for inclusivity of black history and faculty at their institution. Theo posits:

“There are teachers that don't have any content about your person; they would just say stuff that ignore your history or the African-American experience. They were set in their ways...I was very excited when the Cornell came to visit. We all went to his philosophy class that was a major thing in campus, it was the second semester and we started to organize, to get other professors to come, they couldn't find anything so we had to...”

A student of the popular academic Cornell West, Theo describes his excitement for learning from a leading race scholar and even used the experience to rally student support for faculty diversity. Theo lamented that black history was not important at his graduate school. Robert also mentioned that he was a part of the black student union in his college, demonstrating his participation in educational social groups which advocated for and supported black student interests. Therefore, black identity was a collective category by which Jamaican middle class immigrants, particularly those who went to colleges in the States and who were second generation, used to counter racial injustice. The active

participation in black social groups and churches to elicit connections with other blacks and black life was a key way to practice black identity, which was not as prevalent among first generation respondents. Therefore, racial belonging was an instrumental practice for mostly second generation adult respondents, demonstrating the variation in the ways in which people identify, practice and perform blackness among the Jamaican middle class.

Racial Boundary Work

What kind of racial boundary work do Jamaican immigrants engage in?

Boundaries Encountered

Learning how race operates in America is an ongoing process for first generation Jamaican immigrants but a reality of life for those whom are 2nd generation Jamaicans. Like the African Americans in this study, second generation middle class Jamaican immigrants were pioneers of once predominately white settings. They experienced high levels of racial discrimination, through patterns of white flight and hostility from white neighbors and business owners. Therefore, second generation Jamaican middle class adults demonstrated similar notions of how racial boundaries operate compared to African Americans.

Jamaican first generation middle class respondents reported that they, too, experienced racial discrimination in public settings, housing and education, politics, neighbors and to a lesser extent interpersonal relations. The first generation were forgiving of racial boundaries and tried to negotiate the black-white boundary by

adopting de-politicized black identities and not bearing “a chip on their shoulders” regarding race relations.

Public Centers/Cosmopolitan Canopies

In public settings, black identity is constructed as a deficit for darker skinned people. Anderson (2012) explains that the “iconic ghetto” or the image of impoverished areas as being occupied solely by blacks, disadvantages blacks when they enter into public settings where non-blacks frequent. This phenomenon is felt more acutely by the black middle class, who see themselves as undeserving of the treatment that lower class blacks receive. Norella and Mrs. Commod note their frustration with racist encounters in shopping centers. Norella explains

“From my experience, I haven’t experienced anything that I can say oh this person treated me this way because of this, or I didn’t get this job because I am black or because I am Jamaican or they didn’t serve me in the store—well that too, they don’t want you in the store because you are black and that upsets me a lot. You go in a store and you say, “Do you have this in pink?” They’ll tell me its fifty dollars, “Listen buster I didn’t ask you how much it costs, I asked if you have it in pink, that’s two different things, I already know how much it costs.” Don’t tell me that because you think I can’t afford it, that’s stereotyping right? So that type of experience and that’s what makes me really mad, to stereotype and don’t follow me in the store I’m not taking anything. I can pay for whatever you have. So those experiences yes I’ve had ...”

Mrs. Commod, a housekeeper and Great Park resident expresses that she experiences racial discrimination in public shopping settings where she is constantly under surveillance from non-blacks store workers or owners. Mrs. Commod states:

“You go into a store and because you are black and they are all there walking around behind you and stuff like that. You are in a line and

somebody is in front of you, and because you are black, they are looking over their shoulder to see if you are looking at what they are punching on their credit card, it happens all the time...”

The first generation Jamaican middle class, regardless of where they resided, more often than not had two responses to questions regarding racial discrimination: a. they noted that they experienced little to no differential treatment or b. downplayed the significance of an encounter as potentially racist. This pattern was starkly different from African Americans who were vocal and poignant in their descriptions of racial encounters with white and Latino neighbors, co-workers, store merchants and lay people. Similar to the dialogue with Norella, encounters with racial boundaries were often an afterthought.

In other racial discrimination scenarios, first generation middle class respondents described the encounter as racist, but were forgiving and subdued in the face of these racial encounters. For example, Mrs. Commod, too, was reticent to outline the racial boundaries which she encountered in everyday life. However, when she recounted her interactions with her white neighbor, it was clear that she had encountered racism, but validated the experience as deserved or honest.

Respondent: It kind of helps sometimes, if you have too much of your own kind, it tends to get boisterous, but you know the white man sometimes, him kind of keeps things in check, he sees the black kids getting out of control, he calls the cops, they kind of keep things in check, because honestly, we as black people, we are not going to call the cops, we wouldn't. I would rather, if the kids are out there doing something not right, I would rather go out there and talk to them and say you know what, you can't be doing that, it's not right and stuff like that and if they don't, then the next step for me would be to go to the parents. It would have to really get out of hand for me to go to the police, especially if it's certain things. But you know, some people probably they might listen to me but they won't listen to the next person and the next person probably might just have to do the next best thing and call the police. You know, if certain things are happening, you can't be upset with someone if they call the police, like I said, you live in certain neighborhoods, you expect certain

things, but when people step out of the box and go to a certain neighborhood, they don't expect that there. And people want what they are paying for, because taxes in Great Park is really high, so you want to be living in peace, as he said to me one day, you know the kids were outside there and they were bouncing the ball on the ground and he was inside trying to watch his television and the sound of it, you know, it is irritating so he called the police. Police say, come get off the road and go to the park. He was right; there are a lot of parks.

Interviewer: Okay, wow. It's your neighbor right here?

Respondent: Yes, but we get along really good, because when we bought the house, he put up his house for sale, and then afterwards he took it down and he came to us after a few months and he said, wow, I was going to sell my house when you came but after seeing you and everything, am not and he said, but any day you put up a for sale, sign out there, am moving.

Interviewer: Why did he say he wanted to move out?

Respondent: I guess we are black people, he doesn't know us he is probably thinking rowdy, noise and all that, get to find out, and it's not like that. So you know you can't judge people by the color of their skin....yes, he is an honest person, and funny enough, out of everybody else on the block, me and him get along the best, and that's what I like in people, honesty. He just said it like it was because that was the truth.

Mrs. Commod demonstrated that some respondents blurred the racial boundaries between themselves and whites even when they were engaged in racist encounters. Mrs. Commod purports that her white neighbor was “honest” and wanted to get his money’s worth from his taxes, and therefore had the right to call the police on black children in the neighborhood who were disturbing the peaceful character of the neighborhood. Mrs. Commod encountered racism and has formed a social relationship with a white neighbor who, upon seeing her, probably never thought himself that they would become the friends that she says that they are today.

The experience of racial discrimination and exclusion is not confined to just black-white relations. Jamaican middle class respondents noted that they both encountered and blurred the ethnoracial boundary between themselves and Latinos. Mr.

Winter, 46, notes having few experiences with racial discrimination when it came to whites. However, he was clear that when he resided in inner city Bronx before moving to his suburban neighborhood that his family was the victim of crime at the hands of his Latino neighbors.

Respondent: I have only interacted with the African-American and Latino community that was when I was in the Bronx; I lived in a Latino community. I know we are despised; they used to break into our car like two or three times a year. Yes. That's what I think, because the car was parked in the outside lot of the apartment, there were like 12 cars and it was the only one every time.

Interviewer: Who was this Latinos?

Respondent: It has to be because it was a Latino neighborhood, there wasn't a lot of African-Americans living in that part of the town.

Jamaican middle class respondents in Cascades remarked that they experienced structural racism such as poor schools and a heavy police presence. Great Park residents noted that they too had racial encounters but downplayed the significance of these experiences as a way of negotiating the black-white boundary.

Structural Racism: Public School System

The Jamaican middle class respondents in this study, albeit reticent to identify instances of racism in their interpersonal experiences with whites, easily pointed to problems of structural racism... The urban Jamaican middle class were more likely than Great Park residents to note the structural racism they experienced through the local structure of schools and neighborhoods, which they deemed were inherently racist spaces. Timmy, a first generation middle class father of 5 children shares his frustrations with the school system in Cascades and frequently paints a picture of the police harassment in the neighborhood. Timmy works in a neighborhood real estate/tax center which is black-

Jamaican owned. Many of the businesses in Cascades are black owned and serve a predominately black clientele, several of which are restaurants, beauty salons/barbershops, real estate offices or multiservice companies.

In this space, Timmy paints a vivid picture of the racial inequality which characterizes the school system in the city versus the suburbs. A major problem in urban school systems, particularly in Cascades neighborhood is the presence of violence and police social control in predominately black and minority schools in New York City.

Timmy explains that compared to Cascades schools, those in Long Island suburbs are:

“Not that its better, it’s not crowded. Yeah it’s a better school, it’s not crowded. As you can see these schools now, they are patrolled like it’s a prison now. They gotta take off their shoes, their belt, and all sorts of things to get into school. That’s not, that’s not cool. That’s not a good learning environment for kids. I know that they do have bad kids but if you check all the record of all the shootings and stuff, it is in the white neighborhood. They still not putting a prison inside there. And all the security guards and all the cops, it doesn’t make sense. Come to Elmont, its smooth sailing for the kids, they got bus picking them up until they are at a certain age, so it’s good.”

Timmy comments on the racial inequality in the city-suburban response to school violence. He posits that white and black schools experience gun violence all the same. However, black schools are transformed into high security danger zones, while white schools are not. Timmy was also vocal about the ways in which Cascades, a black middle class neighborhood, was also heavily surveilled by cops. He, and several other respondents expressed frustration with the increased militarization of what they thought was a quiet and safe neighborhood. The increased presence of police traps in this middle class setting made many Jamaican residents who once saw Cascades as a “West Indian’s dream neighborhood” uncomfortable. Timmy recounted the harassment he experienced

from young white cops and was livid about the structural racial problems he encountered in Cascades.

“Yeah, too many white cops in a black neighborhood. Predominantly dominated by. Every time you look around you got these cops in the neighborhood setting speed traps and all of that and they are all white. And when you talk to them, they like you are talking to them aggressive and they being disrespectful and some of them are kids. You know, and they don’t give a crap and you get nothing for that. So. Well you do have crime in the neighborhood. But if you gonna get cops, get cops... they are doing a public duty and you cannot talk to them sometimes, they are so rude. They think you are talking to them aggressive. You have crime in every neighborhood. That doesn’t mean that you have crime in black neighborhood white neighborhood. When you do have cops and a man like me, stop me and saying don’t talk to me don’t do that. I don’t take that crap from nobody.”

Timmy echoed the concern that many Jamaicans and other black groups faced in the Cascades setting. Although Cascades Jamaicans lived in a middle class neighborhood, it was a residentially segregated space and suffered from many issues in which inner city schools faced such as increased police presence, crime, and poor schools. The socio-political order of New York and its relationship to space meant that whites controlled the educational and public service resources, leaving New York’s black communities in a difficult position.

While Jamaican immigrants identified the how racial exclusion plays out in their residentially segregated urban landscape, barriers to racial inclusion also characterized the experiences of Great Park residents. The political sphere emerged as an important space where racial boundaries were palpable by Jamaican immigrants. While the black political structure in New York City is a long established institution through which West Indian immigrants have expressed their political interest, New York suburbs in Nassau

County have a less developed black political structure. Few second generation Jamaican middle class residents noted their participation in the black political scene in Great Park. Many agreed that black representation was poor in this suburban context, where white residents often voted according to color, not politics. For example, Ariel, a second generation business manager, notes that while the Italians and Jews of yesterday were able to move out of the ghetto overtime, blacks continue to be relegated to ghetto spaces. For the blacks who are able to integrate into non-black suburban settings, racial boundaries hinder their social inclusion in that space. Ariel, a Jamaican immigrant explains that when she tried to join the political establishment of her suburban town, she was faced with challenging racial experiences. She shares the ways in which white were favored in the political world., Ariel had to prove that she was a credible candidate.

“The political runner up was white, and it was funny because all of our people were black. And she was never exposed to so many blacks in her life. I took her to the black church. She did not know what to do. She saw the little communion thing, and she thought it was, she was in awe. She had to take it home and show her friends. So it was culture shock for her, but she realized what nice people we were. You know and she was like, we prayed, we prayed a lot. And she was like, ‘oh all the prayers, all the prayers’. But it was amusing because she has no education. She’s a business woman that owns a restaurant down on the nautical mile. So it’s okay for her to run. I had to mention my credentials. She doesn’t have any. She might have gone and taken a class in Nassau, that’s it. But she’s respected. I had to prove myself. Then during the race her son, her drug addict son got arrested for breaking into houses, and it was all in the, everybody knew about it on that side, and it was kind of kept hush hush, but they were laughing about it. But they kind of didn’t go crazy, overboard with it in the race. But if it had been my drug addict son, that’s right. ... Yes. I was probably the more qualified candidate, but she’s one of them, you know. She knew the players, I didn’t know the players. But I wasn’t really involved in that end of things, you know. Right. So, but at work, I get along with white folks. You know, I have like one or two of them that I’m

close with. But do I invite them over here for functions, very rarely, so... Yes, they probably are at work.”

Ariel lost her campaign for the Democratic Party but plans to run for office again. She noted that whites who were democrats in Great Park voted republican because the democratic bill was black-dominated. She outlines the differential reception that her, her running mate and her opponent received because of race and racism. Because her running mate was white, she received much more lenience from the suburban community than Ariel would have. In Nassau County, the increase in black politicians has caused anxiety on the part of white residents who perceive the influx of minorities as the threat to the preexisting structure of white control over suburban politics.

Boundaries Erected: School Choice, Friendship and Romantic Partners

In the accounts of the lives of Jamaican middle class immigrants, the theme of setting up boundaries against the black racial group was consistently reported. This boundary erecting process highlighted that culture, loyalty and race were not wedded together, and as a result, tensions between blacks, regardless of ethnic background emerged. Jamaican middle class residents erected boundaries against other middle class blacks, lower class blacks and lower class Jamaicans.

Community Loyalty

Timmy shared that many blacks who live in Cascades prefer to go to a white/Jewish realtor outside of the neighborhood to sell their property, completely

bypassing the black real estate agents which are abundant throughout the Cascades commercial district.

Respondent: Everybody in the neighborhood uses the same supermarket down there, they use the gas station, they come to the meat shop, they do that. They are hanging on. We could do a lot better amongst ourselves, but. You see we have a real estate office here, you got one down there. And um, you find some of these owners when they tend to sell, they go in the white neighborhoods, find a real estate office in the white neighborhood they choose to go to. They don't want black people. That's a problem. Ya understand. We don't empower our own self. That's the problem.

Interviewer: Why do you think we don't empower ourselves?

Respondent: I don't know, it's a question everybody been asking. I don't know, I don't know why we don't. Ya understand. (Background co-worker responds: "I think its self-trust"). Cause a black neighborhood as you can see in America, the white man can put a store, any kind of store, the Chinese man can come and put a store in the black neighborhood. And we will still support it. But we cannot go to Staten Island and open a store. We cannot go to Garden City and open up a store. Much less we go buy a place. Because they do discriminate and they do it discreetly. Ya understand me...we try cater to them a lot, but that if they use this business. As I said, they will go to a Jewish company to sell their house. Or they will go to a Jewish person to get a mortgage from and all of that. I don't know if it's not confidence or what. They can flash them cash and they believe in them, understand me?

Timmy describes the racial boundaries that other blacks erect in their business behavior. This type of boundary work against blacks or "against one's people" is often deemed as an egregious violation of what some term 'black solidarity. Timmy erects moral boundaries against black clientele and residents of Cascades who are not loyal to their black owned businesses which make up much of Cascades' business district. Therefore, the racial boundary encountered in non-black neighborhoods and boundaries erected by black residents in black neighborhoods together impact the ability of small black businesses to succeed.

School Choices

Jamaican middle class immigrants were less active than African Americans in erecting racial boundaries between themselves and other racial groups. But, to Timmy's observations, they erect boundaries against all black environments, generally. Regardless of their residence in Cascades and Great Park, the Jamaican middle class believed that operating in strictly black environments was not preferred. This was made evident either by their school choices or residential preferences. For example, Mrs. Roberts, a Cascades resident in her 60s and first generation Jamaican immigrant, chooses to send her children to racially integrated private schools.

Interviewer: What do you think of your daughter's school's racial makeup? She said it's predominantly white.

Respondent: I think that is okay. I guess she is black African-American. She doesn't have to be in a predominantly African-American setting because, they have to mix, they are about to go out in the world and you have to learn to live with other people. You have to learn from now how to work with them. At least she's there now; predominantly White, so you know their likes and dislikes, you know how they behave and you know how to deal with them. I think that is good start for you, I think that is good, I don't think that there is anything wrong with that. As I always say if all these rich white people are putting their kids there, because from what I know they are lawyers, doctors, chiefs, it must be a pretty good school, so of course you want to take part in this good education. I see nothing wrong with it. At one point she wanted to go to Van Buren but I wasn't too impressed with that cause I see too many African-Americans and I always say where you have too many of them, you know something is going to go wrong. So I prefer her to be in a mixed environment. If it's a predominantly white at Mary Louis, but you still have your group of African-Americans, Indian, Chinese, a mix. So she is mixing with everybody.

Mrs. Roberts echoes the concerns of many Jamaican middle class parents who argue that all black schools will not provide their children with the education and cross-race interactional skillset needed for them to be successful. The precise interest of these middle class immigrant parents in passing on their class status to their children leads them to make choices which keep their children out of all black learning environments,

which they perceive as inferior and a threat to their child's development. For parents who do decide to send their children to all black schools, they ensure that these are charter schools, which are believed to have a stronger curriculum than public schools. Few participants in Cascades actually sent their children to the local public school, which have reputations for low test scores, gang violence and police presence. Like the African American middle class in Cascades, the Jamaican middle class in Cascades and Great Park erect boundaries against all black spaces.

Black-Black Boundaries: Parents Erect and Children Blur

One respondent's daughter demonstrated that a potential catch 22 can occur when parents separate their children from predominately black spaces: their children long for a deeper involvement with black life and culture. Robert, 2nd generation Jamaican immigrant in his early 60s and Great Park resident chose to send his daughter to an elite private school which was all white to ensure that she received a top-notch education and was exposed to social networks which would facilitate her social mobility. Robert is invested in his black identity and it serves as a motivator for his career and life purpose in improving the social condition of black neighborhoods. However, he chooses to send his daughter to an elite white high school for education. When his daughter, Maya, was deciding on colleges, she opted for Historically Black Colleges and Universities as options because of her experiences with racial alienation in her high school.

Respondent: She's a doctor now. She didn't want to go [to a majority college institution], she said daddy, 'mind if I pass.' She said, I've been kicking their ass for four years, I know I can kick their ass, but I don't want to go to school with them anymore. I want to go to school with my people. I want to feel community like they do. When they get off, they go

to their community, they do their things’, she said she ‘wanted to go where my people are.’

Interviewer: So where did she end up going?

Respondent: To Hampton University. I went to visit and she was mesmerized, you are no longer a resident, you are something from the sun, see the difference. What I mean by that is that, everybody down there has a little sun. All of those kids, their parents have a history with education, but they want them to know who they are.

Therefore, while some Jamaican middle class parents may erect boundaries against the black world, their children, sometimes choose to attend predominately black schools. We also saw this pattern among African American respondents who reported that black children in their social network opted out of attending majority universities after spending their adolescent and teenage life in predominately white schools. This is important for integration perspectives which note that, overtime; immigrants will integrate into the American mainstream. For few middle class Jamaican youth, who have the choice to attend majority colleges and social settings, they demonstrate that they find value in all black colleges and social circles, demonstrating an interest in blurring the boundary between themselves and black life which their parents had once erected.

Workplace/Friendships

As evidenced in the previous section on encountering racial boundaries, middle class Jamaicans operate in racial settings where they experience structural and interpersonal racism. As a result, few middle class Jamaicans note building social distance between themselves and whites. Experiences with micro-level discrimination, in particular, compelled Great Park resident Jamaicans such as Mrs. Graves to choose her friends at work wisely. Mrs. Graves notes that she has experienced severe levels of

discrimination which has forced her to feel more commonality and closeness with blacks than whites. She explains:

“... even at work, I tend to gravitate more to minority more than [whites] - - minority meaning, I have some of my co-workers that are white that I speak to and somebody came on board that is a minority, I get closer to that one. It's like you kind of identify more with the minority even though I have white friends.”

Mrs. Harper Lewis, a Great Park resident and first generation immigrant, notes that her relationships with white co-workers are constantly in question. There is an implicit lack of trust which discourages genuine relationships to form.

“I guess the reality is, you know I mean you know that the tensions are out there so – but you would never hear me say something derogatory because that's just not who I am. But I think in the back of my mind there is some kind of reservation because you know in reality what it is....I just don't feel, I don't know – I think because maybe the way they were brought up you know that there is some kind of tension with blacks. I mean unless they were the kind of person like me that would say 'okay you know, there's no problem with race'. You know you shouldn't look at the person's skin color. Then I don't know, I always just have that little question mark there but I don't let it affect me to the point that I'll talk to them and just live my life with them. But like I said I just think at the back of mind there's just that little question mark, is this for real?”

Barbara navigates the black-white boundary by evoking notions of interracial distrust.

Like other Jamaican middle class respondents, she reported that the actions of whites towards them is unpredictable.

Boundaries Blurred: Neighbors and Workplaces

Jamaican immigrants in Great Park and Cascades participated in significant racial boundary blurring. The problem of the color line places blacks, regardless of their class, at a disadvantaged position. Despite this marginalization, the autonomy and agency of

blacks to choose their social worlds or allegiances is palpable in today's society. As noted in the section on the racial discrimination that Jamaicans face in public settings, Jamaican immigrants clearly encounter differential treatment based on race. However, unlike African Americans, there were a significant number of Jamaican respondents who perceived racism in forgiving and often dismissive terms.

In Lacy's work, she notes that the African Americans do not seek full assimilation into white America. They seek to preserve their private social settings and organizational participation with black life in order to perpetuate their black identity in their lives as well as their children. For the majority of first generation middle class Jamaicans, however, they seek to blur the stark racial divisions between themselves and the white population more so than the second generation. Because the second generation Jamaican adults in this sample reside in the suburbs, and are less likely to blur boundaries between themselves and whites, it appears that those who lived in racially integrated settings confront and erect racial boundaries more often than those who reside in Cascades. Mr. Winter exemplifies this trend among the Jamaican middle class. Mr. Winter arrived in the United States as an adult and experienced a series of fortunate events which catapulted him into the American middle class. He currently lives in a pristine one family home in Great Park.

As Mr. Winter sat in his living room, with a Bluetooth in his ear and checked on his toddler daughter Madison, he explained that he chose not to identify with African Americans. He posited that they had "a chip on their shoulder" and that he didn't view whites with the type of angst that African Americans did. He states:

"And maybe that's why I don't identify myself as African-American because I don't have that chip on my shoulder. Back home we dealt with

our race thing back home from the 1600's man. We grew up as kids working with each other because it didn't mean anything to us. We didn't see it as a degrading term, it just means you are black. We didn't see the white man as an oppressor or anything like that, it was just somebody else.”

Mr. Winter notes that race is not a significant social distinction in Jamaica and adopts this same perspective in the United States. This racial ideology of blurring racial boundaries is a part of the Jamaican cultural tool kit, and is seemingly applied in the various social settings in which Jamaican middle class residents live their lives. Even in the face of incidents which could be deduced as racist in nature, respondents downplay the role of race and racism in their interactions with white co-workers and supervisors. This marks an interesting approach to racial antagonisms. This case was seen with Mrs. Commod, who blurred, instead of erected social boundaries against a white neighbor who was clearly discriminating against her and her family because they were black when they moved into the neighborhood.

Mr. Winter purported amicable relations with white teachers, bosses, and coworkers. If he experiences any form of stress or mistreatment, he attributed it to anything other than race and racism. In his interactions with younger whites, he chalks up their racism as being something to be ignored. Mr. Winter is an electrical engineer and has worked on US Marine ships. From his conversations with other crew members, the captain of his assigned ship was racist and uncooperative. However, when Mr. Winter came up on insubordination charges from someone senior to him, the captain was surprisingly accommodating and also later made exceptions for Mr. Winter's personal circumstances. Mr. Winter states:

“And the man who was supposed to be a racist, there was an exception to the rule, they know you are married, they know you have a family and kid, they have to use the discretion he said, don't worry buddy, by the time you get to the harbor way, everything will be sorted. I didn't even need a pass, I just walked off the ship. There was good trends, if something went wrong on the bridge, I came off watch I was in my rack sleeping and somebody came and woke me up Winter, and they say the communication system is not working, the Captain wants you on the bridge right now. Anything electrical in the bridge, he would send for me. That's why I said, I haven't seen racism yet. But on my second trip, I bought my own boom box. Probably that's why I don't identify myself as African-American. I don't want that chip on my shoulder.”

Mr. Winter builds ethnic boundaries between himself and African Americans as a way to blur racial boundaries between him and whites. He anticipated his captain to be racist, but believes that his captain's amicable treatment of him meant he was not the bigot that crew members had portrayed him to be. This is also the case in his work environment, where he dissolves any racial motivations as reasons for why his managers have mistreated him.

Mona, age 61, lives in a predominately black setting; however, she also interacts with whites in business and philanthropic endeavors which she participates in in white neighborhoods in Queens, New York. Mona, a Cascades resident and business owner, notes that she has amicable relationships with the whites that she interacts with. When asked if she experiences discrimination from whites, Mona explains that her tenure as a member of the Global Club was characterized by positive experiences with whites who she gave respect to and received it in return.

Respondent: “Cause I do come across, the fact that they cannot disrespect me cause I give it, so I get it back in return. For example, I belong to a group and there is mostly white folks in it. But, there is no discrimination, as a matter of fact, anything for me, they will do it.

Interviewer: What group is that?

Respondent: Rotary. It's a club, we have kids who are sick in their country and we bring them to the states to do open heart surgery.

Interviewer: Do you think that whites interact with you differently from African Americans. I suppose it's who you meet and what you are about.

Respondent: Like for example in that club, they give me a lot of business. I don't know if this is out of sympathy or what, I don't care (laugh), but they give me a lot of business. Anybody die, they make sure I am going to get the business, they refer their friends to me. I have for Christmas, this one guy give me \$2500 worth business to his customer...for some reason they really, for some reason, they try to pamper me because, when I go, I am a person that listens, that don't say a lot, so they cannot really, you know. And something will happen in the meeting and the president will come to me and say Mona, "Did you hear that, see that"? Cause they know that I am observant. I know what's going on. And if there is something he does I will just tell him on the phone that I didn't think it was right, ya know. And He'll say, "You know Mona, thanks for pointing it out." It's a nice group, I enjoy going there.

Mona repeatedly notes that she has positive experiences with white colleagues whom she works with for philanthropic endeavors. She notes that they are supportive of her and send her business referrals regularly. What is most interesting in the boundary blurring process is that Mona notes that she is almost like a silent participant, a quiet force in the group. Her opinions are respected by the group leaders, however, she does not express her opinions if not probed. This leads us to questions whether the positive treatment that Jamaicans encounter from whites is based on their quietness, calmness, docility, pliability. Therefore, relations with whites are less thorny, perhaps.

Norella, a single mother, notes that she has amicable relations with whites, primarily her mother's Irish employer. She notes having few non-black friends, but has experienced exceptional kindness from her mother's white employer. Norella shares:

Respondent: Yea, but my job is multicultural so and we all get along. Friends, African American, Anita is Jewish, I think of it I have a Cuba friend, white I'm trying to think. If they are my friend then they are my friend, they treat me okay, there's no faults or anything. I actually don't have that many white friends. Our white friends are my mom's boss but she's Irish. She's from Irish, she's Irish heritage. She's really nice to us,

to my mom at least, so she's nice to me too. If she's nice to momma she's nice to me too. She used to take care of her mom and her mom passed and it's just—when was she here last two weeks ago she came to take my mom, she had to go for—because I told her I did my citizenship so she can get her green card now she's doing her citizenship. So she came and she took, she went to pick up my mom because she's working with this other family now. She's taking care of this older woman and she went to get my mom and the other patient took her to her interview, and then took her for lunch. Yeah I went and she's inside, they come out the other door and I'm sitting there and I was just thinking how long does it take and he says not very long and he says by the way they don't come out this door. Oh great, so I go outside and I call her and say, because I have to turn my phone on to ask mom where are you. She leaves me a message I don't have to come anymore she's in the car with Peggy. I'm like but I'm inside, she said they are on some highway she doesn't know where. So they went out the other door so I didn't know where she went. Nice people really nice, and she's genuine but they are Irish heritage. I don't know if that counts as being white, they are white, white Irish. But they are nice and the one that she works now the son he is very nice too. I took her medication over there for her, they are nice. So I don't, but then there are only a few of them we've encountered. So I don't know for the rest of them how they would treat us but the ones that we've encountered are nice people and we are nice people too.”

Norella recounts the positive relations that her mother has with her white Irish employers.

Norella demonstrates that there is ethnoracial ambiguity when identifying who is “white” in New York’s multiethnic white community. However, the ways in which Norella speaks of positive interracial work relations between her, her mother and her mother’s superior demonstrates that there is a level of boundary blurring that Jamaican middle class respondents are experiencing, particularly those who are in “caring” industries and become a part of the private lives of New York’s well off white clientele.

In conclusion of this section on the racial consciousness of the Jamaican middle class, we find that there are important differences in the ways in which place and generation influence identity formation, practices and boundary work. In the next section,

we will discuss the ways in which class as an identity and boundary shape the Jamaican middle class in Cascades and Great Park.

Part II: Jamaican Class Consciousness

Transnational Class Identities and Mobility

Few would disagree that immigrants come to the United States for a better life. What we do not always understand are the mechanisms by which they arrived at a middle class status and the complexity of the experiences that they have once they arrive there. In the case of Jamaican middle class respondents, we learn that class identity and status is very fluid and mandates a transnational framework for full comprehension.

The Jamaican respondents I spoke to were different from African Americans because they had conceptions of race and class which were dynamic and cross- nationally derived. In their lived experience, they understood the American class stratification system through the lens of Jamaica, but were embedded in and actively commenting on the American social class system. Their aspirations, behaviors and identities were the result of the merging of these two national realities. While each respondent had arrived at a middle class status through education, homeownership, income, and/or cultural behaviors, they came from different class origins. Some were middle class rural residents, others were a part of suburban social elite and many were raised in the urban ghettos of Jamaica. Some had climbed the class ladder in Jamaica through education and social opportunity, and experienced class downward mobility upon arrival in the United States. This downward mobility preceded them garnering the credentials and income needed to join the American middle class. Others entered the United States through occupational

recruitment programs and immediately entered middle class professions upon arrival. Most were from the Jamaican urban working class and worked their way up the class ladder by working multiple jobs while attending college or vocational programs. The journey to the middle class and attaining the American dream for Jamaicans was varied, complex and transnationally defined and experienced.

First, as well as second, generation Jamaicans noted that poverty in Jamaica was exceptional compared to that of the United States, making class mobility more difficult in their home country as opposed to the United States. A major part of defining oneself as middle class is being able to say that one has left the poverty and deprivation of Jamaica behind them.

Middle Class Identity

Jamaican respondents defined being middle class in very strict terms: income. What income qualified someone as middle class ranged, however. Some posited that being middle class in New York required an annual household income of \$80,000 while the majority of others argued that one needed \$200,000 to live comfortably in New York City. Theo describes the complexity behind building price points for middle class status when the cost of living varies dramatically by location. Theo states:

“Oh yeah, sometimes, you can be upper class in some other parts of the country, with \$75,000. That is Great Park isn't that much. A typical cop makes about \$110,000. Typical in Long Island also make \$100,000 in the public schools. It is hard to get these jobs up there, you have to know somebody and be connected, teachers in Crosstown, they teach until they are like there for 40 years, they retire or... Yes, they never leave the job. It pays so well that it's the taxes are so high, in Brooklyn I am paying \$3,000 for a family home. Am paying so much more to live here than my investment property in the city. The point is middle class in Long Island is

tough. You have to have a household income of \$200,000 just to function, and that's just basic stuff.”

Several other respondents agreed that a six-figure salary was required in order to maintain a middle class lifestyle. This was the case both in Queens or Nassau, although Nassau had significantly higher property taxes.

“Close to \$200,000” –Mrs. Graves

“It has to be at least 150 grand men. To live comfortably and not worrying about the bills tomorrow morning, be able to drive a new car every six or eight years, put some money away to send the kids to college if they don't get a scholarship, it has to be. When you are thinking about taxes being \$10, 000 and your mortgage being another \$30,000 a year. There you go right there, it's a lot of money.” –Mr. Winter

Theo, like many other Great Park respondents, noted that property taxes are an exceptional financial burden on home-owning residents in Nassau County. As a result, Great park residents consistently provided a higher price point for being middle class than Cascades residents. This was most likely due to the large disparity in the suburban and urban tax regulation system. Due to this spatial disparity in taxation, the city-suburban boundary holds much significance in terms of status, access, and class segregation.

From this perspective, Great Park residents like Theo argue that the current criteria for “being middle class” is far too low:

“The parameters we have are so unrealistic for me. I don't know the figures, but I was teaching a school and the middle, middle class, and they are talking about \$40,000, \$50,000 for a household.”

However, some respondents did note relatively lower price points for defining one's entrance in the middle class. Interestingly, these were women who resided in multi-

generational households, and have incomes which are no higher than \$50,000, but who share household resources with mothers, or grown children.

“Middle class for me is you are not rich but also you are not poor. That's middle class for me...It depends if you have to pay mortgage, car loan or things like that. Some people make around \$40-\$60,000.” –Mrs. Winteron, 40 year old, Cascades resident

“A year, they would have to be earning at least \$50,000 a year, to be able to I think, own a house, do this, do that and go on vacation because it's not that easy. I don't know if that could do it, but I would think that's the least, to be comfortable and to be a middle class.” –Mrs. Commod, 53 year old, Great Park resident

The one exception in the sample was Robert, a second generation- 61 year old Great Park resident and retired police officer. Counter to the belief of other respondents, Robert argues that class, or middle class status is not defined by one's income and their purchasing power. He believes that one's social relationships are the definition of their class position and happiness.

Respondent: First of all I don't like class. Some people don't got money and they are richer than me. Because they are happy and they have a lot of friends, they go to church and they are a community. Especially us, who go to college, like the little lady says, “How long have you been going to college? And when you come back, I want to tell you the history I have in this little box”...because we forget, we have a tendency to fall into the identifications of who we are. Miseducation of a Negro.”

Robert notes that there are many middle class people who “have big houses, but nobody in them.” He finds little class, status or value in this lifestyle. He also posits that the black middle class, particularly those who go away to college to gain an education, return to the black community ignorant. They need to be educated by their elders on the importance of black history and the black community in their lives. This was a reoccurring theme in

the interview with Robert; the increase of one's income and status meant the erosion of social values and relationships, marking middle class status as potentially damaging to a person's social and relational being. One respondent, remarked that being middle is also about educational attainment, residential options and purchasing power.

“I mean like education probably. I don't know, I mean income does so many different things in terms of where you live and what you're able to purchase, how you eat you know, so.”

Also, Mr. Benedict, a 51 year old real estate manager and Great Park resident noted that being middle class is also about access and exposure to social and cultural activities.

“You know I think its income. I think it's there maybe something around just how you raise your kids. The opportunities you try to expose them too academically and athletically, in the arts, and you know you want to have—you want your kid to—but I also think even if you're poor you probably try to do very similar things too. ...So I don't know if that's—but we probably have more of an ability to do it. So the poor given the right chance or whatever would probably do the very same thing but we have more of the resources to put them in wherever or if they need extra this we can do it, if they need extra help and they need tutoring we could pay for it.”

Mr. Benedict believes that income, not values, are what separate the middle class from the lower class. He acknowledges that both low income and middle income parents want to provide opportunities for their children to succeed and experience intergenerational mobility. However, the middle class is better equipped financially to ensure that their children are involved in costly extracurricular activities and attend expensive private schools and clubs. Mr. Benedict and Barbara notes that an important part of being middle class is the ability to afford opportunities for growth and mobility that low income

individuals may not be able to afford. The investment in the social reproduction of middle class status for their children is a key definition of being middle class and practicing middle class status.

Being Middle Class

Mr. Benedict's emphasis on exposing his children to educational, athletics and the arts brought to bear the central actions that middle class people participate in: reproducing class status in their children. However, to what extent does the Jamaican middle class practice or perform their class status in this way? What are the behaviors and perceptions of the Jamaican middle class and do they match the class identities of the African American middle class. I find that belonging to the middle class is about what one does to achieve their incomes, how they decided to use their incomes, the types of neighborhoods one lives in, the quest for "good" schools for their children, and their participation in social groups which give back to local and global communities.

Working 9-5, 7-11, and Sometimes the Night Shift

Many first generation Jamaicans reported having to work two jobs to make ends meet, picking up extra shifts at work, or having "side hustles" which would bring more money into the household. The second generation, however, were more likely to have full time employment in higher level managerial occupations, worked one shift and sought economic strategies to increase their wealth, not just their incomes. The impression that I walked away with after the interviews was that Jamaican middle class entered the middle class through working multiple shifts or in different industries, not through one

occupation or working 9-5 shifts. This was made evident during fieldwork. When contacting parents to schedule interviews, their work schedules and availability varied greatly. Some parents worked the night shifts, others worked 12 hour days, while others worked two shifts a day to earn a living.

Unlike the typical notion of the American dream, the prospect of working one job, without overtime or other streams of income do not apply to Jamaicans and African Americans. They have to be willing to work in their area of specialty and sometimes another industry which is somewhat under their skill level in order to save money for their home's down payment, pay for their children's private school tuition or remit to family abroad or locally. Because the financial demands of leading a middle class lifestyle were so onerous, they pursued work which would help them maintain a middle class lifestyle in the states but also be a financial resource to loved ones and communities at home. Therefore, attainment of the middle class lifestyle or residence is less characterized by safety and financial security than uncertainty and a mandate to keep pace with their obligations, dreams and accompanied financial demands.

Movin on Up: Locational Attainment & Schools

One of the endless quests of the Jamaican middle class was to place their children in non-inner-city, predominately black, low resourced schools. The Jamaican middle class was on a constant quest for schools which were believed to be high performing educational institutions. They noted that their selection of neighborhood was often intrinsically tied to the quality of the schools, with one exception. Mrs. Graves, a first generation Great Park resident and mother of 2, notes that her and her husband purchased her home in Great

Park while living in the Bronx. She entered the United States as a working class Jamaican woman, but quickly moved up the class ladder with the support of her husband and her attainment of a Bachelors degree in nursing. As a person coming into the middle class, she was invested in sending her children to a school in a better school district. She notes that this aspiration would never be realized if she remained in the low income neighborhood of the Bronx.

“No, the thing about it, my husband was living in the Bronx when we came, we didn't want to live in the Bronx, we had plans. Because when I came it was just me and my son. But we had plans to bring him into a good neighborhood for school. So Bronx wasn't it.”

Like many other respondents, Mrs. Graves and her husband developed clear goals for class and spatial mobility upon arrival. They devised a plan to move from inner city, depressed neighborhoods in the Brooklyn or Bronx to residential/suburban areas such as Great Park in order to access a better life and better schools for their son. To them, although they were not quite middle class at the time of arrival, they participated in aspirations and behaviors which ultimately lead them into middle class neighborhood spaces, better schools and lifestyles.

Middle class aspirations are often shaped by the social construction of geographic space as “desirable”, “elite”, and “middle class.” Theo and others noted that they found the middle class lifestyle they were aspiring to in areas of Great Park, some of which have micro- pockets of elite area such as “The Park” and the “The Waterfront.” These spaces afforded residents a certain level of security, upper class style homes and access to schools which promised interaction between their children and children who were from families who “were just like us”. Theo moved to “The Waterfront”, an area on the

southernmost tip of Great Park, located in a high income, expensive real estate area off the water. Living in “The Waterfront” connotes a certain level of class mobility into a middle to upper middle class suburban enclave which is on the water and provided his children with better resources and a certain class of neighbors.

Interviewer: So could you tell me step by step how you ended up living in Crosstown?

Respondent: When I just finished grad school I came to the Bronx to work and after graduating from my doctorate, I got like a job in Brooklyn, so I was in Brooklyn for about five years, living and working and my children were very young then, that I heard about at that time, the school system in Great Park. I heard it was a very good school system, here at — the school system in Brooklyn was pretty rough, and the classroom was so large it wouldn't be a good environment for them...my primary interests were in the schools. Great Park Waterfront had a time before that, a park is on the street, a swimming pool, here they had culture over at the park during the summer time, there's a whole recreational thing that occurs all the time, for the children. So, we were looking to find an environment where the children can play outside and we don't have to worry about security and an environment where they could just strive, ride their bikes and they'd be safe without any kind of confinement.'

For Ariel, 50, belonging to the middle class meant being in a position to send your children to a good school. She believes that the schools in the Bronx would not serve her children well and found solace in the public schools in Great Park. Ariel resident in “The Park” section of Great Park, which at one time was predominately Jewish, but was the target of blockbusting in the 1970s and today is increasingly middle class black in composition. As a legacy of the racist school zoning laws, families who lived in “The Park” were zoned to a more desirable school than other Great Park residents. Ariel, too, believed that this access to a better school district made “The Park” a desirable place to live and exercise her middle class privilege. If she remained in the inner city, she would

try to shuffle her children into specialized schools such as Bronx Science or Brooklyn Tech. However, her exclusive access to a better school district met her desires for a prime education for her daughters (p.13).

“But Bronx schools, they have middle school and high school. I wouldn’t want my children to go there. And if I bordered Mount Vernon in the neighborhood that I wanted to, the north side, houses cost more. But everybody goes to the same school, I wouldn’t have been able to afford private school. So I said I didn’t want to go too far out, because it’s the same commute, and the surrounding towns, there’s New Rochelle, and I said I couldn’t afford that so, and Mt. Vernon’s out...And then of course I moved here because I wanted “The Park” school district, I didn’t want Great Park School District.”

Ariel touches on the strategies which many urban middle class parents adopt: move to the suburbs to access better schools or stay in place, but send your child to private school to avoid local public schools. The urban middle class were actively engaged in sending their children to local private schools or busing their children out to schools in middle class neighborhoods. Mrs. Roberts, too, was interested in a neighborhood which had a good school nearby and a church, and participated in urban public school aversion. Cascades housed a Catholic Church which both had religious and academic appeal for many Jamaican middle class parents. The presence of a well performing, discipline and morality focused school made neighborhoods more attractive and marketable.

“I wasn’t thinking about the playground nor park, I was just thinking about schools because there is one right down there and a church; Catholic Church. I wanted to live in a community where I go to the church. That was a plus. Then the neighbors two times we came we saw no one so we said “oh quiet neighborhood, neighbors mind their own business.” So we definitely wanted this. So basically the package was quiet; no neighbors, quiet, have a church and school; just what we wanted.”

Cascades and Great Park residents each noted that they chose their neighborhood because of its aesthetic value, neighbors and good schools. However, what is remarkable is the

stark difference in the ability of each of these neighborhoods to provide the middle class lifestyle its residents identify with. For example, Cascades has some of the lowest performing schools in the city. Mrs. Roberts remarks

“I am not too impressed with that school. My niece went there and if we were not working with my niece at home I think my niece would have not achieved anything because the teachers, they were not that good. There was one teacher they had, and she was all about herself; she would come in and be telling the kids when she was in school and when she was this. She would come in everyday and complain “Aunty, my teacher didn’t teach me anything today”. Up to this day I am still not impressed with that school because my neighbor’s little girl goes there and would say she doesn’t know what they’re doing in that school. So I thought that changed but it still... There’s only one high school and that is Magnet. I think they’re ok. I have met a few young people that have graduated from there. They said that is was a pretty good school, apart from the fact that the school has no control over what they do outside basically. But to me it seems to be an ok school and as I said those others are Catholic. So the school is good but just elementary school, I still have questions about it.”

Cascades residents were often times more impressed by the middle class character of the neighborhood and their neighbors, but lamented that the public schools were poor and undesirable. Therefore, Cascades residents set up strategies for shuffling their children to private schools or public schools in better performing districts.

In comparison to Cascades, Great Park has a better performing school district, and some Great Park residents even access adjacent school districts which are perceived to be less racially and class diverse and better performing. Although Great Park’s suburban school district is a better performing school district than that of Cascades, it is perceived as a subpar school compared to other predominately white Long Island schools.

Therefore, we see a difference in the ways in which place is socially constructed in the minds of Jamaican residents; it does not always correspond with their class identities.

Each neighborhood is middle class in terms of income and image, however, the quality of

the schools vary and Jamaican middle class residents attempt to navigate an extremely class and racially stratified New York school system where minorities, urban or suburban, receive the shorter end of the stick and have to negotiate their middle class aspirations and their children's futures within these constrained social systems.

The Jamaican middle class, unlike the African American middle class believe that the public schools in their neighborhoods are either satisfactory or underperforming. They often placed their children in private or catholic schools because they believed their children would receive a superior education. Therefore, despite the attainment of middle class status in relatively middle income neighborhoods, the Jamaican middle class perceived the schools as not reflecting the middle class character of their neighborhood and often sought to bypass the schools. Those who could not afford private school sought out alternative or charter schools for their children, which were perceived as better options than public schools.

Therefore, neighborhood public schools exemplify the disconnect between middle class attainment and educational resources for black middle class people. While the landscape, housing prices, middle income population, architecture, and civil society of their neighborhoods indicated that they were leading middle class lifestyles, the Jamaican middle class expressed disappointment and shock at the non-middle classness of their local public schools. This poor quality of schools (or perception of it) is a prime example of the disinvestment in minority urban and suburban neighborhood schools and Jamaican middle class parents are left with the task of learning how to navigate the racialized educational system in order to successfully transmit their class status to the next generation through a quality education.

Character of Place: Shared Values:

A part of being to the middle class is the sense of security and mobility over time.

Families in Cascades rarely sell their homes and are detailed about the type of person they eventually sell their homes to. This ensures that middle class blacks maintain a strong hold over who enters into the neighborhood. Timmy, a resident worker of Cascades who is involved with local real estate shares that Cascades is a family oriented environment and that homeowners shape the character of the neighborhood a great deal. Timmy describes that Cascades.

“You have a lot black American, West Indian, a lot a Spanish and all that. So, I don’t know if you know but Cambria Heights has been ranked one of the best kept black neighborhoods in America, (sucks teeth), in a New York. We have a, what do you call it, um, we have a chancellors community thing that they keep every year, where they meet every month and ting like dat. They give out the flyer and everybody is in the brochure and all of that. And they show us how they rank and all a dat. And most of the stuff is owned by black people so that is good...that’s the one thing about Cambria Heights. It’s not like Brooklyn or the Bronx where you have all people living in apartments and all of that. Cause these people around here, they don’t sell their houses like that, they pass it on to family. Houses are passed on from generation to generation. Unless they died out and they sell the place or they moving, totally migrate to somewhere. But they do pass on to family. So you don’t find that it is populated by strangers. Most people live with their family. A great neighborhood to move to, as I said its good family wise. This is a strong black family oriented neighborhood. There is not a lot a whoop la, there’s no, it’s not like you see people in Brooklyn coming out cursing, fighting and doing all these things, nah.”

Timmy notes that Cascades is a solid middle class neighborhood and, like many other respondents, uses Brooklyn (or the Bronx) as comparison points for demonstrating the middle class status of their area. Great Park residents, such as Robert on the other hand, noted that the neighborhood was a desirable middle class space because he states his

neighbors shared similar social values and want similar outcomes for their space and children. Robert, a 65 year old second generation immigrant, states:

“The values that I share, a lot of the neighbors share, I think it's a wonderful place to live.”

A measure of a neighborhood's class status is embedded in the level of social control and shared values experienced between residents. Although many Cascades residents noted that lower class residents and behaviors were threatening their middle class character of their neighborhood, they maintained that there was a strong investment on the part of homeowners to fight for the neighborhood. The relationship between neighbors, the existence of a strong civic association, participation of Jamaican middle class residents in these groups and informal processes, and the pursuit of neighborhoods and schools which will ensure the social mobility of their children help define this groups belonging to the middle class.

Class Boundaries

What type of class boundary work is the Jamaican middle class involved in?

Encountered: Career Choices, Taxation and Social Welfare Programs

The problems of racial discrimination impact the experience of Jamaican middle class respondents. In regards to economic mobility, many social, cultural and moral boundaries impeded their ability to move up in their work environment. However, the Jamaican middle class' strategies for navigating blocked mobility.

The first generation Jamaican middle class notes that, because they are black and foreign born, they experience high levels of discrimination on the job. They may receive the opportunity to work and earn a decent living, however, they experience significant

road blocks to moving up to managerial roles. As a result, many reported seeking careers in industries that were more “race-blind” in their hiring and promotion practices. Mrs. Graves, a first generation Great Park resident who has resided in the suburbs since arrival and worked for a Jewish company shares:

“What changed my mind to become a nurse was, while working at that company, they were bringing people from Israel. It was still another Jewish company. They were bringing people from Israel and they were asking me to teach these people and these people became my supervisors. And they were making a lot more money than I was. And if you complained about it, they would apace you by giving you a little raise. Maybe a dollar extra per hour, but they were making so much more money than you. That kind of discouraged me. I said I had to go and get something that was not going to be because of my race or whatever. Then I did my research and I spoke with people, in the medical profession it didn't matter your race, you could make money wherever you go, depends on your skill not just because you are -- .you may have some supervisors that may have problems with race but it wasn't the main issue. Whereas working in a Jewish community, they look out only for other Jews. It was myself and another Jamaican that was working there. It was the same revolving thing. They would bring people from Israel, you would teach them the work and they would end up being your supervisor. It was the same revolving thing, so I changed my mind and went. I was pregnant with this one here. So when I went on maternity leave I didn't go back. -- I went into the LPN programmed so I started when he was two.”

Mrs. Graves works in a niche occupation for black women: nursing or care taking careers. The ethnoracial boundaries she experienced working at a Jewish company led her to pursue a nursing career, where tests and exams were the measuring sticks for entrance and promotion in the profession This was the case for other Jamaicans who, instead of pursuing jobs in private and business industries, were attracted to jobs which were less hierarchical and therefore less subject to racism and mistreatment from managers and bosses. For the Jamaican, and overall West Indian immigrant population, the expansion of the service industry increased opportunity and their entrance into the

middle class. Mrs. Commod, for example, works as a housekeeper. She has made a good living out of this profession, since she works for upper class clientele in Nassau County's elite villages. She remarks

“People may say this and say that, but you can see I enjoy what I do. I don't like to have somebody over my shoulder talking down to me. People are kind of like...I go to work, I basically had to work by myself, I work and I leave, and that's the way I kind of like it. You know, it may sound...but that's just me. I'm just by myself, I do what I have to do and...Yes. The money is good and the hours are even better.”

The healthcare and service industry has facilitated the entrance of the Jamaicans into the middle class (Waters, 1999) in the same way that the public sector propelled African Americans into middle class after the Civil Rights Movement. These industries serve as spaces of “more equal opportunity” than the private- business sector. These strategic occupational choices help the Jamaican middle class bypass the boundaries and roadblocks which compromise their upward mobility and ability to stay in the middle class.

Upon arrival, immigrant groups have pre-conceived notions about how their lives in America will unfold. They see migrants return home, wearing expensive clothes and jewelry, buying up property and talking about their jobs. When they decide to come to the United States, they enter with these same expectations for their economic futures. However, the story of mobility for many Jamaicans is blocked mobility, with a couple of exceptions for people who entered the United States through recruitment programs in the fields of education and health. Theo notes that although he entered the US with a student visa and came from a middle class family in Jamaica, he was shocked by how difficult it was to move up the class ladder upon arrival in the United States.

“So it was a real shocker. When you grow up in Jamaica, the idea that sometimes that is propagated with the USA was a notion that America was a land of opportunity, money is on the street, you’ll get rich real fast, and there were many problems with life. Once you get here and discover that’s totally to the contrary, once you get here that there is a process that is brutal. But I think long term based on my internal desire, I was willing to apply myself and work hard. So, I learned very quickly that I wasn’t going to make it, although I had tried out to become a professional soccer player, I also recognized that there was a whole politic involved in trying to go that route and also was willing to face the line I was going to is a very vicious game. That went down, so I went to California and although I didn’t have the money — I mean to try out, so I decided to go the academic route and that made a big difference. So, the discipline you learn in sports and your academic hard work and you apply to your life in different ways and it can pay off but — and the illusion was quickly dismissed after a while that there is not gold on the street, and money in the street and everybody just dying to give you \$300,000 you know, but what you see via TV, via radio, in those who would go out and come back, they would come back with such glamour, you know, in the clothing, and the big radio, and the big gold on their neck. So, it’s like, ‘Wow, I can’t wait to go there.’... Yeah, but they weren’t very honest about how hard they had to work, and what they had to suffer and waking up in the snow, they weren’t honest about it....The illusion was quickly eroded.”

Theo notes the socioeconomic reality that the financial returns on migration are not as immediate or large as expected prior to migration. Other respondents reflect on the differential support that different ethnoracial groups receive in order to facilitate their entrance into the American middle class.

For example, many Jamaican middle class respondents noted that the American social welfare programs have historically bolstered the economic mobility of European immigrants, but black immigrants are systematically locked out of these opportunities, especially those who are in the middle class. Governmental loan subsidy programs facilitated the social mobility and suburbanization of 20th century Italian, Jewish and Irish immigrants. Jamaicans, aware of this trend, noted that these social mobility mechanisms

are unavailable to them, but European immigrants today continue to benefit from them. Therefore, Jamaican migrants understand that the American social welfare system can facilitate one's entrance into the middle class, but they see these mobility opportunities as being monopolized by white immigrants. Because of New York's multi-ethnoracial milieu, Jamaicans often work in environments where the whites are of Eastern and Southern European ancestry. Therefore, they interact with a specific segment of the white community. In interviews with many Jamaican respondents, they noted that they experienced significant discrimination from New York's population. Mrs. Roberts, for example, argues that Jewish immigrants receive exceptional favoritism as a group and even favor their group, to the detriment of Jamaican and other immigrant groups' economic mobility.

“My niece, she is working, gone to college for her Bachelors and Masters. She's ok now but initially she wanted some help. So she said ok she's going to apply for food stamps. She was in a part time job also getting not much money. She went to apply and they told her that in order for her to get the food stamps she has to be like in a school fulltime and she must not leave working. So she said to them “but I need help, I am in a good job but it's not giving me much, I need help in just getting by and I cannot go to school 5days in a week because if I go 5days in a week I won't have the money to take care of my rent”. They denied her based on the fact that she wasn't going to school 5days and she had a part-time job. And all she wanted they were not paying her rent, they only want to give her food stamps. I was looking at that and saying “I don't understand this”. There are other cultures like the Jews, because I work with them. There are the Polish people and I work with them as well and they get food stamps, they get housing, medical and everything but these people have businesses. And my niece was trying to make ends meet and they denied her just because she doesn't meet their criteria. It's an interesting place, opportunities for everybody they say but I don't think there is opportunity for everybody. I think there is opportunity for a selective group.”

As a result of this disparity in the ability to access opportunity, the Jamaican middle class notes being in a precarious position. They believe they have a strong work ethic, and do not oppose hard work. However, contrary to previous notions that West Indian immigrants build boundaries against people who use (or abuse) social welfare programs, I find that the Jamaican middle class express frustration with the unequal access to certain types of social welfare programs which would cushion their quest for savings and upward mobility.

In Great Park, a general concern among respondents was that the non-tax payers or renters in Great Park were benefitting but were not contributing to the tax base. Because the political economy of incorporated villages like Great Park (one section is not incorporated) they operate in a way where redistribution policy guides how tax money is used. This is a source of contention for some of the Jamaican middle class in Great Park, particularly because they cannot access the same programs that the lower class can because of their high incomes. For example, Mr. Winter's, a Great Park resident's main critique of his suburban village is that he pays exceptionally high taxes, but does not benefit from affordable social programs for his children which are offered by the village. Mr. Winter states:

“There is not much not to like really [about Great Park]. High cost of living, the taxes and all and they would have these initiatives, can we raise taxes to pay for this and that, it would always change because most of the people that vote yes, don't pay the taxes anyway. And like many programs they do here for the kids, Kyle and Madison would not go because we earn too much money, it's not available for them. There was a...that they tried getting in, and he got into it one year, because, the first year we tried, the reason why he got in, is somebody told Rachel it was done by family income and I think she just only used hers and that's how they got in. That's the one area I don't like.”

Because he encounters a boundary to accessing affordable social programs which would ease his financial obligations, Mr. Winter erects boundaries against the lower class. He places their “deservingness” into question. He posits that he pays taxes but has to create loop holes to benefit from the social programs which his tax dollars make possible.

Perhaps, other parents who are disinterested in social programs would not feel the same sense of resentment towards the lower class. However, because Mr. Winter would like to access affordable summer programs for his children, the availability of the programs for all becomes a contentious resource issue, leading Mr. Winter and others to decide who deserves access and who does not. Therefore, Mr. Winter erects boundaries against low income renter residents in his neighborhood as a strategy of navigating his blocked access to resource saving programs.

The Jamaican middle class expressed frustration that lower class, non-tax paying or white immigrant populations were given access to social programs and they were left to bare financial burdens on their own. While previous studies note that West Indians frown upon receiving aid from the state, we see here interesting opinions about the use of social welfare programs to facilitate one’s ability to become and stay middle class. They believed that they should have access to social programs because they too are law abiding tax payers and encounter a significant barrier to their social mobility which is not experienced by white immigrant. Mr. Winter, echoes this resentment and notes that his family creates strategies such as filing as a one parent as opposed to two parents household in order to access a resource which could lessen the financial burden he experiences as a middle class family.

Erected

Middle class Jamaicans erect class boundaries against lower class and middle class black groups. This boundary creation is not static across context and occurs in different social situations. The Jamaican middle class is involved in boundary blurring with the lower class, as will be discussed in the next section. However, they do erect class boundaries or create distinctions between themselves and the lower class when their interests and status (re) production are at stake. Boundaries are drawn against the lower class in previous and existing neighborhoods, lower class African Americans, lower class partners, and middle class African Americans who “assimilate” into suburbia.

Cascades residents, in particular, erected boundaries with lower class individuals who were entering their neighborhood. They posited that a “new class of people” were visibly eroding the middle class character of that space. Great Park residents, on the other hand, engage in a type of retrospective boundary building. Because the majority of Great Park Jamaicans lived in predominately urban and minority neighborhoods before they migrated to the suburbs, they were actively engaged in erecting social as well as spatial boundaries against inner city life and low income African Americans.

Mrs. Roberts, for example, notes that she enjoys the overall feel of the Cascades neighborhood. However, the increasing presence of lower class cultural signifiers such as men on the corner and heavy police presence compel her to erect boundaries against lower class residents who live and frequent Cascades.

“I don’t want to use the word ghetto, but it is too low with all the people hanging on the street, boys smoking and the frequent police visits. I don’t like that part of this area. Coming up businesses are ok. I have no problem people operating their own businesses. So that’s ok but come up and once you cross the library I am ok with that but just that part below the library I don’t like. That is the only drawback to my community.

.....Yes. Apart from the old residence; when I say old residence I mean the people that we came and saw; a lot of them seem to have moved out and the reason why is because some of the houses are not kept well as they were before. Some of them are new faces, young faces and not the common faces we used to see. Up to now, 7 years ago the neighborhood was very quiet but it has started to be noisy at times like having parties and so with that kind I guess new people; the older ones have sold it but it's still quiet just certain times; that festive time is when it gets noisy....Definitely. Like festive times we tend not to have a problem. It's not dead community or neighborhood but overall like right now you can hear we've been here all along; it's quiet."

Norella, too, posits that her neighbors are increasingly undermining the middle class atmosphere of Cascades:

"There are more things that I like than I don't like. Like some of my neighbors are monsters, sometimes two or three in the morning the music is so loud. The boys they hang out two doors down hang out all the time. So my kids, she puts her things in so she doesn't hear them when she is walking by... They are teenagers and the older ones that hang out, the father is I don't know, but there are older ones twenty years, twenty one, and twenty two, over there as well. But yea that's the only negative for me and for them other than that its fine."

Mrs. Roberts and Norella echo the sentiment of several Cascades residents. What distinguished Cascades residents from those in Great Park was that Great Park residents believed that they were able to escape the inner city culture by creating geographic distance between themselves and the city and lower class blacks by moving to the suburbs. Therefore, Great Park residents, too, erect social boundaries against low income blacks and minority neighborhoods, and use physical distance to solidify this separation from inner city, high crime, poorer areas in the Bronx and Brooklyn.

"I like the peace and quiet. I don't like where there is too much noise. And like raising kids, I don't like to raise my son in certain environments. You know like in the projects, we used to...all these boys standing on the corner and stuff like that, I don't like this stuff." --Mrs. Williamson, 40 year old.

“We didn't want Kyle to grow up in the Bronx... We have the experience of people breaking into our car and everything. She really wanted to get out, and we knew we wanted to get out of the Bronx... I guess probably it because of where we were, we were living in an apartment and... Looking back at it, I was only here for like five years and I could not deal with that. Noise and all that. You lived in an apartment and you don't know anybody. You saw them, but I couldn't tell you anything about one person in that apartment, I couldn't tell you a single name. You saw them and said hi and that was it. When we moved over here, I remember we moved in on a Sunday and by the Tuesday, Wednesday, all the neighbors were coming over. I mean, welcome to the neighborhood, if there is anything you wanted... you know. I remember when Madison was born, we didn't cook for that week when we took her home from the hospital. So it is totally different. After the first two weeks we met all the neighbors here. I knew their names after the first two weeks. Everybody's kids played together.” – Mr. Winter, a 46 year old

Great Park residents used their social and financial resources to create physical distance between themselves and lower class people and lifestyles in the inner cities of Brooklyn and the Bronx. They made constant references to their encounters with crimes, poor schools, loud neighbors, and unemployed men on street corners. They aspired for a home in the suburbs and gathered their resources in order to achieve this social and physical distance. The main goal of this boundary was to separate their children from these types of environments which they deemed as toxic. Cascades residents, on the other hand, live in a middle class area, located in the city. Because of Cascades' proximity to lower income neighborhoods, there is significant spill over. Also, the cache of Cascades as a middle class neighborhood has attracted many low income renters to the neighborhood, making it difficult for middle class homeowners to escape the lower class culture that they sought to leave behind by moving to Cascades.

Therefore, Great Park residents' are able to use their financial resources to live in an area which is largely protected from lower class residents, although that too is

changing in recent years with the recession and the increase in renter occupied units. Nonetheless, while Cascades residents erect class boundaries between themselves and lower class people present in their neighborhoods, Great Park residents are able to erect both social and spatial boundaries. The larger incomes or greater willingness to use their incomes to pay into an expensive taxation system makes this aversion and spatial boundary work possible.

Class Interactions at Work:

Some Jamaican middle class respondents noted that they interacted with lower class African Americans in particular in their workplaces. For middle class respondents who worked in governmental or service industries, this was popular. Norella, for example is a billing coordinator in a healthcare office in the predominately black Jamaica, Queens area. She notes that the clientele who come to her job are predominately low income and are on welfare. She remarks that they can be challenging to work with.

Interviewer: Do you interact with people who are lower classes, like people who are poor, or people who are very affluent and do they every treat you any certain way because of your class position?

Respondent: Poor no, the poorest ones I've really encountered are folks that have come to my job to bring their kids to therapy or foster kids or what not. Just people in general who are on welfare and maybe that's why they come in upset and mad all the time. Attitude, you'll get anything with attitude trust me, so maybe a little bit.

Norella notes that her interactions with lower class blacks who are on welfare at her work place are emotionally taxing. They come to her office for medical services and she notes that misunderstandings between staff and clients occur from time to time and are a source

of stress on the job. Norella believes that the reason why the lower class African Americans she interacts with are “upset and mad all the time” is because of their class position and economic depravity. Therefore, she erects social and cultural boundaries against this group and uses their class status to explain their behavioral patterns.

Other Jamaican respondents were engaged in using class status to explain the worldviews and behaviors of lower class blacks, most of the time framing the behaviors of the lower class as dysfunctional and problematic. Theo argues that lower class African Americans have particular attitudes and outlooks which he finds disturbing. Theo, an Ivy League educated psychologist has both a practice and church congregation to which he is the head pastor. He interacts with a low income African American, African, and Afro-Caribbean community in his church. He posits that low income African Americans are distinct from the poor in other Caribbean countries. Theo reflects that while the African Americans who are in the middle class are able to cope and manage racial boundaries, the African American poor are unable to recover from the historical and present day abuses of racism.

“My observation sometimes is that, there is a broken spirit amongst those that are poor in the African-Americans. I have seen poor around the world, Ghana, Nigeria, Jamaica, Haiti, I don't know, it could be the systematic racism, that has destroyed the internal spirit of the people, Jamaican, the poor have black doctors, black lawyers, so having those mentors surround you, gives you a sense of hope. Sometimes it's missing in the poor neighborhoods where the teachers are white. So they have the imagery that breaks the people's spirit.”

Although there was boundary blurring which occurred between the Jamaican middle class and lower class people, there remained significant moral boundaries being established against African American lower class people. Theo transnational comparison

of black poor people demonstrates that his conception of race and class are shaped by his immigrant origins and exposure to black low income people in other national contexts. He erects boundaries against African Americans. He believes that they are damaged by American system of racism and poverty, while the black poor in other nations still have a sense of dignity, pride and remain whole in the face of by systematic racism.

Other respondents discuss the African American lower class in stereotypical ways. They posit that they do not have the work ethic that immigrants do. Mr. Winter, repeatedly stated that he had little experience with racism and did not have a “chip on his shoulder” the same way African Americans do. He believes that if he was born in this country “he would be living in the Hamptons”, believes that lower class African Americans are getting by and do not take full advantage of what this country has to offer. Although he believes that the middle class African Americans he interacts with are “no nonsense” and have similar goals as him, lower class African Americans are not on the same page. He states:

“African-Americans, everybody is jealous of Jamaicans....Because we work so hard. A Jamaican back home, I remember when I was backing home, if I woke up in the morning and it was raining, I would not go to work man. When you come here and you look outside and it is 18" of snow, you have to go to work. And back home, a guy like me who would not go when it was raining, a guy like me would have three jobs, I would be working. African-American are not good at that.”

Mr. Winter goes on to signal solidarity and shared values between himself and middle class African American parents, therefore connoting that he is particularly referring to low income African Americans’ work ethic.

“The good thing about his (Kyle) friends, his team, all of them are, the parents are all of the same mind sets as we are. No nonsense, middle class

parents, hard-working people, his team is mixed. It's mainly African-American kids.”

Mr. Winter, therefore, believes that there is something particularly problematic among the lower class African American population and he erects social boundaries to signify his superiority and preparedness for navigating the American class system.

Some Jamaicans, however, build social and cultural boundaries against lower class blacks in general. Mr. Acorn, a second generation Great Park resident, too, perceives uneducated, street cultured-blacks as having little aspirations and hope for tomorrow. However, he doesn't make a distinction between African American and foreign born blacks. He believes that black youth in general are at risk of being left behind. He remarks that they have little chances of mobility and do not speak English well enough to have a chance at success. In discussing the progress and stagnation of the black community since the Civil Rights Movement, Mr. Acorn recounts a conversation that he had with a friend at church.

“Doctor Evansly... he wanted me to meet with these other gentleman and long story short, Evansly I seen him maybe two months later and he said Al remember when Jesse and I had to meet with them and he asked me that question he said, how many black men, males, do you think graduate high school in this country, percentage give me a percentage. I was like I don't know, I really didn't know and he said just take a guess and I think I said sixty five, seventy, he said no, he said forty two. So that means if you don't graduate from high school where you're destined to, you can't even get a manufacturing job if you don't have high school so what you going to go do Jail? You got your pants hanging off your body; you don't even speak the English language right. They can—I think some of them don't even know how to do what was that I think it was Ebonics, I mean some of them where they don't know you know the language of [0:54:43].”

Mr. Acorn erects boundaries among young lower class black men who he perceives as having no chance at social success in life. He makes remarks which signify cultural

boundaries of style and speech that are adopted which only exacerbate the inability of young black men to access economic mobility.

Interestingly, while the Jamaican middle class is actively engaged in erecting social and cultural boundaries against lower class blacks and African Americans, they also erected moral boundaries against blacks who “forget where they come from.”

Jamaicans both in Cascades and Great Park erect boundaries against other middle class blacks and/or Jamaicans who suburbanize and forget about the urban communities that they left behind. As was made apparent in previous paragraphs, Jamaicans participated in significant inter-metropolitan movement to outer city and suburban middle-income suburbs. Timmy, a first generation Cascades worker believes that the process of residential mobility is a prerequisite for racial separation and social distancing of blacks from their racial group. Therefore, the experience of class and spatial mobility allows them to leave the black community behind and culturally assimilate into middle class, suburban and/or white lifestyles.

“And that’s what tends to happen, say a man owns a house, have a good car, yeah and all of that, they feel like they have arrived but you haven’t. You understand me, that’s where we have the problem. That’s where we don’t empower each other. ‘Cause that man don’t turn around and try to help someone coming. You can’t save the world you know. Remember not every good you do is good, you understand me? I make it, I’m up there, I got two houses. I think I should be up there all the way in Long Island with those white people and think you are alright. No, I haven’t arrived. You should go back into your community and do stuff and help out. Remember, you can help so much, it’s not everybody, but you can help.”

Robert also reflects:

“They come a long way, as a people we’ve sort of forgotten who we are. Some times in many cases we are more like the other and we haven’t retained our own self...I was a police boss. I’m telling you I’ve been many places, so I’m standing here, full uniform, badge, shoulders, obviously in a white shirt not a blue shirt, and my people would walk right by me and

go to their Caucasian civilians and ask them, what's going on, what should they do. They would be why don't you ask the boss, he's right over there. So, it's something that's residual and that we retain, I don't know why. Many a time's as you climb the ladder, you are less likely, to -- you want to help, but you don't want to help them be with us. You thought that, if am making \$500,000 I don't want somebody who may be upward mobile to move into my area. So they got to go somewhere else to prove themselves.”

Timmy, Robert and several other respondents are active participants in their local and Jamaican community. They judge other blacks who enter into the middle class, but who use their income only to support their status and lifestyle. They believe one's entrance into the middle class should be used as a means to give back and return to the black community. Middle class blacks who relinquish social ties with the black community are judged harshly and are deemed morally compromised. The description that residential mobility into all white neighborhoods equates 'whitening' or a de-racialization process is not a new phenomenon, but an exceedingly interesting one given that racial boundaries in America will never allow blacks to assimilate into whiteness. However, white culture, politics and boundary work can be adopted by blacks, and these respondents are policing the boundaries of black middle classness so that blacks who achieve status do not leave their communities behind. Some Jamaican middle class people frown upon this assimilation and erect boundaries against middle class Jamaicans and blacks who do so in order to maintain a rhetoric of racial solidarity and reach back.

The Queen's English versus Patois

There were also tensions between middle class Jamaicans and lower class Jamaicans. This dynamic particularly emerged in the realm of language, and accents, where Jamaicans believed that lower class Jamaicans were too invested in performing

their 'Jamaicaness' or were so deeply entrenched in the "ghetto" that they could not shed the visible markers of their social class origins. Mrs. Graves reflects that accent retention can be a deliberate or uncontrollable process. Nonetheless, she erects boundaries against a woman whose accent signifies her ghetto origins

"I have a girl that I work with, that's really from the Ghetto, Jamaica. Sometimes even I have difficulty understanding what she says. And she doesn't change for anything. And I have sisters and my mom, my mom has been here like, she is going to be 80 and she came here in her 40's. She speaks the same, there's nothing changed. Some people don't want to change, some people put all the effort in changing who they are."

Mrs. Commod too shares her disdain for the ways in which some Jamaicans valorize patois, which is perceived to be the language of the lower class.

"They do the worst things, because they just want to be Jamaican. You just go there and you see them...they won't even speak properly. And I know you grow up in Jamaica, you go to school you speak English. You have to write English, you have to talk English because, even in my daughters time in school, nobody could write, Patois (00:31:49:10), we all could say it, she has never spoken Patois probably now, but we all could say it, but we couldn't write it. Now Jamaicans have mastered the art of Patois, in writing it. The average Jamaican, none of my kids can read Patois. You go on Facebook, they can read it, they have mastered, I have a neighbor and he has mastered Patois, in writing and speaking it and I don't know why...Patois is not a language, Patois is a dialect. It's just as you would say the Asians would speak Quail French. That's what it is, it's just Quail English, and we are not the only ones because sometimes you are watching the television and I see the Irish. To me, there language come across as some Jamaican language, it just has a different accent. Because growing up in Jamaica, I couldn't say to my brothers, 'Com here'. Meaning come here, I could not...Because it was not accepted by our parents. That was, we were supposed to speak English. You say to someone, 'Com here' it means you are upset. Americans you call them and they will say to you 'what?' That's taboo in Jamaica, somebody calls you and you say what, that means you are irritated with the person, you are upset, so you'll say 'what?' You are upset, you have to say yes, because that is how it is. What is asking a question, it's not an answer."

The Jamaican middle class engages with multiple types of boundary work, social, cultural and moral with multiple types of groups such as middle class blacks, lower class African Americans and lower class Jamaicans.

Boundary Blurring

Roughly half of the sample of Jamaican middle class respondents participated in blurring class boundaries between themselves and lower class individuals. The Jamaican middle class in this study, particularly those who are first generation are a special group because they actively participated in erasing the boundaries between themselves and individuals who were less fortunate than they were. Although some identified themselves as being poor or working class (jokingly or facetiously), they had middle income salaries and lived in some of New York's most desired residential neighborhoods. Therefore, although they reluctantly identified as being a part of the middle class, their material possessions, income and education indicated otherwise.

However, despite their consumption patterns and income, they worked hard (more so than African Americans) to demonstrate a level of humility in their interpersonal interactions with individuals of lower income. Mrs. Roberts exhibits that she sympathizes with the lower class individuals in which she comes in contact with. She curtails her style of dress and consumption patterns in order to take attention away from her class status and portray herself as a status equal.

“The difference is I don't spit in their face, I don't do that. I am not a flashy person. I don't go shopping to Macy's and buy \$50 blouses and \$100 sneakers. I don't do that. I go to Kohl's they have my size or if it is a comfortable fit, I will shop at my favorite store; Kohl's. People say that Kohl's is expensive but I go there when they have a sale. So when I'm mixing with the people from the low income level, I try not to be or don't

present myself as a better dresser. I don't present myself as more financially able. I am down there with you, I understand. You would say that if say "let's go to a movie, oh it's ok I will pay today and you can buy refreshments" you know stuff like that. I try not to make it look like I am better than you. I take you to the movie, I buy refreshments; "where do you want to eat do you want to eat? Red Lobster or Burger King?" or we go to any restaurant so I mix with them. They don't treat me differently."

Mrs. Roberts is conscious of class differences between herself and people who earn less than her. She strategically interacts with them in a way which does not signal her class or status, easing any potential interclass tensions. She curtails her tastes so that she may lessen the gap between herself and people who have less than her. Like many other Jamaican respondents, Mrs. Roberts is aware of how she might be perceived by the lower class and that she might make them uncomfortable with her status. Therefore, she avoids social friction by being modest and adopting what she perceives as moderate, less flashy consumption patterns.

While Mrs. Roberts ascribes to a lower class or working class identity, Ariel is the complete opposite. Ariel, too, claims that she actively lessens the class boundaries between herself and lower class blacks in which she interacts with in church. Like African Americans, the Jamaican middle class in Great Park interact with the lower class in predominately black churches outside of their neighborhoods. Ariel, in her interactions with the lower class, however, she does not actively conceal symbols of her class status. While Mrs. Roberts may not be interested in high end clothing and five star restaurants, Ariel believes that these consumption patterns are an important part of her everyday life. Therefore, her interest in blurring boundaries between herself and the lower class are often undermined because her status is often reflected in the cars that she drives and the clothes that she wears.

Respondent: “I would say now it seems like we’re, I’m becoming more middle middle class. But I would have said I was upper middle class. Like in my church a lot of people are lower income and they think I’m rich. I’m like look, I get up and go to work every day. I’ve got to pay the mortgage just like you. It just so happens that I have a better education, so I have a higher paying job than you do. So... Yes, I mean, but you know I have this house. I drive, I’ve driven several cars. When I came here I had a beamer, you know and they think all of that stuff is status. And my kids went to college. I worked very hard with these kids to go to college with some of them you know. My mother and father never went to college either, so what makes me any different. But because I went to college, and they didn’t meaning that these parents, they didn’t. They look up to me for that, so I helped their kids with the whole college thing like we were talking about.

Interviewer: Do you feel like they ever judge you, like as the rich lady, she thinks she’s better?

Respondent: Yes, I do feel that, because they’re always watching what I do. That could be because I’m a leader in the church. But even before I was in the ministry, they were always watching what I do and that always used to bother me. Because I’m like, you know what are you all talking about me for per say? Not that they’re talking about me that I can hear, but I know people watch what I do, but you can just sense it. Like, I bought a new car. I don’t see any problem, what was wrong with the old one? You know that kind of thing.

Ariel explains that she comes from humble beginnings and her parents were not educated and that she struggled to pass on the value of education to her own children. She interacts with the lower class in her church and tries to blur the boundaries between herself and them with this narrative. However, Ariel’s self-description and her status behaviors are often seen as contradictory. Ariel shares that she changes her car from one luxury brand to another year to year. She is flamboyant in terms of material possessions. Less fortunate people who she interacts with, perhaps, believe that her efforts to portray herself as a being on the same level as lower class people that she interacts with is disingenuous.

Many Jamaican middle class respondents reported that they were first generation middle class people, and therefore, understood the plight of lower income or working class blacks. As immigrants, many of them came to the US with little resources and strived for opportunities to become economically mobile. Similar to the typical Jamaican stereotype which was made popular by the television show “In Living Color”, many Jamaican respondents stated that they were poor upon arrival and had to work (many of whom still do) several jobs in order to enter the middle class. Mrs. Graves, a 49 year old nurse and Great Park resident shares her experience and understanding of social mobility and financial responsibility.

“I have a lot of people that I work with, that's technicians that make less than half of what I make. And there are people that clean the floor, some Spanish people that make really minimal amount. And it's the same cycle, they work and they send money back home to their wives or whatever and they work two or three jobs. When I started as a nurse, I never worked one job. Even when I was going to school, I worked full time. And I never had one job. I used to, even as a nurse, I worked in the nursing home and on my day off, I would work somewhere else, it was never like one job. I had to pay the bills, I had a dream and I had investments and I wanted to buy certain properties that when my kids came of age I could sell those properties and pay for their school fees. And then the market turned around. It's like I have all these upside down properties that I am struggling with. And you cannot sell it because you owe the mortgage that's bigger than the property value. It's crazy and I tell them, you can have plans, you are better off having some plan but that don't mean that's it's going to work. Things change.”

Mrs. Graves notes that she is hardly staying afloat with her bills and that she interacts with lower class people who are in a much less fortunate position than she is. She has had multiple jobs in order to buy into her suburban neighborhood and large home. Her aspirations and work ethic, she believes, are emulated by another immigrant group, Latinos. Mrs. Roberts posits that she and Latinos have a strong similarity, because they

work menial jobs in order to support their families here and back home. She sympathizes with their position and blurs the class boundaries between herself and this group because she constructs herself as someone who is “newly” middle class, with symbolic connections with the immigrant/striver experience.

The Great Recession also shaped the ways in which the Jamaican middle class constructed their class identities in relation to the people from below. Many respondents noted that the boundaries around being middle class were thinning, and many people who were once staunch middle class residents, were descending the class ladder quickly because of job losses and high foreclosure rates. For example, Theo’s posits that, although he may be middle class, he like many others are one paycheck away from difficult financial situations. He blurs boundaries between himself and lower class people who may think that he is out of touch.

Interviewer: What are your interactions with people who are in the working class and poor? I’m wondering how they interact with you, like do they see you and go, oh there’s Theo, who lives in the harbor, is there any issues with jealousy and competition and....

Respondent: In my country, sometimes people make comments about that, oh he is rich because you drive a BMW, but I never heard people say privately, they perception that I am rich, but near where I work, I touch people’s lives, but there will definitely be a perception that he is rich but agonizing after it doesn’t help. You feel like you are out of touch.

Interviewer: Do you think that that is true?

Respondent: The truth is, most of us, most people are one paycheck away from corrupt, in the harbor there are houses on foreclosure, ask her she will tell you. And this are folks who came and bought those houses for like \$600,000, then the houses dropped, they bought them at \$600,000 and sell them at \$350,000.

Interviewer: Do you ever meet anyone who challenges your authenticity because you are black and you have the income and live where you do?

Respondent: Not to my face, that he doesn’t know what it means to be hungry, to struggle, not to my face, that’s a conversation that

can be had behind my back, once in a while, I interact with young people,

The current economic climate has created a milieu in which the boundaries between the middle class, particularly the lower middle class, are blurring with low income Americans. For blacks in particular, regardless of their ethnic origin, the foreclosure crisis undercut their ability to build wealth in homeowner assets and major job cuts across public and private sectors set many at a disadvantage. Therefore, the Jamaican middle class has been sensitive to this turbulent socioeconomic milieu and continue to construct their identities and social relationships with lower class blacks accordingly. In conjunction with building moral and cultural boundaries against the lower class, the Jamaican middle class also actively engaged in lessening the class boundaries between themselves and the lower class because they were sensitive to the financial insecurity that was a part of their past experiences in Jamaica and upon arrival in the United States, but also acutely aware of the financial uncertainty which haunts their middle class aspirations.

Conclusion

The Jamaican middle class is a social group which operates at the intersections of race, ethnicity and class. Previous work on the West Indian and Jamaican middle class finds that they have distinctive identities compared to the lower class and African Americans. This chapter has provided a snapshot of the Jamaican experience and contributes to the conversation about the Jamaican middle class. We have taken into account the ways in which generation, residential context, and urban v suburban space matter to racial and class identity formation. Furthermore, using the framework of being and belonging, we

were able to unpack the ways in which Jamaicans talk about their identities, and how their behaviors and practices reflect or contradict their identities.

Jamaican immigrants have been of interest to scholars because, like other West Indians, their social group straddles two group identities. They are both a racial group and an ethnic group. In the post 1965 era of mass immigration, they have been at the center of academic and policy debates over the structural versus cultural explanation for their perceived social success compared to African Americans (Sowell 1978; Model 2008). They have also been used in academic conversations to understand whether Jamaicans or West Indians in general constitute a viable social group by which political interests can advocate for this group's interests (Kasinitz, 1992, Rogers, 2006).

This chapter hopes to make a contribution to the existing literature on Jamaican immigrants by delving into the ways in which this transnational group is becoming American, and particularly African American middle class people. Their entrance into the American mainstream will be as minorities. Albeit their economic mobility, they encounter race and racism in the United States in similar ways that African Americans do. For those who achieve middle class status, they are introduced into increased interactions with the white world, which for African Americans, has meant significant social and psychological problems around identity, racial belonging, racial loyalty and aspirations. In this chapter, we find that the Jamaican middle class is becoming like the African American middle class in some ways, but have a unique process of social incorporation which is particular to their group.

In terms of race, the Jamaican middle class is distinct from African Americans because their notions of race and class are embedded in their experiences in the

homeland. Waters notes that West Indians come from post-colonial societies which have different ethnic and racial structures than the United States. Similar to Waters findings, Jamaican middle class immigrants purport that a process of racial learning, or in this study learning their “blackness” was a large part of their adjustment in the United States. They purported that class, not race, was the most important faultline in the Jamaican context. However, Jamaican respondents noted also being shocked by the realities of white poverty and acknowledged that Jamaica’s racial and class structure were deeply intertwined, whereby whites lived in segregated residential spaces and blacks often only interacted with whites as their servants or workers.

The first generation respondents were more likely to exhibit these anxieties about the national differences in race and class structures. This makes sense, primarily because the second generation adult population grew up in the United States and developed a racial consciousness primarily in the United States. As a result, we find that the first generation respondents identified as black, while the second generation was more involved in being and belonging to black life. What I mean by this is that the first generation, reluctant to acquiesce to notions of black inferiority, but understood that they are black persons of African descent and identify themselves as black on formal applications. However, the second generation is more invested and prideful in their black identity, and see it as more than a box that one checks on formal applications. They see it as a motivator, a cornerstone of their identity which shapes their political agendas and occupational choices.

The Jamaican middle class is also involved in significant racial boundary work. They, more so than African Americans, are engaged in blurring boundaries between

themselves and whites. However, they are also invested in blurring boundaries between themselves and lower class individuals more so than African Americans. In general, the Jamaican middle class encounters interpersonal racism from white and Latino neighbors and shopping centers. Cascades residents, were more so acutely aware of poor relations with Latinos and were also attuned to the structural racism which was embedded in the quality of black schools and black neighbors. A reoccurring problem was the increased presence of “white police in a black neighborhood”, from which the men in the Cascades sample referred to repeatedly as being a part of the city’s racist structure. This boded true, particularly since during my fieldwork in Cascades, high ranking government officials who lived in Cascades were condemning the NYPD from stopping and frisking them without probable cause as they drove home from work in government vehicles.

Therefore, the lived experience of being in Cascades for Jamaican residents, particularly men, is one where racial encounters in a black community are characterized by black white power relations between black citizens and white officers. The poor quality of the public schools which are predominately black, also reflect to the Jamaican middle class that their status as a black population means lesser resource access and public services than less black neighborhoods. Therefore, Cascades residents are more acutely vexed by systematic racism which manifests in their everyday lived experience. Great Park residents are more likely to note the structural racism they experience from institutions such as universities and workplaces. Their exposure to more elite and predominately white institutions, but lack of hostility experience with whites in their neighborhood context likely contributes to this spatial difference.

The lack of consciousness of interpersonal and structural racism in the Great Park neighborhood is a stark contrast from Great Park African Americans, who repeatedly noted that their white neighbors were socially distant from them. However, this wasn't due to the absence of interpersonal racism from white neighbors. It was due to the decreased levels of angst or retribution towards white neighbors who exhibited racism. The one exception was a Great Park resident who has lived in predominately white suburbs and experience significant discrimination from her white neighbors since she was a resident there. Therefore, we also note that time of arrival and the racial context of the original place of settlement plays in how the Jamaican middle class in Great Park experience, interpret and react to race and racism in their immediate residential contexts.

The Jamaican middle class was also invested in erecting racial boundaries against all black environments, particularly in the case of their children. Like the African American middle class, they believed that less black environments were more equipped to provide their children with the social and educational resources they needed in order to succeed and to transmit their class status. An interesting pattern emerged between the children of African American and Jamaican youth whose parents sent them to predominately white public or elite private schools. The youth, when ready to make choices about their college experience, sometimes decided that they would avoid majority institutions in the interest of blurring boundaries between themselves and blacks. Some respondent's children decided to attend historically black colleges and universities in order to connect with their black identity and community.

In addition, the Jamaican middle class, although interested in exposing children to interracial worlds and environments, believed that a level of racial solidarity was in order

for blacks. This was an interesting finding, precisely because it speaks to Lacy's finding that black-African Americans do not seek full assimilation and are interested in maintaining ties to the black community, even when they move up the class ladder. Furthermore, some respondents noted that they erected moral boundaries against whites in their workplace, whom they deemed as untrustworthy and unpredictable.

The section of boundary blurring provides a glimpse into the multifaceted nature of the Jamaican middle class racial consciousness. Despite the levels of racial encounters with racism and some instances of questioning blocked mobility, many Jamaican middle class respondents were reticent to note that they were the victims of interpersonal racism or were very forgiving of people who treated them poorly on the basis of their skin color. They were more actively engaged in blurring their racial boundaries between themselves and whites than they were invested in creating distance from them. One strategy for doing this, which is now general knowledge in sociology, is that they erect boundaries between themselves and African Americans, as a way to demonstrate that they "don't have a chip on their shoulder" and could therefore, get along easier with whites. This is interesting, particularly since the existing body of knowledge focuses on the preferences for black immigrants over black native born in work environments. Whether the perception has become a reality or vice versa, there is an important dialogue occurring between the Jamaican middle class about how whites perceives black ethnic groups, and the message that they continue to receive is that they are preferred, and use African Americans as a stepping stone in their acceptance process. This level of boundary blurring was more likely to occur among first generation respondents, mainly those in

Great Park, demonstrating the importance of generation and place in the racial identities, beliefs and practices of the Jamaican middle class.

Although the Jamaican middle class discussed their racial and class identities as being intertwined in certain circumstances, they also have distinct class identities which shaped their interactions with middle class blacks, and lower class blacks, Latinos and Jamaicans. Although previous studies have examined the differences in racial and ethnic experiences across class for Jamaican immigrants, this is the first study, to my knowledge which exclusively focuses on the class identities, practices and boundary work of this sizeable population.

To be middle class in America is a loosely defined concept. Recent scholars have pointed out that there are different types of middle class: lower, middle and upper middle class. Each of these classes are believed to have distinct identities, particularly because the financial status and opportunities afforded to them shape how they see themselves in relation to others in the stratification system. Also, their jobs, income and status groups all influence who they are and what they do.

It is important to note that the Jamaican middle class sample, particularly the first generation, did not fit the typical model of a middle class American. Unlike the notion that a middle class person has a 9-5 job, lives in a single family household with their immediate family members, and worked in a certain type of industry did not emerge in the Jamaican experience. Many first generation Jamaicans noted that they worked several jobs, worked opposite shifts from their spouses, and were involved in “side hustles” where they found ways to bring in extra streams of income by working retail, when they were nurses, for example. The first generation was also had financial obligations in the

United States and at home. Therefore, their class identities were embedded in two stratification systems which have different standards for who is middle class.

These findings have interesting implications for the future of race relations. First, a shared black identity formed through repeated encounters with racism in the United States can be used as a point to rally a black political identity and continue a movement for racial equality. However, the variety of attachments to black identity also demonstrates that racial identity and attachment for middle class Jamaicans is a mixed bag and that racism is a motivator for unity among black ethnics who have different notions about how important race is and/or should be in their everyday lives. The inclusion of the perspectives of second generation middle class adults allows us to see the importance of generation and time in the US in this process of racial identity formation. Also, the immigrant replenishment of black foreigners may continue to introduce migrants in the United States who have transnational ideas about how race should operate. This will cause variation in how these ethnic groups conceive of their racial consciousness and mobilize as a racial group.

Through in depth discussions and analysis of the ways in which the Jamaican middle class thinks about race, we find that generation, space and time of arrival in the United States matters for the strength of the black identity. However, few respondents expressed racial pride (most likely the second generation) as the majority of respondent's formed their racial identities when encountering racial boundaries in the context of the United States. An interesting outlier was a first generation immigrant who was exposed to racial boundaries early in her time in the United States, and formed a strong black identity as a means of connecting to the collective black group in the United States.

In terms of class, the Jamaican middle class overall posited that to be middle class in New York required a family of four to earn at least \$150,000 per household. Other Jamaican immigrants, particularly those who lived in female, multigenerational households were likely to provide much lower price points for qualifying as middle class. It is possible that, because in multigenerational households it is likely that individual earnings are less shared than say in a two-partner-married household, these respondents were answering the question based on their individual earnings and financial obligations as opposed to the entire households.

The Jamaican middle class practiced their class identities through the passionate quest for quality schools for their children and neighborhoods which had a strong middle class character. They stated that they made choices about living in Cascades or in Great Park because they were invested in finding a neighborhood where their neighbors shared their same values, but also were in close proximity to well performing schools. Great Park residents were more so able to create social as well physical distance between themselves and what they perceived to be the problems of the inner city. Cascades residents, however, lived in close proximity to urban poverty, crime, poor schools, and could only erect social or symbolic boundaries between themselves and the challenging aspects of life in a major city.

Respondents in Cascades and Great Park reported experiencing significant class barriers to maintaining or improving their middle class lifestyle. Many first generation respondents shared that upon arrival they aspired to work in an industry, for example business, which was hostile to immigrants and blacks in general. They noted that there were significant barriers to their upward mobility in these careers. They then adjusted

their aspirations, and moved into niche service fields for blacks, particularly black women: nursing and caring careers. Several of the first generation respondents in particular worked in the healthcare or education industry, which they deemed to be more race blind in the hiring and promotion process, which has allowed them to live the middle class lifestyle that they aspired to.

Some respondents also reported that the taxation and social welfare system was inherently biased in favor of white immigrants. They, despite their equal earnings to middle class blacks were able to access social programs such as food stamps which made their ability to maintain their status as middle class easier. The question of social welfare programs and deservingness also shaped the boundaries Jamaicans erected with lower class, non-taxpayers in Great Park. Respondents noted that, although they paid into the tax system, non-tax payers were given access to summer programs while the middle class was locked out. They, therefore, were building moral boundaries between themselves and the lower class in order to portray themselves as deserving and the lower class renters as undeserving of access.

Cascades residents, on the other hand, erected cultural boundaries between themselves and lower class residents and behaviors which were occurring in the neighborhood. Like African Americans in Cascades, they were discouraged by the increased presence of men on street corners, loud music and neighbors who did not share the same values as they. Jamaicans noted that they lived in a black neighborhood where owners almost never sold their homes, or sold only to other blacks in order to maintain the image of the neighborhood. As they valorized middle class symbols, architecture and mores, they also deplored the perceived low aspirations of black youth. They expressed

frustration with the younger generation who adopted “street”, “hood” or “ghetto” lifestyles and did not finish their schooling. Lastly, the Jamaican middle class erected boundaries with patois speakers, who they often deemed as not speaking the “Queens’ English” and were treating a dialect like a language. Implicit in this point of view of many first generation respondents was social class boundary, where the lower class spoke patois and the middle class enforced speaking “proper” or “English-English.” This too, is relative, because one respondent noted that even Americans do not speak proper English and she had to adjust to the American version of English here in the states, which was frowned upon as low-brow and unsophisticated.

Lastly, the Jamaican middle class, despite their perceptions and social distancing from the lower class, also made real attempts to blur the boundaries between themselves and the lower class. Several first and some second generation respondents noted that they came from poor families and worked their way up the class ladder through education and financial investments. They noted that in Jamaica, they interacted with people who were less fortunate and more fortunate than they, and they made an effort never to emphasize these class differences. They carried this attitude to the US, and even as they moved up the class ladder, they attempted to maintain modest lifestyles in some ways, but expressed their status through things such as luxury cars and expensive clothing. Nonetheless, there was a consciousness that the plight of the lower class was not very different from their own. The Great Recession and foreclosure crisis created exceptional levels of anxiety for the Jamaican middle class, and they often expressed that although they were able to ascend the class ladder, their financial futures were unclear. In this unstable urban and suburban terrain, the Jamaican middle class is negotiating their place

in the American mainstream. A great deal of uncertainty remains about their futures.

However, currently, the second generation demonstrates interesting patterns of economic integration and limited sociocultural assimilation while the first generation continues to learn their place and status in the racial and class stratification system.

Chapter 6: The Racial and Class Identities of the Haitian Middle Class

Introduction

The black Haitian middle class is an ethnoracial group which we know little about. The scholarship of Flore Zephir and Michele Laguerre, provides a glimpse into the demographic reality that there is a Haitian middle class, yet it is uncertain how they manage racial and class boundaries in everyday life and if and how they might be similar or different from the African American and Jamaican middle class. This chapter attempts to elucidate how racial exclusion and economic mobility are managed and negotiated by an understudied Haitian middle class ethnic groups in urban and suburban spaces.

I analyze how the Haitian middle class conceive of their identities, belonging and boundary work as it relates to race and class. In previous chapters, I provided findings on how the African American and Jamaican middle class identify as black and middle class versus the ways in which they say they practice these identities in everyday life. I use the term Haitian to describe a person were either born in Haiti and migrated to the United States, or born in the U.S. to Haitian immigrant parents. Haitians will be analyzed in the larger framework of black immigrants in the interest of examining the ways in which they are similar or different from the African American and Jamaican middle class.

In this chapter, I continue to build on the question of how race and class are experienced by black immigrants. I use the case of Haitian middle class residents in Cascades and Great Park, to unpack how they conceive of their racial and class identities across space. I use data from in depth interviews with 19 Haitian adults. I conducted in depth interviews with 10 adults in Cascades, 6 females and 4 males. I also interviewed 9 adults in Great Park, 4 females and 5 males. The average age of respondents was 45, making this sample a significantly younger one compared to African Americans and

Jamaicans. I find that the Haitian middle class have mixed levels of attachment to their black racial identities, and practice black identities in less concrete ways than the African American and Jamaican middle class. Nonetheless, the individuals who do practice their being black are more often than not suburbanites or 1.5 generation.

The Haitian middle class also engages in interesting patterns of boundary work. They blurred racial boundaries between whites, particularly coworkers, bosses and in interpersonal relationships more frequently than African Americans. Yet, many confessed that they encountered significant racial boundaries in their places of work, from clientele and neighbors in Great Park. These experiences with racial boundaries were acknowledged as being a function of class as well. So a person can be pulled over because they are black, but let go once the cops find out they are a physician. In another scenario, a Haitian doctor is pulled over for driving a luxury car with an MD license plate while black. Class, therefore, mattered in the social interactions of the Haitian middle class, as they had to negotiate their class status while being solicited for financial support by family members, sending remittances back to Haiti, and ensuring that the next generation, too, prospered.

Racial and Class Identities among the Haitian Middle Class

Part 1: Racial Identity

The Haitian immigrant middle class was mixed in their understandings and attachments to a black racial identity. There were interesting differences in identification across space, with suburban residents following the theoretical assumption that moving to the suburbs “whitens” black residents. However, there were small numbers of suburban Haitians who

are black identified, pinpoint race and racism in the United States, and articulate a black racial political consciousness.

Unlike the Jamaican sample, the Haitian middle class people in this study were more so first generation. Therefore, it was difficult to assess the relationship between identity and generation. Space mattered to the way, in which Haitians understood, claimed, and mobilized around their black identity. Mr. Herve, a 1.5-generation Haitian immigrant, Cascades resident and father notes that he identifies as a black person in America. He jokingly goes on to say that he is

“Black, I’m a negro”.

While Mr. Herve expressed his black identity in a crassly joking manner, Mr. Herve is an example of the adoption of black identities by Haitians, which they deem both as being a source of prejudice, but also pride. I refer to the expression of pride in the tone and manner in which Mr. Herve notes that he is using the term “negro.” He uses it in a subversive manner, stripping it of its negative connotations and using it as language to identify himself and mark his belonging to the racial group. His comfort with this term, reflects the ways in which African Americans have taken formally derogatory terms imposed upon them, and made them a part of their everyday linguistic usage (the term ‘nigga’ is the closest example of this) (Kennedy 2003).

Today, in light of the power of youth and urban culture, young black people come together and reinvent themselves and their experiences. They adopt names which are defined socially as derogatory and problematic and transform their meanings, so that they connote something more palpable, useful and sometimes endearing. This is seen in the

term “my nigga” which has its origins from the word nigger, but is used today in non-hostile relations between blacks (and sometimes non-blacks). Walking down the streets of Jamaica Ave, or Broadway, one will witness young black, whites, Latinos and Asians calling to, arguing or playing with each other while using the term “my nigga” to refer to their friend who was in present company. Therefore, Mr. Herve is speaking to this tradition of meaning switching among the black population, when he notes that he is black identified

Unlike Mr. Herve, other Cascades respondents noted that they were identified as black, but did not have a strong attachment to that identity. It was simply a phenotypical descriptor of what they were. Because being black is readily visible some respondents noted that it was inescapable. However, it was also not something they would hide or shy away from. For example, Edwin is a first generation immigrant. He is a divorcee and notes that he is black and checks the ‘black’ box, on applications.

“I am black. So when they see you, they see you black. Okay. So is not, you cannot hide that thing is reality.”

In spite of the embracing or adoption of black identities among most Cascades Haitians, there were examples of Haitian women who were opposed to adopting or embracing black identities. They viewed black identities in the stereotypical sense; as a stigma to one’s social position. It was essentially a burden. They worked hard to avoid identifying as black, and some even crossed racial boundaries on administrative applications. Marie Joseph, for example is a Cascades business owner. She runs her own beauty shop. She noted having very strong feelings about race. She shared that race as a category and

identity lacked importance in her everyday life (in later sections, I will discuss, the lowering of racial boundaries among the Haitian middle class).

Marie Joseph notes that on applications, she checks the “white” category, in order to avoid the term ‘black.’ She argues that when people and applications inquire about one’s race, they use the information you provide as a basis to discriminate against you. She is vehemently anti-racist in this manner and believes that throwing people off with the use of the “white” category as a descriptor is the preferred way to manage this problem. Marie Joseph also notes that in phone conversations with potential clients, they assume that she is white because of the sound of her voice. However, instead of noting that she is black, she claims that she is Haitian, replacing a racial identity with an ethnic identity.

Interviewer: Do you think that it is important for Haitians to identify as Immigrants, Americans or blacks?

Respondent: Haitian is Haitian. We Haitian, that’s it. That’s it. Haitian, real Haitian, you Haitian. There should not no but about it, if that’s where you were born than you are Haitian. But as far as the black, the white or whatever it is, I don’t think that it is proper. Because me in any application that I put we always put white.

Interviewer: Why?

Respondent: Because I don’t think that it should be there. Even on the phone, when I talk to people on the phone, they never think of me Haitian, they always think of me as a white woman, or that I am from Russian. I said “Russia, I don’t have any accent from there at all”. I said I don’t know where that comes from. They said “well, the accent is different. I said ok, but I am Haitian.

Marie Joseph believes that it is more appropriate to express one’s national identity, not their racial background. This echoes Mary Waters’ findings in *Black Identities* (1999).

Waters finds that West Indian middle class immigrants adopted ethnic identities over black racial identities. This was constructed as a distancing strategy which allows them to

separate themselves from the negative associations which accompany being black in America. Although it is not clear whether Marie Joseph is creating a distinction between herself and African Americans in particular, we do find evidence that emphasizing one's racial identity is problematic for some Haitian respondents. Noreen, 34, too, presents significant hesitation when it comes to identifying or embracing a black identity. For Noreen, being or saying that one is black means that they are attaching stigmas to themselves. She attempts to move away from these social scripts and displayed discomfort when it came to the term and the black collective group. This pattern, however, was not characteristic of what occurred among others in the population.

Being and Belonging to Black Identity

Belonging

In the analysis of the Haitian middle class in Cascades and Great Park, I find that some suburbanites and later generation individuals identified as black and practice their black identities in everyday life. The first generation in both places were more likely to be averse to practicing black identities, or used black as a descriptor of self but not as a definition of their belonging to a collective racial group.

Although those who lived in the suburbs were not always attached to black identities, the few who were black identified expressed a strong connection to this affiliation as they encountered significant racial boundaries. Mr. Herve displays similar attachments. He adopts a pan-Africanist black identity, noting that he identifies with blacks in the Americas and in African countries. However, this sense of belonging is not contradictory to the ties that he has to a Haitian identity.

Interviewer: How do you, would you say that and somebody is like oh you know who are you, where are you from, what do you guys say? How you describe yourself to someone?

Respondent 2 I identify with Haitian. I identify with what we call African-Americans. I identify with the other West Indian. I really truly identify with the black person and the African Diaspora, I think. She corrects my English on Diaspora. I feel all that makes me who I am. And it is hard for me because I, in that, and which is so interesting, I really do relate to the black person, but I could sense having a similar experience that I had over there, down there. I don't and so like I have friends who are African and are literally from Nigeria and Kenya and so on and so forth and we talk and we relate and we and I have friends who are right Americans you know. I have also Haitian friends.

Haitians who were 1.5 generation and or lived in the suburbs were more likely than first generation or urban Haitians to perceive significant connections to the black racial group and/or people. Unlike Marie Joseph, who preferred to invoke her Haitian ethnic identity instead of black, few Haitians were averse to racial categories. They freely identified as black, but were reticent to being seen as a part of their black collective group. For example, Eulily exemplifies this position.

Respondent: I'm not person but you know like always in my job I always tell people that I am a black person but I am not...

Interviewer: Um-hmm, you are not black people.

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: I don't want to be labeled as people; I want to be labeled as a black person.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: You understand.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Respondent: Because to me this is what I've realized, once you say black people they attributed it with like [inaudible], scared of us, this type of things you know and I don't want to take part of these things you know, I want to live my life as a black person, honest, respectful you know and I like the neighborhood because it's quiet, there's not too many people can't afford it, I mean I would say it's like a professional area you know because the tax is very expensive, the housing and very expensive so to

me it's, I would rather not being able to live a luxurious life but have, give my kids a good education.

Eulily notes that that she is a black person, but she is not a part of black people. Her approach to a black identity is an example of an embracing of the color of her skin, yet a distancing from people who share the same phenotype. This type of insider-outsider status signifies the complexities at play for Haitian immigrants, some of which operate on one side of the color line, and others who demonstrate that there are shades of grey in the race-identification processes.

Being

While the Haitian middle class respondents were mixed in their sense of connection to both black identity and the black racial group, they were also mixed in the ways in which they practiced black identities. For example, Antoine, 45, who described himself as black, noted that he used a black realtor to find his current home. He, perhaps, was more comfortable with a black realtor because he believed that they would be honest with him than a white realtor would when he was searching for housing. Mr. Herve, on the other hand, was black identified and practiced his black identity through cultural and social consumption patterns.

“You know, if someone truly asks me what or who I am in that context I would say I am Haitian. I will definitely say I am Haitian but my life and I guess the way I go about things every day, the music that I listen to would lean me more towards more African-American.”

Few individuals like Mr. Herve did not claim to belong to the black racial group, yet they partook in practicing African American black identities in other segments of their lives, demonstrating a disconnect between what they say that they are (or how they understand

their belonging) and what they actually do. Joseph Delanse, on the other hand, practices his black identity by being a part of black social elite groups such as Jack & Jill. After my interview, Joseph's family stayed a while in the kitchen to get to know me and my research. They mentioned that later in the evening, they had a social gathering for their son with a Long Island chapter of Jack and Jill.

After the hour long interview with the Delanse Family, I remained at the house for a couple of minutes with Mr. Delanse. I spoke with Brandon, who remained in the kitchen after the interview, listening to the conversation between myself and his father. Jean's wife, Lorraine, walked in as I was packing my backpack to leave. Lorraine, was a dark skin woman with sharp and strong facial features. She had high cheekbones, which looked as if they were deliberately designed for precision. She was coming home from a day's work. She explained that she came home to get the kids, Brandon and his younger brother Sam, for a Jack and Jill meeting. She was a newer affiliate of Jack and Jill and she believed that it would be a nice place for her sons to meet "kids who were like them," particularly since they attended predominately white private schools. Joseph noted that he would be staying home, but it would be a good thing for Brandon to connect with other black children like him. His private school is predominately white which limits his interactions with other blacks (Fieldnotes 11/27/2012).

Joseph was one of few parents who transmitted a sense of black racial identity to their children. This made them distinctly different from African Americans and some Jamaicans in this sample. In comparison to African Americans and Jamaicans, Haitians were less vocal and less active about the ways in which they practiced black identities or attachments to the black collective group.

Boundary Work

How does the Haitian middle class engage in boundary work?

Boundaries Encountered

Workplaces, Neighborhoods and Police

The Haitian middle class, although mixed in their orientations to a black identity, often perceived incidents of discrimination and differential treatment. A few respondents posited that the ways in which they were treated during interactions with non-blacks had little to do with race. They attributed other factors to what seemed to be race-blind problematic interactions (which will be discussed further in the section on racial boundary blurring).

The Haitian middle class achieved their class status mainly through the medical and service professions, or were business owners/entrepreneurs. In each of these employment sectors, they noted coming up against bright racial boundaries from both whites and blacks in their workplaces. They reported that their status as managers, owners or higher-level workers were overlooked, and their race was used as a signifier of being low income, less educated or immoral. For example, Edwin, 53, lives in Cascades. He notes that affluent whites at his place of work sometimes insinuate or accuse him of taking belongings, which they leave in their car.

Interviewer: Do you ever feel like people, white people treat you differently because you are black?

Respondent: Yes in the beginning I know after you're there and know them they respect you for who you are you know, yeah. At work yeah respect you, you know yes like one day at work and then a girl to me ID, I lost my wallet and say yeah, where, he said I know and I ask her why you are asking me that for, I know because I dropped it here I said do you have money on you, she said no just only and she bring ID cards and the plastic I said so I don't deal with plastic I deal with cash you know because she

said you're funny I say yeah but you're funny too. Why were you asking me that for, you know?

Interviewer: So you feel like he was asking you that because you are black or he thought you stole it.

Respondent: The kind of job I am doing they don't respect, they think you are a thief. Way back you steal, you steal people stealing stuff from them you know from their car and everything and you know that you steal them, me I don't care; I don't care what you think about this. Now I don't think about what you think about me but I am just, since I don't do it I don't care. I don't, you can talk all the talks you do not touch me I don't care, that's the way I feel.

Edwin makes a middle-income salary working as a manager of a parking garage.

However, because of a combination of his race and the lack of prestige attached to his occupation, he shares that white clients often treat him with disdain, doubt and suspicion in his workplace. Edwin adopts an attitude of indifference to this discrimination. He understands himself as an honest and hardworking person, which is completely contradictory to how the whites that he works with perceive him.

Respondents who work in sectors that have higher occupational prestige, also noted experiencing bright racial boundaries. Claudette, for example, is a fulltime hospital social worker, whom in interactions with white clients, was assumed to have no credentials or status. Claudette, owns a non-profit organization in Great Park. It is an ethnic-based organization which serves the socioeconomic needs of suburban immigrant communities. She shared that when she meets many white patients in the hospital, they ask her to perform duties which are inconsistent with her status and undermine her professional role. Claudette notes:

“So, I learned to be black here, so up to day 2011 we still have a lot of white people who are because of their ignorance or their own prejudices or racism, who act towards us in races that you know, racist way. As a social worker I go in the room and as soon as I go in the room just look at facial expressions sometimes. I

just go and; why she would expect for me to be that angry, right? The patient asks: ‘Could you get my cup for me if we can get some water ‘– and intentionally I don’t, I could do it but I don’t. I say’ excuse me you need some help? I’m gonna call the aid for you.” You understand?”

Claudette expresses that she constantly engages in a status approval process as a black woman as a social worker in the predominately white suburban hospital. While Great Park residents reported a higher propensity towards experiencing racial discrimination, it was also experienced by Cascades residents.

Neighborhood

Similar to the African American middle class, Haitian middle class respondents shared that their neighborhoods and schools were sites of social separation between blacks and whites. This racism was both experienced and perceived. For example, Joseph lives in a waterfront area of Great Park. He notes that since he has moved into the neighborhood, his neighbor’s children and his own have never socially interacted. Joseph shares:

“Plenty, I will probably say the actually racism in my neighborhood have always been more interesting to me. And acts of racism in my neighborhood, ironically, I would say what I consider racism have been equivalent between whites and blacks....I’ll tell you what – I will tell you what I think the white racism is, I move in the neighborhood, my son is the same age as another child, they don’t play, my next door neighbor and I rarely have a conversation.”

Joseph notes that his encounters with racism in his neighborhood are among the most interesting. Similar to several other Haitian respondents, he believes that whites in his neighborhood are distance from him and they use their children to avoid social interactions between adult neighbors. Like African Americans and Jamaicans who live in integrated suburban neighborhoods, physical proximity is not a proxy for social closeness between racial groups.

Mr. Herve, who was discussed in previous sections, was aware of the social conditions of race and racism in Long Island suburbs. Yet, he attempts to avoid this reality by choosing to reside in predominately black Cascades. He lives in an arguably less affluent section of Cascades. When I entered his family's home for the interview, I walked into the foyer area, which had cherry wood hard wood floors which spanned into the living room, matching the polished wood furniture. The facade of their home did not represent the pristine nature of the inside of their home. Mr. Herve posits that his neighborhood is not an ideal setting, but it is a better place to live as a black person than Long Island suburbs.

Respondent: Yes. Personally I would just like to move and search.

Interviewer: Really. Where do you want to move?

Respondent: I don't know. It's like to me the ideal places I would like would be in Long Island or in Upstate New York. Somewhere in Long Island, that's what I would like. But (shakes head to indicate "no").

Interviewer: Is it because of the property tax.

Respondent: Yeah. I don't like the people.

Interviewer: You don't like the people. Why is that?

Respondent: I don't know. It tends to be very segregated yes and I don't want my kids my kids to grow up in that kind of environment. Although this is very segregated, too, here. but I don't know. I wanted them to grow up in an area where they are comfortable. But so probably this is not good area where you feel comfortable as well and I don't feel comfortable with the situation that goes on out here. But, you know that's why we are stuck here cause I am trying figure out where do I want to move that is going to provide all the things that I want. It's hard (laugh)."

Mr. Herve notes that he is not interested in living in suburban settings which are all white and alienate him and his children. He remarks that although he lives in a segregated neighborhood, it is a black space in which he feels comfortable living and raising his family. Mr. Herve and few other respondents provide evidence that segregated black spaces are not traps, as is often portrayed in the literature. Mr. Herve has strategically

chosen to live in Cascades because of its emotional comfort. Although he, and many others work in racially integrated spaces and send their children to predominately white schools, they value returning home to a neighborhood where people look like them. They place a high value on racial commonality with neighbors and anonymity, which they would not have if they lived in what they perceived to be racially contentious neighborhood spaces in Nassua County. Therefore, he circumvents racial prejudice altogether through his residential choices.

Law Enforcement

It is no secret that urban police officers have a poor relationship with black communities and residents (Weitzer and Tuch, 2006). Jamaican respondents, particularly males, noted that they encountered problems with police in their neighborhoods. Haitians echoed this issue. Joseph noted that as a young black male, he was heavily targeted by police and has even spent time in jail. He expresses deep disdain and fascination for the manner in which police deal with blacks. Joseph noted that he experienced racism, but that there are different brands of racism. Age mattered, in his opinion. When he was younger, he wore dreadlocks, and was pulled over by police on the basis of his appearance.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you ever experienced any discrimination from whites because of who you are, where you're from, how you look; personally, your own personal experience?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you tell me an instance?

Respondent: In my – it will be easier for me to tell you if I was young, I had dreadlocks and this is what it is, a cabbie didn't stop for me, or a cabbie did that to me, then it's easier. Police arrested me; I mean I've had time where police have stopped me for no reason. And at the same time, I think that sometimes they stopped me and allowed me to go because I was a physician. But I think as you get into particular streams of America,

racism is different. Like my son, goes to private school, operates in majority Caucasian institutions, their perceptions of these things are different. You have to try to teach them what they are experiencing, without handicapping them. Because I think the greatest part about racism, is not the amount of racist acts committed against you, but the amount of vigilance, unnecessary vigilance you dedicate to racism.

Joseph notes that racism subsided once police officers realized he was a doctor. Joseph goes on to explain that as an older and professional person, he experiences a different type of discrimination than a lower income or younger black man would, highlighting the importance of age and class in racist encounters.

While this lived experience is valid in regards to Joseph, in another instance, respondents reported that their class status is overlooked or questioned by law enforcement officials because they of the color of their skin. Eulily, in her 40s, for example, recalls the time when her and her husband embarked on a trip to Canada. Her husband, a doctor, was accosted at the US/Canada border while driving a luxury car and had an MD license plate. Eulily shares:

“Yeah, I remember I went to Canada with my husband, my husband is a physician. And he had this two seater Mercedes I think the CLK that we were driving from Canada when we get to there. When we got to the border and at least we stop, I showed them my passport and my husband showed them his passport but still they took the passport they scan it still they’re asking where is my husband, they had to ask my husband what kind of job do you do. You understand just because I am and guess what the plate says MD medical doctor so what else do you need but just because he is a, I am sure when they scan your passport all your information comes up right. So why do you have to ask me what do I do I mean in order to pass through the border you have to know my profession? In fact do you ask everybody that pass through there what do they do.”

Eulily experienced racial discrimination when she traveled abroad. The majority of Haitian middle class residents experienced racial boundaries to access and entrance into

spaces where whites are the gatekeepers marking the significance of race in their social experiences. Despite the reality that some Haitians did not evoke strong attachments to black identity, they were vocal about their encounters with race based differential treatment. A possible explanation of this response to encounters with racial boundaries is that the Haitian middle class, more so than African Americans, see their racial encounters as being specific to the white individuals who commit the act. An encounter with racism is not attributed to being caused by white people, but simply the white person that they are interacting with. Some Haitians noted that they were sometimes “treated better by whites than they were by other blacks.” Therefore, their weaker attachments to black identity are perhaps rooted in feelings of lower solidarity with other black ethnic groups in their neighborhoods and places of work.

Boundaries Erected

The Haitian middle class encountered significant racial boundaries in their neighborhoods and work place settings. However, inside and outside of these places, they also engaged in drawing boundaries between themselves and other racial groups. In some instances, they drew boundaries between themselves and their own racial group. Like African Americans and Jamaicans, Haitians engaged in erecting boundaries against all white neighborhoods, black schools, and non-black partners.

The Haitian middle class echoed the concerns that schools, which had a higher percentage of black students, were less desirable and lower resourced than predominately white educational institutions. Therefore, some respondents made strategic decisions to send their children to elite private schools, which had a smaller ratio of black students.

Mr. Herve, despite preferring to live in an all-black neighborhood, seeks to send his children to multiracial and elite schools so that they will receive what he perceives as a quality education. His son and daughter attend elite private schools in Queens and Manhattan and are doing well academically. However, the daughter lamented that in school, she is treated like a racial outsider. Therefore, Mr. Herve erects boundaries against predominately white neighborhoods, but also builds boundaries against schools with a significant black population. This demonstrates a tension which was also apparent among African Americans and Jamaicans, who desired to remain connected to their black racial group as a form of emotional reprieve from a racially hostile world, but also ensuring that they transmit their class status to their children through a quality education.

In terms of school choice, middle class African Americans, Jamaicans and Haitians were more likely to use suburbanization and/or private schools in order to avoid predominately black schools which they deemed as low-performing. Therefore, class, trumps race in their decision-making processes about their children's education. In their imagination, racial solidarity with predominately black schools will place them at risk of reproducing their class status. This is a pattern present among middle class African Americans as well as Jamaicans. Joey, 50, is one example of this. Joey, like many other Haitian parents, engages in this boundary work with schools that have a significant black population. Joey is a Haitian first generation immigrant who is married to a non-black woman. He notes that the suburban public school in his area has a significant black population, and therefore, is not a desirable place to send his children.

Interviewer: Okay, I get you a lot. And so in terms of Sidney's school now what's like the racial ethnic and class make up or the students?

Respondent: I would say 90 percent Caucasian.

Interviewer: Ninety percent? Okay. That's where a lot of the white folks who live send their kids. And so when Fabrice is Bolton High what was the make up there?

Respondent: I would say 25 percent Caucasians and less blacks.

Interviewer: And or do you worry about the composition of school, like the racial composition a little bit?

Respondent: Yes, it was. I feel that when the school is predominantly black, fewer resources are available in the school. That's the setting of the system.

Although Joey posits that this problem should be attributed to the larger social system of racism, he makes the individual choice to send his children to elite private schools outside of his neighborhood. This is not to say that Joey is anti-black schools. He encouraged and supported his eldest son attending a historically black university. Like other Haitian and Jamaican middle class immigrants, they strategically sent their children to high performing historically black colleges and universities. Historically Black Colleges and Universities were seen as vehicles for black upward mobility. Yet, Joey circumvents local schools that have a large black population because he feels his children will not receive a quality education because of the perception that it is occupied by low-income black individuals.

Romantic Relationships

The majority of the Haitian middle class respondents were married. With the exception of one respondent, all were married to black partners. They argued that, in hindsight, they had made the "right decision" to choose a black partner. Only one respondent, Antoine, noted that if he could do it again he "would not just consider a black partner, I would be more open than I was then". However, for the most part, interracial integration through intermarriage or inter-dating with non-blacks was not of interest to many Haitian middle

class respondents in the suburbs and the urban areas. Edwin, for example, notes that he is only interested in dating black women because when he has dated interracial, it was unfulfilling experience.

Interviewer: Interesting. Was it important for your wife to be black?

Respondent: For her. Yeah, black and kicking and black. I have been with Spanish girl but it is not the same. And not the same might not take somebody with another, some, put you in some mess they don't have. You might you know, you have to adjust and everything. And I am like a king, like a king.

Edwin is a recent divorcee of a Haitian black woman, and noted that he will likely date a black woman again. However, he is not opposed to his children dating outside of their race. Other parents like Eulily noted that although they would not date or marry outside of their race they “did not care whom their children decided to be with because they have to live with them.” However, it is interesting to note that Great Park housed a greater number of people who were in interethnic or interracial relationships, demonstrating that there is a relationship between suburbanization and marital integration.

Boundaries blurred

The Haitian middle class respondents in this study proved to be a dynamic group of immigrants with complex orientations to how to navigate racial boundaries. While in the previous sections I describe the sites where the Haitian middle class build boundaries against blacks and white spaces, these same individuals also participated in boundary blurring between themselves and the white world. This blurring occurred on an interpersonal level, namely with white employers, neighbors or coworkers.

Despite their encounters with discrimination, some Haitian middle class respondents noted that “all whites were not the same.” There was variation in the levels of “amicability” among blacks and whites. For example, Mr. Edwin notes that he is different from African Americans and in this process he lowers boundaries between himself and whites. During a discussion of his encounters with white racism, Edwin notes:

“That’s not all the white people, not all of the white people are like that. They don’t put you there; you know, you are the one responsible for your life. What about if you want to make it. They don’t say “white people, this white people that”, you know.”

Edwin notes that African Americans blame white people for their social problems, and build a racial boundary between themselves and whites. However, Edwin blurs this boundary or social distance between whites (to the extent that he can in a racially unequal society) and himself by adopting a sympathetic view towards their diverse behavior patterns. He believes that blacks are responsible for their lives and that some white people are fair and amicable, a sentiment echoed by few other respondents.

Noreen, too, blurs boundaries between herself and whites when she discusses issues of racial difference and discrimination. According to Noreen, there are different types of white people. There are those who are not open to other types of people, then there are the white people who you form interpersonal relationships with non-whites. She shares that the whites at her job are in a higher-level position and sometimes they appeal to West Indians more than “afro people.”

Interviewer: So do the white people that you interact with; do you think that they treat you differently because you are Haitian?

Respondent: No, I think we are one people. I think we are one people; some of them, the ones that don't – they are so much of extremely (liberal, career open minded) or you know not open or you know, not open to anybody and then there are the ones who once they get to know you they like you as a person, like you as an individual.

Noreen is reticent to explain the motivations behind why some whites behave this way. However, she does share that whites treat her as an individual without making assumptions about her racial identity. Marie Joseph, on the other hand, believes that whites are mostly well-intentioned and amicable. She finds them to be kind and caring, and appreciates the help that they have provided to Haitians in particular.

Interviewer: How do whites treat blacks from your point of view?

Respondent: You know what, they love Haitians. Other nations, or white people, they love Haitians, in my eyes, they always show that they care for us, they want to hand out whatever help that is needed, they are always there to help and not to judge. Ok, so, I don't know, I don't have any problem with that. Some say I always think positive, I always look for the positive side in whomever. If I have to look for the negative part, it's not going to work out.

Marie Joseph notes that her interpersonal relations with whites are usually quite good and positive. She says that she has an “optimists” perspective which allows her to function in society successfully.

Racial boundaries were also said to be blurred in the relationships that some Haitians had with whites in their workplace. Although the workplace is often a site of interracial tensions, some respondents noted that they had positive experiences with whites.

Interviewer: Have other business owners experienced problems with their customers, any kind of financial issues such as crime or discrimination?

Respondent: Discrimination? Hardly, Hardly. I mean you know what there will be. I have people that walk in here for notary and they see me, they like “a

woman?” Ok, they were looking for a man. And, when they find out what I do, and how well do I do it.

Interviewer: Like anybody?

Respondent: Anybody. “Is there the notary here?” “Is there a realtor here”? And then when I show myself it’s like “are u sure”? So then I have to put my license out.

Interviewer: Do you get that from Haitian People?

Respondent: Everybody. Everybody. You know what, the white people don’t do that. They ask for a notary, I work, they are like welcome, we are happy that you are here and stuff like that, it’s different, yeah.

Marie Joseph, who previously noted that she sees the social world with a lens of optimism notes that when whites come to her for services, they treat her well, and sometimes better than other blacks do. Eulily, too, notes that she is treated better by whites than the blacks that she interacts with in the workplace.

Eulily shares that most of the doctors that she works with are white and that they are “caring people” who want to help their patients get better. The only time they have a problem with “black/West Indian nurses” is when they do not take care for the hospital’s patients properly. Eulily blurs boundaries between herself and the white doctors that she works with; all the while building boundaries against West Indians who she believes are not doing their job.

Interviewer: Do you interact with white people at work?

Respondent: No. Actually the whites are the doctors at work. Most of the doctors are white and I have nothing to say about them. They care, they treat people nicely. You know and the doctors to me, whether they are black or white, they are very caring people.

Eulily notes that she experiences significant social boundaries from other black ethnic groups. In her mind, she imagines that if she were dealing with whites, they would not be as resistant. Her thoughts are inconsistent, but nonetheless valid. She notes that there are racial boundaries between whites and blacks because whites may not like you; they don’t

display their disdain for you as much as the black person does. There are internal tensions in the black community, which Eulily elucidates as having a symbiotic relationship with the blurring of racial boundaries between her and whites. She notes that whites look more at your resume while blacks judge job candidates' personality. She believes that one's credentials, not personality, are the important criteria.

Interviewer: Do you think that whites treat you differently because you are Haitian and not like Jamaican or African-American.

Respondent: I wouldn't say so but actually to tell you the truth I would say I get along better with whites than black. To me the white even though the person may not like you as whom you are, as a black person but when they're close to you they don't show it to you with them. But the black person will show it to your face to make you feel less than what you are, than who you are, you know. I could tell you that from my experience, where I work, I was never interviewed. Why, because I was sent there when I was in school as a summer intern. So at the end of the summer they gave us the option to stay to work so I decided not to stay. I wanted to finish school first so I went and finish school then after I'd finished school I called the nursing supervisor and told her that I had finished. She said "oh yeah, come!" She just hired me right there. And that's the only reason why I got this job. Otherwise, if I had to be interviewed by a black person or West Indian person, I would not have gotten it.

There were also respondents who uniformly posited that they did not think race was a problem. They fostered friendships with whites and did not encounter racial discrimination. Noreen, for example, notes that she has good relations with whites, through romantic and friendship relationships.

Respondent: Yeah, I have white friends; dated a white person almost but not, didn't you know. And it didn't have to do with the fact that why I didn't dated – it's because I was seeing someone else you know, yeah.

Interviewer: And what are your interactions like with whites to say?

Respondent: Good. Often down with them. You know, you treat me right I treat you right whether you are white or black you know.

Interviewer: Some of them feel like you are different than other blacks?

Respondent: Probably yeah, you know, like I think in life you have to create a set of standards for yourself and respect for yourself for other

people to also carry that along for you whether they are going to be black or white.

Another example of interpersonal relations between Haitians and non-black is their perspectives towards interracial romantic relationships. Romantic relationships are a traditional measure of the depth of intimacy between racial groups (Lee and Bean, 2004). Many Haitian middle class respondents noted that they erected boundaries between themselves and racial others. Although the majority of respondents noted that they would not participate in interracial dating, the majority of them were permissive of the idea of their children dating outside of their race. Like many respondents, Mrs. Jean Baptiste, 46, notes that she prefers that her romantic partner was black but has no preferences for whom her children should marry. Mrs. Jean Baptiste is a first generation, light skin high school teacher. She has a presence when she walks in a room, has a thick Haitian accent and a raspy voice. She teaches afterschool for the local Haitian community organization and she holds a key position in the community church as well. She has young adult children and notes that she doesn't care what type of person they marry, exhibiting less stringent requirements for the racial composition of her children's' partners. Mrs. Jean Baptiste also posits that she teaches a diverse group of students and that her son has a diverse pool of friends, noting the racial boundary blurring which is occurring across generation.

Interviewer: Do you have preferences to who you want your children to marry, like your girl, she just got married, did she marry a Haitian man or?

Respondent: That I don't know. That, I don't know. I always tell them, girl or boy, if you're married and you're leaving the house you're not coming back. Make sure you're ready, I'm not saying that I'm not helping you if you need help but don't come back begging because you were not ready. This is the only thing I have with them. I don't care if they take the black, I'm not going to live with them, you are.

Interviewer: What about a white person or Spanish?

Respondent: Unless they can't deal with me – no, I don't have preferences. Because to me, if I do have a negative opinion and they like somebody that I don't like, I want to avoid that and I don't want to start a problem. I don't have a preference, it's their life.

Mrs. Jean Baptiste has young adult children and notes that she is not concerned about what type of person they marry, exhibiting less stringent requirements for the racial composition of her children's partners. Mrs. Jean Baptiste also notes that she teaches a diverse group of students and that her son has a diverse pool of friends, noting the continued boundary blurring which is occurring across generation.

Appreciation for diversity also demonstrated a type of boundary blurring process among the Haitian middle class. In terms of overall diversity, Haitian middle class respondents, particularly those in Cascades, noted that they enjoyed their neighborhoods and the city because of its ethno-racial diversity and cultural richness. Claudia, an adult-student in her 50s appreciates the diversity of cultures and racial groups, which are in her Cascades neighborhoods.

“Because I just love Cambria Heights. It's the same thing I said about New York. There is a variety of people coming from everywhere in Cascades. You got Haitian, you got Jamaican, you got Indians and now I see some Chinese coming around. In my neighborhood we have 2 or 3 Chinese in the neighborhood and we got the Jew people coming right back. So this is a real complex neighborhood. I like it because, like I said, the Haitian community is very predominant around here so you're not really disconnected with your country. You have all kinds of services. If I want to send a transfer, I go and find the transfer place right there. If I want to eat Haitian food and don't want to cook, I can get a Haitian restaurant right there. If I want to buy some special things from Haiti I can go and find it. If I want to send stuff – so like Cascades is great because of that. Secondly, I can say, I find myself among my people and even though that's made me not missing my country as much as I could miss. And also you have people from all cultural backgrounds; you become a part of the whole melting pot as well.”

Claudia, like several other Haitian respondents posited that the multiracial and multi ethnic landscape is appealing to her. She claims that the complexity of the neighborhoods is desirable. This section on the racial identities, practices and boundary work of the Haitian middle class showcases an assortment of attitudes and behaviors towards racial difference and ethnic ties. This section demonstrates that racial identity is fluid, negotiated, and contested by Haitians in some ways in which are similar to African Americans, such as school choice, but that are also different, such as their preferences about whom their children should marry.

Part 2: Class Identities

How does the Haitian middle class conceive of their class identities?

The Haitian middle class in Cascades and Great Park share similar middle class identities. However, space emerged as important because the residents of Great Park were considerably more affluent, had visible signs of their class status through their home structures, the types of cars they drove, their disposable income and the types of social, cultural and political activities that they participated in.

In terms of ethnic group differences, the Haitian middle class, like Jamaicans and African Americans, adopted modest attitudes when describing their class status. Many purported that they “were poor” and “had to go to work to earn a living.” These sayings were evidence of their disqualification from the middle class category. However, their residential attainment, careers, high educational levels, consumption patterns and income demonstrated other patterns.

Belonging to the middle class

The middle class, as described in the literature section of this dissertation, is a nebulous group. The Haitian respondents in this study qualified as middle class people through a mixture of their incomes, homeownership, and educational backgrounds. Their average annual incomes in 2011 ranged from \$100,000-\$150,000 and everyone had at least an associate's degree. The majority of Haitian middle class people in Cascades and Great Park noted that income was the primary indicator of a middle class person. Like other black middle class respondents in this study, they posited that making \$100,000 is not enough to sustain a middle class family the global city of New York. A minimum of \$150,000-\$180,000 was believed to be necessary for a household to thrive in New York's current economy. The following quote by Antoine, a Great Park resident and business owner, demonstrates the high income threshold required to be a part of New York's middle class.

Interviewer: Okay. So how much would you say someone in a household of four or five has to make in order to be middle class?

Respondent: I would say about \$180,000.

Interviewer: To be middle class.

Respondent: Yeah.

Mr. Herve, 45, argued for a more restrictive standard for being a part of the middle class.

He notes that on the surface, his family leads a middle class lifestyle. However, financial insecurity was a part of everyday life.

Respondent: To be honest, when I thought of middle class, someone who's in middle class would be people who own a home, have a family, cars; at least two, able to go on vacation every year with their family, go places and so and so forth. From outside that would be like us, but I won't say we're really middle class, because of all the other struggles that we dealt with. I didn't note it from a financial point of view and I don't think we're middle class...

New York's cost of living is so high that it requires many middle class families to earn six figure salaries, which would make them a part of the upper middle class in other parts of the US. Because of New York's intensified housing market and high cost of living, the perceived minimum qualifier for belonging to the middle class could be viewed as exorbitant and out of touch with middle income America.

While income was perceived to be a key indicator of one's middle class status, cultural markers of class were mixed. Tastes were also seen as central to belonging to the middle class in Cascades and Great Park. Marie Joseph, 44, notes that there is variation in their patterns of behavior and tastes in the marketplace despite the fact that people live and operate in a middle class neighborhood., Marie Joseph shares:

“I feel that everybody has their own state of mind to do whatever they please. So it's you outside that needs to know what you are getting. Ok, do you prefer inside, because inside you can return if there is an issue or whatever. Outside, you may not return because the person may not have the same thing that you bought yesterday. To me it's a matter of principle or a matter of choice, what you like, taste. In this neighborhood, you have different tastes. You have cheap (chuckle), you have extravagant, and you have those who don't care as long as they have what they want, when they need it. OK, you have different taste over here, different flavor, which is good, which is good.”

Therefore, belonging to the middle class is not solely about one's income, but it is also related to the choices one makes about their consumption patterns.

Residential location was also a status marker for the Haitian middle class. A higher-class status was conferred upon individuals who lived in Nassau County suburbs. Residing in Cascades was considered by many to be of the epitome of middle class living. However, locational attainment in suburban contexts connoted that one had “arrived.” Claudette, 59, a Great Park resident noted that she visits areas like Cascades

because her family and friends live there, but “not often.” She said that she attends occasional parties there, but is reticent to do so because of its lower social status.

“I go to parties in Cascades sometimes, not too often. I prefer not to but I go if I have to. It’s just a little crowded and crazy over there.”

There were clear status divisions present in the ways in which Cascades and Great Park residents experienced their place of residence. Noreen, who has participated in inter-metropolitan migration patterns, notes that Queens was a decent place to live. However, it did not compare to the country/suburban style living standards that she was accustomed to in South Jersey. Noreen states:

“From Canarsie (Brooklyn) I actually moved to Jersey. Yeah. And then you know, to Jersey I didn’t want to go back to Brooklyn. Like once you move out to like the suburban areas, it’s not like Queens is that much of a suburb but it’s just like I just got tired of the – you know, I left Brooklyn and you know, I got tired of Brooklyn. You know, also we were all tired of Brooklyn but afterwards you know, I needed to move back because of my son. You know, we were just too much with traveling – I was so tired and I finally now like really living on my own. You know, and I didn’t want to go back to Brooklyn. Like you know, I got tired – like I got used to certain things in Jersey. South Jersey. Real suburb, real country suburb.”

Like the immigrant generations before them, residing in the suburbs of major cities today confers certain privileges and amenities. Many Cascades and Great Park residents valued these accoutrements. Cascades residents were rooted in their neighborhoods, and many have finished paying their mortgages. However, for younger Cascades residents, they perceived their neighborhoods to be stepping stones, a place to begin their middle class dreams.

Mr. Herve exemplifies a Cascades respondent who sees their neighborhood as a springboard, and not a final destination. He and his wife moved from Brooklyn to their current home shortly after they married. They purchased their home through a homebuyer assistance program. They received financial assistance from family members, in addition to their own savings and a cash settlement from a recent car accident. As much as they enjoyed and cultivated their home through cosmetic improvements, the neighborhood did not reflect the status of their home. Therefore, belonging to the middle class demonstrated that there was a continuum of middle classness among Cascades younger families. They believed that they were beginning their ascendance into the middle class, and hoped to move to more suitable residential locations that reflected their class aspirations and tastes.

Transnational Ideas of Class and Status

While the Haitian middle class expressed strong opinion about their middle class lives, they provided in depth information about their families class origins. I found that they were more vocal about their family's class origins in their home country than African Americans and Jamaicans were. They noted that economic prosperity was sometimes, but not often, the reason for their family's migration. For Haitians, migrating to the US took on economic as well as political meaning.

The majority of Haitians in the sample noted that they came from middle class families in Haiti. They came from households where their fathers were business owners/entrepreneurs, or worked for government agencies. In most households, mothers stayed at home, tended to their children or worked as a partner in the family business.

However, in more progressive households, respondents noted that their mothers were teachers, worked as seamstresses for neighborhood families, or they used migration as a strategy for household mobility. Therefore, the Haitian middle class was hypersensitive to issues of class and class mobility, particularly as it related to their social class past and present. For example, Marie Joseph, currently a business owner in Cascades noted that, like several other respondents, she lived a middle class and perhaps upper middle class life when living in Haiti. She purported that she lived a high-class lifestyle before coming to the United States as a young girl. She lived in the “best neighborhoods,” had maids and drivers.. Therefore, migration to the United States was a wholly undesirable move for her. She notes that her mother migrated to the US and experienced a lifestyle downgrade, making her reticent to participate in the family migration process.

Interviewer: Before you came, what were your thoughts about New York and Queens before you came? As a young girl.

Respondent: Before I came? I don't like New York. I never liked New York even when I was in Haiti. Without having come here. I never like it. You know what? When my mother come to visit us in Haiti, she was always talking to my grandparents. She told them she has to work and this is what she has to do, and I remember looking at her, and saying “what? I don't want to be there.” Because when my mother starts working here, she was a nanny and then after that she went into elderly. And the abuse that she used to take from other people because she didn't have her green card. So, I was like “what, I don't want to be there,” and then when she was talking about the snow. And I'm like this in not a place I want to move to. And then it's cold! I said oh no, and then you don't have a maid? That is the first thing that I ask her. “Who cooks the food, who does the laundry?” She said I have to do it. I said “you do? and that's why your nails are like that.” She has beautiful hands. I said your hands are beautiful and stuff like that. I'm like “mm, this place is not for me.” She said that they have good education and stuff like that. You learn to speak English. I said “Ma, I am learning English here. I don't like it, and I like Spanish better.” I find English to be the worst language ever that anybody have to speak. Up to now I still feel the same way. I don't like New York, I don't like the United States period. Why? I don't know they just don't turn me on.

Like several other respondents who came from middle class families in Haiti, their parent's migration to the United States meant that they had to work jobs which were below their skill level, and caused them to experience downward mobility in terms of income and lifestyle upon arrival. However, overtime, their parents ascended the class ladder or set the next generation up to do so.

Few respondents noted that they left Haiti for reasons of political instability, as opposed to economic motivations (e.g. Noreen, Claudia, Josette). Their families were relatively affluent^{xli}, before the fall of the Duvalier regime in the 1980s, The descent of the multiyear dictatorship undermined their family's economic prosperity. Noreen, for example, arrived in the US at a young age, but remembers growing up in Haiti, in affluent conditions. She speaks of the lavish birthday parties that her father threw for her and her sister, and the type of entrepreneur that she was. However, she shares that his economic connectedness came at a political price, causing her family to become a target. Noreen noted that the decision to come to the US was out of fear for the family's life. She shares:

“Yeah, we were home and people were actually trying to get in the home. It's scary. Extremely. And there is no help everything was in chaos. I remember my father wasn't home that day and so when the people – just was my mom to stop (indiscernible) from their home. My mom and I and my sister were to run upstairs and...Hiding. I remember my aunt came to visit that day unfortunately end up being stuck in the same situation with us. And we had like a nanny you know – we were all scared... So it's like five women upstairs, and we were just like started (leaning on friends). We were pretty terrified, they had like all kinds of stuff in their hands and screaming and shouting. Somehow someone went to meet my father from...From coming to the into the block you know, area and he wave my father over there and then told him not to go that way and somehow he went to the back of the house. And we – you think this is the movies...It sounds like a movie. We were actually got rescued from like one of the windows and then pulling us down, my dad and the other guy was just

helping. And it was so weird like I don't think the people, and you could hear there were other people in the block that were like oh it's only the you know, like lady and her kids."

After explaining this horrifying scene from her childhood, Noreen went on to explain that businessmen like her father, needed protection in Haiti. Their affluence and influence made them prime targets during insurgent upheavals, many of whom were opposed to Haiti's class and political inequality.

"So he had certain things about him you know, but there was the reality of the country that we were living in. If you were a business man, you had many things you had to have some kind of connection in the government, that was – people forget that the time that we are living in what was the norm you know, like when they start criticizing they forget you know, because if you have business you have certain things – you need to have some kind of connection for protection. You need something. Either you would be harassed or either you would have issues, you know, so people forget you know."

Noreen's rationalization was an attempt to defend her father. However, one is left to question to what extent her father's middle class status and power was at the root of why her family home was targeted that day. Nonetheless, the economic prosperity of her family made her a political target, and later a political exile in the United States. Like few other middle class Haitians in this study, migration was more of a political imperative than a strategy for economic mobility. This immigration status made them distinct from Jamaican immigrants.

Belonging to the middle class, in the imagination of many Haitian middle class respondents, was as much about their quality of life as it was about money. Many Haitian middle class residents lamented that belonging to the middle class in Haiti was a more desirable experience compared to being middle class in New York. They noted that in Haiti, one could have house help and nurture relationships. In Haiti, work requirements

are less demanding than in the United States, which allowed them to spend quality time with loved ones.. For example, Edwin noted that in the United States, one could be middle class and have the accoutrements which come along with this status. However, the quality of one's marriage may suffer because of unhealthy work schedules.

Interviewer: Is there anything you miss about Haiti?

Respondent: The lifestyle. You know like here there's no and you don't have no time for friend, friend don't have no time for you. in Haiti you will sit down and talk all over blah, blah, blah and you know and got more time for your family and friends but here there is no most a thing like that, everybody is on different thing, sometime you passed six months you don't see your friend or a year you don't see your friend and is living in the same neighborhood with you, yeah. Sometime you married your wife and then you don't even have time for your wife. She work in the morning, you work at night when she is coming you're going to work.

Edwin shared a sentiment which was echoed by Haitian nurses who worked overtime, entrepreneurs who worked two or three jobs. They each spent more time chasing the middle class dream, than actually living it. Therefore, while class mobility was a goal for many, few posited that being middle class, or the type of lifestyle of hard work and multiple jobs, meant that one's quality of life was desirable. Many shared that their relationships suffered for it. While there are implicit assumptions about gender and work in Edwin's quote, the fact that this is how class identity is imagined indicates its centrality to how the Haitian middle class perceives and manages their belonging to the American middle class.

Being Middle Class

The Haitian middle class respondents participated in activities and networks which demonstrated, reinforced and transmitted their class status. Their occupations and careers

were a clear example of their social status. They were service managers and medical professionals. All the entrepreneurs who owned businesses and organizations served the black community in general, or the Haitian community specifically. Similar to the black bourgeoisie which Frazier focuses on in his seminal text *Black Bourgeoisie*, the black middle class was formed when black entrepreneurs opened shops or worked in professions which served the black community when whites refused to do so out of racist fears of the black community. The Haitian middle class in this study adopted a mix of these mobility strategies by opening up stores and businesses which catered to Haitian clientele, primarily through beauty salons, real estate companies, barber shops, grocery stores, bakeries and restaurants.

Many of the participants in the study were involved in entrepreneurial activities (some in addition to their full time jobs) and participated in activities which improved their local and transnational communities. This was a classed process because it mandated time and financial resources to complete projects while maintaining one's standard of living. For example, Claudette was a full-time social worker, yet she also participates in a local non-profit which was invested in improving the quality of life in the local environment as well as abroad. This was characteristic of many Haitians, who took part in either local or transnational community building projects.

In Cascades, business leaders noted that they wanted to bring scarce specialty businesses into their neighborhood. They were interested in enhancing the quality of the neighborhood. Marie Joseph noted that she enjoyed Cascades and took strides to improve it.

“I like it over here, I am comfortable. I am trying to make it better; I am trying to extend this place to open my spa, yes. Because I want to put something here that they don’t have around here. So this is what I pray God for and I hope that he would provide it.”

In the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti, many Cascades residents provided remittances or social services to Haitians in New York and in Haiti. In the suburbs, for example, Claudette managed a local non-profit which sought to help both low income and middle-income families adjust to life in the US,. Claudette works as a full time social worker. In her free time, she runs HAYLEY, a local non-profit. Through this non-profit, she addresses issues of inequality and poverty by providing services for struggling families.

“Okay first I want to start with me. I consider myself as middle class doing what I do as a social worker working with different class.... Look I have to say I’m very happy and fortunate to understand and been expose to not having and being able to evaluate it, even though I haven’t. And I think when I look my life the meaning that I have giving it to serving always someone who always involving, like I always this not fair, this is the way things should be from the time I was kid. I always ask this person, I’m very sure that person look up to them. They don’t even understand but they love me. My parents don’t really understand me...”

Claudette, grew up poor, and “reaches back” to those who are less fortunate. Because she has achieved a middle class status, she can participate in this type of community work. She laments that her parents wanted her to pursue a career as a doctor or engineer, but she wanted to be a social worker, so she could help others. The group Hayley, also has a women’s group which serves middle-income women who Claudette claims have “different needs and concerns than people who are low income.” The women’s group, HAYLEY, is comprised on middle class professional Haitian women. Claudette explains:

“Phenomenon Group is not a program, is not for the client is for the professional I said so the clients are the professional, she said no is professional getting together as again. Is another social need we are talking on social account she said but do you see is not same, I said it’s probably not the same but is the same, what do we do when we get together; it’s an empowerment group, it’s a support group. We don’t call it that but let’s be real it’s support group. So, you know it wasn’t intended to be that what is today. Seven years ago we started Phenomenon Women Group, we invited women and it just turn out that we see is a different type of women who would come to the group and I come to understand in the hierarchy it’s needs, when someone need housing, must put food on the table, they don’t sense the need to be saying to them where I am where I am going. So is Phenomenon Women Group became more of, we don’t put it out like that, you have to be at a different level, you end up being at different level being in that group, you follow me? So this is to say, could be a middle class, could be whatever class to be part of the group. So, in a way is a services, it’s still a support group if we call it the support group maybe there was certain people would have come. But when you have 15, 20 people participating and very happy to be in Phenomenon Women Group where we address issues relating to woman; domestic violence, sexuality, you name it etc. it’s still current. You understand what I’m saying?”

Therefore, Claudette, like many other respondents, participated in local community organizations which addressed the social, spiritual, and educational needs of its residents.

The Haitian middle class also practiced being middle class through the strong use of social groups and remittances to alleviate the social conditions of poverty in Haiti. A part of understanding oneself as middle class for Haitians is through the comparison of their present social status and wealth to that of their lower income family members in Haiti. However, while some cut ties with lower income family members, friends, and communities, the Haitian middle class and to some extent the Jamaican middle class, actively sought ways to remain connected to Haiti and participate in social projects to improve the conditions of their homeland.

First, the Haitian middle class was involved in the transmission of capital across borders into Haiti. Through remittances, they remained connected and supportive of

family who were in the home country. All respondents, with the exception of those who could be considered 1.5 generation, sent money back to Haiti to help aunts, uncles, parents, siblings and friends pay for medical fees, keep their businesses open or attend school. While many respondents participated in this type of remittance system, they ranged in the amount of money they sent home. They transferred anywhere from a couple hundred dollars, to \$2000 a year back home. However, they also invested in capital improvement projects. For example, Joseph, a medical professional in his 50s and Great Park resident. He travels to Haiti 3-5 times a year to participate in medical missions and community projects. He describes the dilemma of a middle class Haitian person with family back in Haiti.

Interviewer: Okay, all right, sounds good. Okay, since you have so much family back in Haiti, do you send money back or when you go back, are you giving money or do you remit?

Respondent: Yes. I – into, I have relationships. I will finally show you relationships with people. I don't – as to the amount of – the amount of money I send to Haiti compared to the amount of money I remit, it is very different. Most Haitians send money. They send a \$100 for this person, a \$100 for that person and so it's almost like a relic, they have not – the way I do it, I support projects. That means if you want to go to school, we sit down and I say how much is it going to cost and how long is it going to be, this is my commitment for six months, this is my commitment for two years, this is what I'm going to do, and I do that. In two years, I'll give you half, in three years you'll take a 100 percent of your – and I'm not sending you anymore. In a way there is a finite beginning and there is a finite end to it. It helps my sense of not being abused and it also help me – my sense of thinking that they are going to be independent. It also preserves my relationship with family, because so often times when you just send money, the person that they – you don't send money anymore, it is almost a cessation of love, a cessation of caring, your caring, you know. Because if you send me money for ten years, why haven't you send me anymore, you don't care about me anymore and that leaves – that leaves you without an exit strategy.

Whereas if you simply say; we're going to support your education, I'm going to support you with this building in progress for four years, when it's done, I'll--then there's an end. So in that sense that's the way I support

– I tend to support more structures, family, organizations and stuff, I do not support urgent or impoverished related issues; in terms of like, oh damn my god, you look so horrible, I'm going to promise you this and promise you that, because that destroys the country. That destroys the psychology of people so I do remit but it's a little different.

He describes the dilemma of a middle class Haitian person with family back in Haiti. He manages this relationship in a way which demonstrates his middle class status. He invests strategically in creating pathways of mobility for his family and community in Haiti. His intention is to bolster and support the population, and resists becoming a constant source of financial support.

Boundary Work

How does the Haitian middle class engage in class boundary work?

Boundaries encountered

The Haitian middle class were a part of New York's middle class and shared common concerns of middle class people such as paying off debt and transmitting their class status to the next generation. Also, the economic recession was repeatedly referred to as the most significant challenge to maintaining and reproducing their class status. Marie Joseph shares:

“A lot of people have moved, a lot of people have lost their business, like something's were not kosher or they lost interest or whatever it is. Because I believe that since the past 3 years, things have been slowing down. So, instead of us bringing up our prices, either we leave it the same, or there are days we look for special prices just to keep the same customers or to attract new customers. It's been tough.”

Marie Joseph has witnessed the closure or owner-transfer of numerous neighborhood shops on the Boulevard. Walking down the residential streets of Cascades and Great

Park neighborhood, one will find an assortment of foreclosed homes or homes for sale. Therefore, places like Cascades, which prospered in the past several decades from an upswing in economic conditions, were now experiencing stagnation, and in some respects, decline. For example, Eulily notes that she owes more on her current home than it is currently worth.

“My house would be paid off you know and my kids will probably have money to pay for their couch you know. In the past if you buy a house we use to say oh I have a problem. I wanna take \$50,000 on my house, not anymore you can’t say that. My house is worth \$420 and I owe \$470 so you think I can borrow any money on my house before. So it’s put it off and let me tell you something. When I see my life I know a lot of people would like to be in my position even though sometimes I may not be able to put food on my table, you know it’s pretty hard it is.”

The lived experience of being middle class for Haitians, as well as Jamaicans and African Americans in this study was characterized by structural and personal challenges to their class status. The deterioration in the national and local economy and the interlinked housing crisis shaped this outcome.

Haitian middle class respondents also noted that they experienced significant boundaries to their class mobility and status from their social network of family and friends. The white middle class is said to have a network which is more saturated with middle class people. Blacks on the other hand, are said to have networks that are more likely to have a high proportion of low-income people. This pattern was prevalent among the Haitian middle class. For example, Mr. Price, a father of 2 who lives in Cascades, argued that he was middle class, but it was difficult to remain that way because of low-income family members who needed his services.

“I’m middle class, me and my wife. But what does that mean when you have all these people behind you who you have to help, give money too. That takes away from your income, your life. It’s not easy because they need the help, and you cannot say no. You have to help. It’s all the hands that you have to tap to help that are behind you. Can’t ignore them, so.”

Cascades residents were more likely to purport that family and friendship networks posed challenges to their middle-income status. In connection to the ways in which one’s networks helps or hinders their class status, I also find that the Haitian middle class confronted class boundaries from family members who purposefully hindered their transition into legal and economic stability in the United States upon arrival. Claudia, for example, noted that a male family member, a middle class engineer, withheld information from her about accessing a work permit and permanent residency in the United States which impacted her ability to economically integrate.

"Then he told me how to renew my visa but no one wanted to help me in the family. They know. There is something in the Haitian family, you born here so you haven’t gone through, so I’m going to tell you a culture. Family, they will really extend themselves for help, at a certain distance. Especially, they have this thing when they come, they came and they had a hard time they want you to also have a hard time, they will not pave the way for you. To them I was well educated, I was not only working as a teacher at the time, I was starting – because you see, after you study sociology – I think here is probably the same thing, I was an intern at one of this big places for research, I was well into that. So when I arrived here, to them it was like, if they help me (I would go and help too quick). So they came here, different ways, I was more educated than then, my generation, the second generation of the children in my family more educated than the first generation which is normal but they didn’t see that way. And what threw me away is – I went to live with an uncle because I came to Florida and up to New York here, when I heard that I could not go to Kansas. I went to an uncle, by the time I was looking for a job we find out that I was due for an interview, he threw me out.”

Claudia provided insight into what she perceived to be a problem with the Haitian immigrant family. She argues that if a family member senses that a new immigrant will

surpass them economically, they will be less willing to help you ascend the class ladder. This was the case for other respondents, who said that they dealt with contentious situations with sponsoring family members upon arrival, but who did not facilitate their upward mobility. They instead caused excessive levels of stress and hindered their access to social networks and information. This was similar to the Jamaican middle class experience, where some respondents noted that their family members attempted to limit their aspirations and dreams of becoming educated, having cars and purchasing homes.

Some respondents noted that, before they arrived in the United States, they had strong relationships with family members in the states who offered to sponsor them once they arrived. However, respondents shared that after they settled in the United States, their immediate or extended family members changed their demeanor and retracted their original promises of financial and emotional support. A possible explanation for this patterned behavior was that their sponsors grew jealous of the migrants potential to succeed,. A Jamaican woman noted that her sisters had never purchased a home although they had lived in the United States longer than she did. Therefore, when she and her husband set out to purchase their current home, they were discouraged and harshly judged by her sister, who believed it was a wasted investment. Claudia noted that her experience with her uncle was rooted in his desire to keep her in a subjugated status, creating power relations where she depended on him for her well-being. These patterns are perhaps rooted in the tensions within immigrant communities where ones social mobility is seen as a personal threat to those who may not be as affluent.

Boundaries Erected

Public Schools

The Haitian middle class, similar to Jamaicans and African Americans, engage in boundary erecting against groups and environments which they constructed as social or moral outsiders. The primary institutions that Haitian middle class respondents built class boundaries against were public schools. According to many Haitian respondents, the public school in Haiti is heavily stigmatized as being a place where “poor people send their children.” When Haitians enter the United States, respondents noted that they worked hard to send their children to Catholic or private school. There was a cultural belief in Haiti that public schools are inferior educational institutions compared to private schools. Eulily, a high-ranking nurse and Great Park resident shares:

“Like where I live I would I mean if I had the money believe you know coming from Haiti will always have the tendency that our kids should go to private school versus. We always compare like public school as poor people school that’s our mentality you know even though we know from back home the public system is better than the private system but just for maybe for reputation, don’t want to be labeled as. Poor people some Haitian will go to the extreme to put their kids in public school. I have a friend of mine she is a nurse; she’s not making that much money. She has four kids in private school, yeah \$40,000 probably \$30,000 something you know and she is working, she can’t sleep but night to work to pay for the school but I understand she lives in Brooklyn were she lives it’s always good you know but right now to tell you the truth if I had the money I would put my kids in private school.”

Noreen, too, noted that she was dissatisfied with the public education system in New York. Her line of work requires her to frequent public schools and she shares what she notices.

Interviewer: What do you think of the public schools?

Respondent: I really don't like them and that's one of the reason why I was thinking about moving to Nassau or you know, not too far and Valley Street or something. So I'm trying to see you know, I don't know how is going to be yet so. I would say just by me even going into schools and working and also looking at some of the report cards online and you don't even need to look,(no mine), just look at them after school, it's just a chaos. I think that silly children are children that last most of the tire and you know I feel that you know, also a lot of time they don't really care because they know is a lot of minorities and a lot of those teachers is just hatred you know. I mean you know, giving that there are some good ones; I'm not going lie, there are people that actually you know, what they do and you know want to make a difference. But then you have people who are just there to come up with (application). And the classroom is and materials scarce and scarce and you wonder. You know, I feel very strongly about that to have money to go to prisons and have money to provide things in prison and yet be seeing kids; they are not getting books.

Noreen explains the problems that schools have as the result of the “kids” and the “system.” As a strategy to build further distance between her and parents who send their children to public schools, Noreen wishes to move to Long Island, where public schools are perceived as superior. However, even among suburban respondents, they posited that their neighborhood schools have decline significantly in the past several years. They, therefore, also erect class boundaries against suburban public schools. These class boundaries are deeply embedded in racialized perceptions about schools with an increased number of black and/or minorities. Several parents noted that when they drove past the schools, they saw young black students misbehaving and dressed with “their pants hanging low.” Therefore, an increased number of black students signified to Haitian middle class parents the decline of a public school, although financial disinvestment caused by white flight and negative perceptions about the quality of integrated schools is an important part of the story (Clotfelter 2001). Therefore, Haitian middle class parents adopt a similar approach as whites who opt to send their children to private school in order to escape minority students who they automatically perceive as being lower class..

Neighborhoods

Haitian middle class respondents also engaged in building boundaries against lower income neighborhoods which were adjacent to them or the actual neighborhoods in which they lived. Space mattered in this process. This pattern was more prevalent among Cascades residents who were surrounded by low income neighborhoods. Therefore, in the absence of the physical distance between low-income people who lived in adjacent neighborhoods, they erected social distance between themselves and low-income neighborhoods. Mrs. Jean Baptiste, for example, noted that Cascades was different and superior to other parts of Jamaica, Queens.

Respondent: I would say no. It's like Cascades to me is more legit

Interviewer: More elite?

Respondent: I mean where people with class live...Because it's more quiet and there's too many activities over there and when you get inside here it's quiet.

Other respondents built boundaries against the low income people in their neighborhoods and those in Long Island. They noted that there were "better places to live" than what was available to minorities and immigrants. Edwin, for example, noted that there is always a better place to live and raise one's children than Brooklyn, Queens and Great Park.

Interviewer: What do you think about New York as a place to live and raise your children?

Respondent: As you can live but if you are in Brooklyn or Queens you go and look for another better place. And not Queens, not all over that ...if you live in the bad neighborhood you have to move. No, I think it's good.

It's kind of okay. It's kind of okay but there is enough better place than what we have.

Interviewer: Like where, would you say is better?

Respondent: I don't know but I think, I think there is, I think there is much better place than here.

Interviewer: And.

Respondent: Like all over, like in Great Park there is a better place than Great Park, you know when you go to the big buildings you find all those housing there people living in welfare and those things and then you will live in a nice neighborhood you know and is different, is different, it's like here too.

Edwin notes that there are mixed-income dwellings in Cascades and Great Park, which he believes reduces the desirability of their neighborhoods. He builds boundaries against his current living space, and notes that even if one “moves on up” to the suburbs, there are more desirable neighborhoods that one could live in. Perhaps, Edwin is addressing the limited residential options that blacks have, whereby they are sorted into neighborhoods with a higher percentage of low income residents than the white middle class (Alba, Logan et al. 2000). Therefore, while some Haitian respondents noted that they made strategic choices to live in predominately black settings in order to avoid white hostilities in the suburbs, others reported that their residential choices were constrained and that there were “better” neighborhoods which were, perhaps, more difficult to access because of racial steering and high property tax requirements.

Romantic Partners

Lastly, the Haitian middle class noted that they built class boundaries against romantic partners. Like African American middle class people, Haitians had class and income specific criteria for being in a romantic relationship with someone, which were sometimes also influenced by ethnicity. For example, Marie Joseph noted that she

preferred Haitian men as opposed to Haitian American men because they “had more class” and knew how to treat their romantic partners.

Interviewer: Where is your husband from?

Respondent: He’s from Haiti, he’s Haitian (giggles). I love Haitian men, yes I do. I understand them better than other nationalities. I understand them better. There is something in them that attract me more than anybody else.

Interviewer: Was he born in Haiti or was he born here?

Respondent: He was born in Haiti. I don’t think I would go with any Haitian boys here. It’s a different culture, oh no, mmmm. They spoiled. No, No, I don’t know if they spoiled, there is something about the one that are born here. They are too American for me. I like the old fashioned ways. I like it, so, any guys that are born in Haiti, they have a better culture, they have a better understanding about woman, they care more about the woman than the one that are born here. They care more. I have friends who are married to Haitian who are born here, it’s not the same when you compare to the Haitian who are born here. The Haitian that are born in Haiti, there are things that they know not to say and not to do. The one that are born here, they lash out whenever, they have no reserve. Haitian men pamper their women. To them, in their eyes, the woman is a rose. Ok, over here, its half and half. They (American born Haitian men) say “you know, baby, this is New York City baby, what do you think?, we go half and half.” I don’t like that talk (laugh), so it’s a turn off, yes, it’s a turn off yes.

Noreen, on the other hand, notes that while she is not interested in someone making a lot of money, she is interested in someone who “has their stuff together.”

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. And is it important for them to be of a certain race or a certain class or a certain ethnicity?

Respondent: Not necessarily a certain race or a certain class, like definitely what do you like to, you know, some of which character he has you know, their head on their shoulders. You know, at my age right, the person I am going to be with now needs to be together.”

Therefore, Noreen’s partner selection, like that of many other respondents, was to have someone who was established in their life and career. Others were more interested in the comportment of partners in romantic relationships, erecting boundaries against American

born men of Haitian ancestry. They were perceived to be less caring and attentive towards their female partners compared to Haitian men who were born and raised in the context of Haitian cultural frameworks around masculinity and cross-gender romantic relations. Therefore, within the Haitian ethnic group, women made distinctions between nationality and ancestry when choosing their romantic partners, giving precedence to foreign born Haitian men.

Boundary Blurring:

Although the Haitian middle class engaged in significant boundary erecting, they also actively blurred boundaries between themselves and people who were of lower income backgrounds. Some parents noted that they were not interested in practicing or expressing their middle class status to others. They engaged in modest behaviors, and rarely wanted to bring attention to their social status. A husband and wife agreed:

“ We are not flashy people, we don’t like to bring attention to ourselves, there is no need.”

Marie Joseph was vocal about blurring boundaries between herself and people with a lower income status. She, like many others, have a transnational perspective on how class operates. She notes that in Haiti, class distinctions were more permeable than they are in the United States.

Interviewer: It’s said that there are strong class divisions in Haiti. What do you think about those class divisions?

Respondent: Well I have been there so I know they have a lot of classes. But, there was respect, now the respect isn’t there anymore. Let’s say for instance, Was it the rich class that we were living as, or the middle

class....? We have 3 classes in Haiti. You have the poor, you have the middle class and you have the rich. Like here. Ok, but, when you say poor people, but they were really not that poor the way you see, like homeless people and stuff like that. Like the homeless in Haiti, they usually have family members that go after them to feed them and to bathe them, but they would rather beg on the street because they don't wanna. or they have a mental disorder or something, but there will be time when their family will take them and put them someplace. Then you have the middle class family who goes to work, they come back, wherever they would be working at, they will go to work, they will come home, everybody will be fed, everybody will be taken care of. As far as entertainment is concerned, once in a blue moon they will go to the beach, it was free to go to the beach, or go from the province or whatever it is. Now you have the rich who travel abroad. And pleasure was always there as far as entertainment is concerned. But everybody would mingle at that point. When there is a party, like a bal (Haitian dance party) or something, wherever the bal is or whatever that band that is playing, whether you are poor or rich, that night everybody is dancing; everybody is enjoying themselves. Whether it is the maid that is at your house, or the gerant (house manager) or whomever, but everybody together until the next day then everybody goes back again to their classes. Even at church when you are going church, all right, everybody has their own little church and stuff like that, but over here, (in the US) they try to do the same thing, but it is not working. Ok, it doesn't work. Meaning that they try to divide the Haitian. I am talking about Haitian doing that to their own Haitian people. Ok, as if you were well known in Haiti and stuff like that so you here, it's the same thing. No, everybody here, we work together, we take the heavy snow to shovel and everything. You know we do what we have to do so we don't divide ourselves. Although some of them bothered and live with the white community so that people don't know what their background is, whatever they doing. But it is just some kind of mental thing that they have.

Interviewer: Are there stronger class divisions here than in Haiti?

Respondent: Yes

Similar to African Americans and Jamaicans, Haitians also used a spiritual framework to erase social boundaries between class groups. Marie Joseph uses moral justifications to demonstrate that there is no difference between people in different class groups.

“People have not learned anything yet. They haven't learned life and they don't know what life is all about. Because if everybody is into religion now, they are Christian, but if they are into Christianity, that means we are all one. So we should be able to do it as one. Of course, I mean people who are educated and uneducated, they are two different, they see things

two different ways, at the same time, we have to learn how to respect one another and work together and do what needs to be done accordingly?”

Noreen, too, echoes a similar type of moral and religious code when portraying her perspective and relations with people in a lower income bracket than her.

“I always feel like you can learn from anyone whether you know, because you can have as much education you never know everything. You know, so I really been treating everyone with the highest respect, with respect whether they were even at work for people who take out the garbage can or whatever. I’m always you know, saying “Hello, how are you doing?” you know, all kinds. You know, like everyone deserves respect; at the end they were all human beings. And you know, I think it comes from my *faith*. You know, that at the end of the road we all have blood running through our veins and we are going to the same place, buddy. And I feel like as if we are going to the same place. We all have the common thing to this story. So rich, poor, black, white...”

The existing literature notes the ways in which middle class blacks erect boundaries against the lower class in order to distinguish themselves. While this is true in some respects, and makes for an interesting narrative about boundary work in the black community, relationships between middle class Haitians and the lower class are more complicated. Similar to African Americans and Jamaicans in the middle class, Haitians adopted a religious spiritual narrative when discussing their perceptions of people who had lower incomes than themselves.

Conclusion

The Haitian middle class, like the Jamaican middle class, were more vocal about their class identities than their racial identities. The amount of data on the class experiences of the Haitian middle class outnumbered that found on issues of race. I attribute this, partly, to the fact that many respondents were coming to terms with how race in the American

context worked, or are trying to manage racial boundaries by doing a fine dance around it. They both adopted and embraced black identities. Generation mattered in this process of belonging, whereby Haitians who were 1.5 generation were more likely to claim a strong sense of membership to the black collective group than first generation immigrants. Few suburbanites demonstrated similar patterns of attachment. For the first generation, black identity was a descriptive characteristic. First generation individuals embraced black racial identities. There were explanations for this, which included that they were turned off by the negative associations attached to black people or because they experienced poor relations with other blacks, perhaps, compromising their sense of racial solidarity.

In terms of being black, or practicing black identity, some Haitian middle class respondents participated in activities and everyday behaviors which signaled their ties to the black community. For example, they noted using black realtors to find their homes and desired to live in a black neighborhood to avoid white settings which they believed would be hostile to them. They also strategically taught their children how to navigate racial boundaries in everyday life; all the while exposing them to black middle class social circles such as Jack and Jill. This behavior was more prevalent among suburban residents, and 1.5 generation respondents. Racial boundaries proved to be a part of everyday life for the Haitian middle class, although some noted that these incidents were manageable, or all together dismissable. They reported encountering racial boundaries in the workplace. Great Park residents dealt with discrimination in their neighborhoods, and Cascades residents negotiated the racialized treatment they received from police officers who infiltrated their predominately black neighborhood. Some Cascades residents

actively erected boundaries against all white neighborhoods because they perceived threats of racial exclusion, yet they also actively avoided predominately black schools for their children which they believed to be low quality.

Furthermore, the Haitian middle class opted out of participating in interracial marriage markets, yet blurred that boundary when it came to their preferences for their children marital partners. Haitians were more likely than African Americans to accept their children's non-black partners. Racial boundary blurring between themselves and whites also occurred most frequently among the Haitian middle class than African Americans and Jamaicans. Although they identified the different forms of racial discrimination that they encountered in their workplaces and neighborhoods, they were also believed that "all white people were not the same." They noted that they had amicable relations with coworkers and managers. Therefore, there were real tensions among the Haitian middle class in terms of being black, racial identity and lived experiences with racial boundaries. This is, perhaps, due to their position in the black ethnic hierarchy as a low social status, stigmatized group. They may desire to overcome ethnic stigmas by avoiding preexisting racial stigmas or the linguistic isolation.

In terms of class status and identity, the Haitian middle class agreed that income and education were the main indicators of class status. They, however, often shed away from the title of belonging to the middle class in an effort to downplay their possessions and status. Nonetheless, the sample made an average 6 figure household salaries. Tastes were also said to be an important indicator of one's class status. However, respondents noted that in middle-income neighborhoods like Cascades, the cultural tastes of the population varied from simple to refined. Residential location also proved to be an

important indicator of one's belonging to the middle class, particularly since these groups deliberately choose to live in Cascades and Great Park. The Haitian middle class also belonged to the middle class merely by the virtue of living well off lives compared to the families that they left behind in Haiti. Many of the respondents noted that they came from middle class families in Haiti, and left the country for political as opposed to economic freedom. They left behind family members, and overtime, ascended the class ladder in the US, further separating them from social networks in Haiti.

Being middle class, or practicing one's middle class status primarily through their participation in community building projects locally and in Haiti. The Haitian middle class often expressed that it was their duty to improve the conditions of their neighborhoods and that of their countrymen in Haiti. They used organizations, remittances and associations in order to achieve this goal. Despite the challenges of staying afloat in a difficult economy, middle class Haitians (with the exception of the 1.5 generation respondent, Mr. Herve) sent money to Haiti, spreading their wealth across international borders, yet managing to maintain a middle class status in New York City.

Boundary work was also engaged in by the Haitian middle class. They encountered significant boundaries to maintaining or improving their class status. This was in part due to the fact that they were often solicited for monetary assistance from lower income family and friends (remittances were a part of this process). They erected socioeconomic boundaries against what they perceived to be low income establishments and locations such as schools and adjacent poorer neighborhoods. Despite their drawing of class boundaries against the lower class, they also contradictorily erased class boundaries between people who were lower income such as their family and friends. Like

the Jamaican and African American middle class, they used a spiritual and moral framework to lower social boundaries between themselves and less fortunate family members or people in their social network.

The Haitian middle class demonstrated a complex web of belonging and being to the middle class and engages in interesting patterns of boundary work which are both similar and different to the African American middle class population. In the next chapter, we will discuss the implications of these findings for the African American culture of mobility model and the place of black ethnic middle class groups within the larger framework of segmented assimilation. The hope is that this project will demonstrate the complexities behind the economic ascendance and racial exclusion of various segments of America's middle class population.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: Understanding the Black Ethnic Middle Class

Existing sociological studies argue that race and class are not fixed categories or identities. They are defined, redefined and negotiated in everyday life by social actors and institutions. Contemporary research has demonstrated how black immigrants in particular confront and then learn the structures of race and ethnicity in the United States. Recent work on the black middle class elucidates the contextual, changing and transformative nature of social identities such as race and class. Building upon immigrant incorporation and the race/class literature, this dissertation has raised the following important questions: a. How do native and foreign born middle class blacks experience race and class? and b. Is there evidence of a convergence in racial and class lived experiences between African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans?

The case studies suggest that Haitian and Jamaican middle class immigrants are becoming similar to African Americans in the ways in which they navigate racial and class boundaries. This provides important empirical evidence that the African American Culture of Mobility hypothesis is a viable addition to segmented assimilation theory. However, space, generation and ethnicity matter in the process of becoming similar to the African American middle class. In interactions with whites in the suburbs and at work, as well as class relations here and abroad, the Haitian and Jamaican middle class demonstrated important differences from the African American middle class. In this concluding chapter, I first summarize these findings in greater detail. I then discuss the implications of these findings for existing theoretical frameworks of minority and immigrant integration.

Discussion of Findings:

How do African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans experience racial identity and boundaries?

Racial Identity: Group, Space and Generation Patterns

When analyzed together, the black ethnic middle class groups in this study navigated racial and class boundaries in their workplaces, neighborhoods, public space and interpersonal relations with non-blacks. This suggests that being middle class did not mute racial nor ethnic identities or boundaries. Instead, I learned that there are a complex web of decisions and problems that black ethnic middle class adults confront in everyday life in relation to their racial integration and class mobility. The preceding chapters on the racial and class identities of black ethnics (African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans) have provided a portrait of the ways in which they handle their middle class status while negotiating the boundaries of race and ethnicity. Along key dimensions, we find that African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans encounter race and racism in everyday life in institutions and social interactions (See Table 7.1 for detail). However, each group demonstrates an interesting, and sometimes different, way of negotiating the social and cultural boundaries. This provides evidence that the black middle class' cultural toolkit is varied and complex and influenced by one's immigration experience, ethnicity and social history. The dimensions we focus on in this dissertation are ethnic group, space and generational differences.

African Americans

The African American middle class possessed identities in their cultural toolkit which allowed them to both: a. convey their class status to whites to demonstrate that they are distinct from the African American lower class, and b. strategically remain tied to the black community despite their class cleavages which strained this relationship. They expressed strong attachments to their black identities, regardless of their presence in Cascades or Great Park. Black identity was not simply a reactive identity, which came into play once an African American respondent encountered racial discrimination. It was a part of the social fabric of their lives, which they constructed as having a rich social, cultural and political history.

Space: Space mattered to the ways in which black identity was experienced and expressed for African Americans. Because Great Park residents resided in a multiracial environment where they were a minority, they sought black social spaces more actively than Cascades residents, who lived in an all-black area. Black identity dictated where suburbanites worshipped, how they raised their children and the social groups and associations in which they participated. Suburbanites ensured that their children were exposed to other blacks, and therefore, left their neighborhood to attend black churches and social groups which would instill a sense of racial community and pride in their children.

Space also made a difference to the ways in which African Americans defined black identity. For Cascades African Americans, ethnicity was a key faultline used to define racial belonging, a pattern which was absent among Great Park residents, who were more focused on racial boundaries than ethnic boundaries. Being black in the

context of a multiracial and multiethnic landscape such as New York created opportunities for middle class African Americans to define who were the insiders and outsiders of black identity and the black collective group. In Cascades in particular, African Americans lived amongst other blacks from across the Atlantic. They believed themselves to be “authentic” blacks. Racial authenticity was defined by African Americans in terms of a black person’s origin and connection to the history and culture of blacks in the United States. Therefore, being authentically black was defined by nationality, whereby Cascades African Americans believed themselves to be genuine black people, and non-Americans were outsiders of that group. This tension between race and nation emerged as an important theme among African Americans, who constructed themselves as the gatekeepers of black identity in the face of increased black ethnic diversity in their middle class neighborhoods. In the racially integrated suburban neighborhood of Great Park, ethnic differences were more muted. Racial boundaries were more pronounced in Great Park than Cascades, as a result among African Americans.

Jamaicans

The Jamaican middle class and the Haitian middle class demonstrated different patterns around their black identity. Space and generation shaped the racial identity and boundary patterns of the Jamaican middle class, whereby the second generation was much more likely to reside in suburban environments and exhibited higher levels of racial consciousness and corresponding social behaviors..

Generation and Space: The first generation Jamaican respondents were engaged in a process of adopting black identities as a descriptor of themselves, but it did not define their social identity or practices in everyday life. Their experiences in Jamaica embedded a sense on class consciousness over racial consciousness, which persisted after the migration process. Therefore, being a part of the black community and practicing blackness was something which was learned overtime by the first generation. However, the second generation adults in this sample, people born in the United States of Jamaican parents, demonstrated similar patterns of racial identity formation as African Americans. They, too, came of age in the United States, and embraced the ethos around black identity, culture and the struggle for racial equality. Therefore, black identity among the second generation respondents in this sample, too, was a cornerstone of who they were, how they chose their careers, raised their children and politically organized.

Haitians:

Haitians, too, saw divergent patterns in black identity attachment and practices. Like the first generation Jamaicans in this study, first generation Haitians adopted black identities as descriptors of themselves, a phenotype based identity which they could not escape. The 1,5 generation, on the other hand, exhibited racial identities which were strong and shaped their social identities and the ways in which they raised their children. They, therefore, exhibited stronger similarities to African Americans than the first generation.

Generation: However, some first generation suburban respondents also participated in rejecting black identities all together. This occurred for two major reasons:

- a. they felt that the social stigmas attached to being black should be avoided at all costs

and b. they were mistreated by blacks from other ethnic groups, who believed that they were inferior because they were Haitian. This caused a tension which hindered their sense of connection to the black collective group. Therefore, they believed that it was better to refrain from discussing race and racial identity and they blurred boundaries with whites. The few 1.5 generation Haitians in the study, however, converged with second generation Jamaicans and African Americans in their racial identity formation, embracing black identities and using institutional and social networks to participate in black cultural and political life. Therefore, generation mattered to the ways in which black immigrants perceived and connected to black identity.

Space: Residential context mattered to the level of intensity and strategy involved in one's involvement in the black community, whereby suburban residents actively sought opportunities to congregate with blacks inside or outside of their neighborhoods, while urban residents partook in black life on a daily basis by virtue of living in an all-black space.

Managing Race, Social Relations and Mobility

We have discussed the ways of being and belonging to one's racial identity and group. With these findings in mind, we now explore the African American culture of mobility based on what we know about how middle class African Americans navigate racial boundaries (we will discuss class boundaries in the next section) in comparison to middle class Haitians and Jamaicans. Racial boundaries were experienced in the context of schools, neighborhoods, public space, and social interactions. Overall, space mattered to how racial boundaries were experienced and managed. Great Park residents, in

general, experienced higher levels of racial boundaries because of their constant interactions with white neighbors. Racial boundary work was therefore stronger among Great Park residents and ethnic differences were muted as a result. Racial boundaries were encountered by all groups. However, interactions with whites and structural racial boundaries were managed differently across groups. Jamaicans exhibited similar mobility strategies compared to African Americans, whereby they erected boundaries against the white social world, circles and neighbors as a response to discrimination. Some Jamaicans expressed more sympathetic views towards whites, or reasoned that the mistreatment they faced was not race related. However, Haitians, were more forgiving of white racism, and noted that their interactions with whites were sometimes friendlier than their interactions with other blacks.

Schools

Groups and Space: Ethnic groups in Cascades, in particular, confronted poor performing public schools which were in their neighborhood. They often argued that the reason why their local school was low quality was the result of structural racism and residential/school segregation endemic to urban environments. They adopted outmigration strategies which were characterized by sending their children to integrated schools in neighborhoods outside of their middle class residential area, and erected boundaries against the black students who were in their area's public schools. Suburban African Americans, however, believed that the public schools in their neighborhoods were hidden treasures, and noted that when they were coming of age, public schools were high quality and still are today.

Jamaicans, on the other hand, saw little benefit in their local public schools, regardless of it being urban or suburban. Parents who did send their children to public schools expressed regret in their inability to afford private schools tuition fees or shuttled their children to alternative or charter schools which were perceived as better performing institutions. Because many urban and suburban African Americans actually attended public schools in their current or nearby neighborhoods, they attested to its positive attributes. Suburban African Americans valued the diverse curriculum of public schools, which emphasized artistic and athletic development of children more so than private schools.

Haitians:

Haitians also frowned upon public schools because they were all black, but also because they perceived them to be a place for low-income children. First generation Haitian and Jamaican immigrants were primarily invested in their child's academic curriculum, which they believed an all-black school often did not nurture. Therefore, African Americans differ in their use of public versus private schools as a vehicle of mobility for their children, compared to Haitians and Jamaicans who reluctantly sent their children to public schools or spent exorbitant amounts of money on private school tuition at a higher propensity than African American parents in this sample^{xlii}.

Social Relations

Integrated Suburbs: Interactions with White Neighbors

The black middle class confronts significant racial boundaries in the context of the integrated neighborhoods in which they reside. This was the case for African

Americans and Jamaicans in this study, and few Haitians. However, the ways in which they navigated the social marginalization they dealt with in their residential settings differed based on ethnicity.

Group: African Americans are said to experience subtle or overt hostilities in their neighborhoods with white neighbors. The African Americans in Great Park noted these patterns. Jamaicans, too, posited that their white neighbors targeted and harassed their black teenage children, calling the cops on them on some occasions when they were simply playing outside with friends. One Haitian man noted that he has lived in Great Park for years and their white neighbors, who also have teenage sons, keep their distance and their children never play with one another. Respondents from each group encountered and maintained social distance from whites..

However, Jamaicans and Haitians demonstrated different reactions to this treatment than African Americans. Some first generation suburban Jamaicans noted that they understood the angst that whites felt about their new black neighbors, and sometimes befriended them. They adopted a more forgiving attitude towards white racism than African Americans, blurring the racial lines between themselves and whites.

First generation Haitians, too, adopted a sympathetic attitude towards their white neighbors, who they claimed were sometimes more amicable than their black neighbors were. Therefore, the level of boundary blurring between Haitians, Jamaicans and their white neighbors was absent among African Americans. This demonstrates that interpersonal relations with whites in racially integrated suburban residential spaces were viewed as less threatening to first generation immigrants Haitians and Jamaicans, who, perhaps, were happy to gain residence in what they perceived to be an affluent mixed

race neighborhood and did not want to create further social cleavages. This seemed to be particularly the case for Haitians who felt like outsiders of the black collective group but whom also emphasized that their class made them more accepted by their white neighbors.

Romantic Partners

Almost all African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans in Cascades and Great Park expressed that they were not interested in dating outside their race. They had a strong preference for marrying black partners, although few respondents were married to Latino or Asian partners (these were always Haitians and Jamaicans who lived in Great Park). They expressed a concern that romantic or friendship relationships with whites were hindered by issues of trust. In terms of their children, African Americans and Jamaicans were more likely to desire that their children marry black partners. Haitians, however, blur this boundary, and are more likely to be open to the idea of their children dating or marrying across racial lines. A potential explanation for this divergence is that Haitians, perhaps, with a strong sense of their social isolation, see interracial dating as a welcomed tool for integrating with other ethnoracial groups.

Public Settings

In public settings inside and outside of their neighborhoods, African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans all reported experiencing differential treatment based on the color of their skin. In shopping districts and commercial areas, African Americans noted that they encountered racial discrimination often. Latino and white store clerks, cashiers, and

owners treated them poorly based on the color of their skin. Jamaicans echoed this frustrating social interaction, noting it as a moment of visible racial marginalization. Cascades residents posited that police officers targeted them heavily both in their neighborhoods (Cascades) as well as when they traveled outside of their city, treating them with suspicion because they were assumed to be deviant and threatening.

Therefore, Haitians, Jamaicans and African Americans noted experiencing similar levels of discrimination in public life, despite the racial civility which is said to be a cornerstone of urban life. Perhaps, this convergence in experiences in public space is the result of the type of social interaction. Because members of all groups were targets for racialized encounters, and did not have interpersonal relationships with the perpetrators of racist acts in public space, it's facile for respondents to see this form of racial discrimination as upsetting. Although first generation Haitians and Jamaicans, in interactions with white neighbors, coworkers or bosses, experienced similar forms of discrimination, the personal nature of these relationships, perhaps, made them more forgiving of the whites who were a part of their everyday lives as opposed to strangers who treated them harshly or dismissed them based on the color of their skin.

In conclusion, middle class African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans, are similar in how they negotiate racial boundaries in public settings, but diverge in the ways in which they manage more personal racial relationships in their neighborhoods and workplaces. Space and generation mattered in this context with African Americans, Jamaicans and Haitians having divergent reactions to white racism in their residential space. Furthermore, generation mattered in these racial boundary processes. The 1.5 generation Haitians and second generation Jamaicans in the sample were more likely to

operate like African Americans, demonstrating the ways in which generation and time in the United States mattered in the convergence of attitudes and practices of African Americans and black immigrants in the middle class. This provides some evidence for the African American culture of mobility hypothesis, which posits that later generation middle class black immigrants will become more similar to middle class African Americans.

What is the role of class identity and boundaries among middle class African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans?

Managing Class

The class consciousness of the black population is of increasing interest in academic and policy circles. How do the middle class black ethnics in this study understand, perform and protect their class status? By virtue of the sample selection process, space, ethnicity and generation shaped the ways in which respondents in Cascades and Great Park understood their middle class status and their relations with the lower class (See Table 7.2). The higher property taxes in Great Park's suburban county mandated a higher household income from its residents. Therefore, Great Park residents were more financially affluent than Cascades residents. This income differences was reflected in the attitudes towards their status and that of others who resided within the city limits.

Therefore, Great Park residents possessed more bourgeoisie attitudes and manners, and constantly referred to the lower class/income neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Bronx as areas they abandoned or all together surpassed in the interest of quieter

streets, between amenities and most importantly, better schools for their children.

Cascades residents, on the other hand, managed class boundaries in similar fashion to Patillo-McCoy's Groveland residents. The proximity of low income neighborhoods and the increasing number of low income residents in their neighborhoods activated stronger class boundaries and strategies for maintaining the middle class character of their neighborhood. Therefore, the conditions which accompanied living in a predominately black urban middle class area or a racially integrated suburban neighborhood mattered to how black middle class ethnics negotiated their class identities and status. Furthermore, group mattered in this class identity formation process as well. Unlike African Americans, Jamaicans and Haitians were embedded in two economic systems, here and in their home country, which attached different meanings to their class status.

Group: The African American middle class conveyed their class status through social, monetary and cultural signals. They actively attempted to transmit a middle class cultural identity to their children. In terms of class identity and status, the Jamaican middle class attained its middle class status in seemingly different ways than the African American middle class. Several respondents worked multiple shifts and jobs in order to qualify as being middle class. They were distinct from the African American middle class in their economic obligations. While the African American middle class reported sending remittances to family members left behind in the South, the Jamaican and Haitian middle class reported a higher frequency of sending remittances in the form of money and goods to immediate and extended family members. They juggled this financial obligation alongside maintaining a middle class lifestyle in the United States.

Therefore, the class identities of the Jamaican middle class, as well as Haitians were embedded in the stratification systems of Jamaica as well as the United States. The migration was often a strategy for economic mobility. Therefore, their departure from Jamaica was a promising investment and they were perceived by the people they left behind as “making it” or attaining the American dream. In the United States, they managed to become a solid part of the American middle class, demonstrating their class status in the context of the United States. They attempted to ensure the reproduction of their middle class status through the pursuit of better performing schools for their children, much like the African American middle class.

Space: In Cascades in particular, African American middle class were concerned with the quality of their neighborhoods, which they believed were in the process of deterioration with the entrance of poorer residents. They used language, as well, to distinguish themselves from lower class Jamaicans, who spoke “patois.” Great Park resident were more engulfed in issues of racial boundaries than class. This is not to say that class did not matter to Great Park residents. Across the board, Great Park residents had a heightened sense of being middle class and erected boundaries against city life and residents whom they felt a sense of “I am more affluent than Brooklyn and Bronx residents.”

In terms of class status and identity, the Haitian middle class displayed a greater involvement in improving the social conditions in Haiti and in their local community (like the African American middle class). This is in part due to their heightened sense of nation (Zephir, 2001). This was an expression of their higher class status and economic capacity to help people who were less fortunate but also the class disparity between self

and their home community, including family members, friends, and neighbors. They actively remitted, demonstrating the nature of their financial obligations and status. This served as an impediment to sustaining a middle class lifestyle. The pursuit of high quality schools also reflected the middle class status of Haitians parents, who, like Jamaicans and African Americans, actively sought better schools by either moving to suburban areas with better performing schools or sending their children to private schools.

Maintaining and Reproducing Status

A key aspect of the minority culture of mobility is that racial minorities navigate class boundaries in their everyday interactions in their communities. Class boundaries often emerged in the context of interactions with lower class or lower income coethnics who challenged the ethnic or racial authenticity of middle class minorities, or who solicited respondents for financial support, undermining their ability to save and prosper. How did the middle class blacks in this study navigate these faultlines? There were ethnic differences in how class boundaries were perceived and navigated. African Americans believed that their largest challenge to reproducing their class status was their inability to find suitable black male partners to build a household and resources with. The African American sample was largely comprised of women, and they reported that their access to “marriageable” black men was limited. This was more so the case in Cascades, where there was a larger proportion of single female headed middle class households.

Jamaicans in Cascades and Great Park, however, believed that they were largely hindered by their local level social welfare systems. Some noted that they were taxed heavily, but did not have access to social programs which would help them maintain their

class status and relieve their loans and debts. They believed this was unfair, particularly because middle class Jewish people were said to have access to public benefits while other ethnoracial groups were denied access.

Generation: This was a more likely response among first generation respondents in Cascades and Great Park. Jamaicans in the first generation also noted that, because of their immigrant status, they had to avoid potentially lucrative career paths in business. They noted that the financial world was hostile to immigrants, and they therefore managed this boundary by pursuing careers in healthcare. Many of the Jamaican first generation respondents worked in the healthcare niche as nurses or medical technicians. This was also the case for Haitians, who believed that the standardized exams required in the nursing field were race blind and easily navigated as an English language learner. The 1.5 and second generation respondents, however, were more likely to pursue a more diverse array of careers, many in the business sector.

The Haitian middle class in this study expressed that a significant challenge to their class mobility was low income family members who they supported financially. Perhaps, the emergence of this pattern among Haitians could be attributed to their group's status as an isolated and disproportionately low income ethnic community. Their ascendance into the middle class requires more time and resources than African Americans and Jamaicans primarily because English is not their first language and they negotiated a poor context of reception at times in their social interactions with other ethnoracial groups.

Interclass Social Relations

African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans in the middle class demonstrated a mixed bag of identities and behaviors when interacting with low income residents in their neighborhood, at work or in their social networks.

Space: In Cascades, the entrance of low income residents highlighted class identity among all respondents. In terms of relations with low income newcomers to their neighborhood, almost all Cascades residents expressed their disapproval. They posited that the renters who were moving into the neighborhood were undermining its middle class character, and were causing the neighborhood to decline in value. There was a particular problem with low income people who were moving to Cascades from inner city Brooklyn and the Bronx and who displayed what respondents perceived as “ghetto” behaviors in their middle class neighborhood. Therefore, like Great Park residents, Cascades residents erected boundaries against residents of what they considered lower class boroughs or areas.

Concurrently, many African American, Haitian and Jamaican respondents noted that they did not subscribe to class distinctions. Space did not matter here. They blurred boundaries between themselves and low income people with the use of religious and spiritual narratives which supported the idea of human equality regardless of one’s wealth. Because many of the respondents claimed to have grown up in low income circumstances, they sympathized with the experience of being poor. In interactions with higher income individuals, African Americans asserted that this economic distinction did not define their worth, and that they challenged the attempts of affluent people to degrade

them. Therefore, Haitians, Jamaicans and African Americans are similar along some dimensions of racial and class identity work but different along others.

The African American Culture of Mobility: Theoretical Implications for Segmented Assimilation

The African American middle class toolkit, the Haitian middle class toolkit and the Jamaican middle class toolkit encompasses sometimes different and sometimes similar public, ethnic, racial, class and status based identities. However, there were interesting points in which the Haitian and Jamaican middle class were similar to African American middle class respondents, providing key evidence that the African American culture of mobility is salient in the lives of immigrants. They should be explored further in future research on segmented assimilation patterns and overall immigrant socio-cultural, economic, and political incorporation outcomes.

Scholars have noted that the African American middle class is a distinct ethnic group, with a cultural toolkit which consists of social identities (racial, public, status-based, class, ethnic, etc.) which help them navigate their peculiar social position. As noted by Franklin Frazier, the

“Most important consequences of the emergence of the black bourgeoisie, namely, the uprooting of this stratum of the Negro population from its folk background. As a result of the break with its cultural past in either the Negro world with which it refuses to identify, or the white world which refuses to permit the black bourgeoisie to share its life” (p.24).

While Frazier’s summation is a sharp critique of the racial and cultural authenticity of the black middle class, his approach outlines the awkward social position of the African

American middle class in America today. This insider/outsider status is shaped by the boundaries and structures which restrict their ability to fully be incorporated in the United States as blacks in a country that sees itself as distinctly white, despite their better economic outcomes relative to the larger black population who disproportionately occupy the lower class compared to other racial groups, and who in recent economic times, have slipped into more fragile economic situations than ever before. The black middle class today is different compared to that of Frazier's era because of its size and composition, increased ethnic and residential diversity and the tensions between the culture of the streets and decent middle class values. However, the lack of the full social, cultural, economic and political incorporation of blacks in the middle class relative to the white middle class and their interest in escaping (as opposed to transforming) systems of racial inequality makes this epoch's black middle class disturbingly similar to the black middle class population of Frazier's era.

The African American middle class has historically been on the outskirts of the American mainstream. They are almost never thought of as natural Americans (Glazer, 1993) since America sees itself as a white nation. This is exemplified with the election of a biracial president, Barack Hussein Obama, who identifies as black. In the continuous questioning of his birth certificate and American citizenship, America's ugly racist underpinning confirms itself. Yet, the black middle class, which came into fruition, first through serving the black community as business owners and medical professionals, then entered the mainstream occupations in the public and private sector, has ascended the American economic ladder, attaining middle class, upper middle class and affluent lifestyles at unprecedented rates. This cohort of African Americans in the middle class

are more similar to the white middle class in their economic status and residential option than the black lower class, leading many scholars to argue that class, was becoming a more important predictor on life chances for blacks in the United States than race.

While the focus on the black middle class has been primarily on African Americans, the increasing diversity of the black population compels us to explore how racial and class identities are experienced and managed by black immigrants as well as African Americans. In this study, we have found that members of the two largest black immigrant groups in the United States, Haitians and Jamaicans, have overlapping identity and boundary negotiation strategies. However, they diverge from the African American middle class in some respects, as their transnational orientations, time in the US, generation, context of reception and group structure shapes their identity management processes differently.

Immigrant Incorporation: Black Foreign Born and Native Born Relations

Therefore, this dissertation has revisited the question of the black middle class toolkit in order to assess a. how the black middle class toolkit varies across ethnic group and, b. to evaluate the convergence or dissimilarity in the being, belonging and boundary work of these different national origin groups. The current state of the literature argues that black immigrants distance themselves from black identities to ensure their social mobility and acceptance by whites. To do this, they emphasize their ethnic origins to demonstrate that they are a different type of black. Other studies have noted that middle class black immigrants are becoming increasingly aware and connected to their black

identities as they encounter racial discrimination in their places of work, residence, learning and public space.

In this dissertation, we have found that Haitians and Jamaicans relate to their black identity in similar ways to African Americans do. However, generation, space and group mattered in this process. The Jamaican middle class demonstrated stronger patterns of identifying and embracing black identities. They also managed problematic interactions with whites similarly to African Americans. The Jamaican adult second generation and Great Park residents demonstrated this similarity more so than the first generation and Cascades residents. Haitians, however, diverged from this pattern. While some Haitians embraced black identities and managed racial discrimination through social distancing strategies and remaining tight to black spaces and black collective group, many were reticent to talk about race or acknowledge their black identities. Oftentimes, they adopted more forgiving attitudes towards white racism which they encountered in places of work and residence. Therefore, as the African American minority culture of mobility argues, later generation, economically mobile immigrants will become more similar to the African American middle class in terms of the racial boundaries that they encounter, however, they may have varying responses to these social problems which are shaped by how long they have been in the states, their transnational notions of social inequality and where they live.

Therefore, affiliations and attachments to a black and middle class identity is complex, and is shaped by generational status, time in the US, and residential context. Ethnic distancing, as previously theorized by segmented assimilation scholars is not the entire truth, and the African American Culture of Mobility provides an important entry

point into understanding the nuances behind being black, immigrant and middle class in today's society. For example, Jamaicans in the second generation demonstrated strong attachments to their black identity and use it as a corner stone for their decision making about where to live and work. While Mary Waters argues that as the second and subsequent generations of West Indians come of age, they will become an indistinguishable part of the African American population in the United States, Vickerman (2001) posits that time in the US is the most important predictor of whether Jamaicans embrace black identities and see commonalities between themselves and African Americans. This study finds that time in the US and generational status matter to the strength of Jamaican's black identity, with the first generation middle class *adopting* black identities and the second generation *embracing* black identities. This shifts our thinking about how black identity works among middle class West Indian black immigrants in particular and middle class blacks in general.

The Haitian middle class, however, did not demonstrate similar patterns (with the exception of a few 1.5 generation respondents). While they described themselves as black, their connections to the black community and identity were mostly functional, and had little affect or influence compared to African Americans and later generation Jamaicans who expressed strong attachments to black identity and transmitted it to their children while emphasizing their upward mobility. Therefore, there was a stronger convergence between Jamaicans and African Americans, than Haitians and African Americans in racial identity and boundary work.

This difference, perhaps, can be explained by linguistic boundaries between Francophone Haitians and Anglophone blacks. The fact that Haitians speak a language

which is completely separate from the standard English language creates a social distance between themselves, African Americans and Haitians which can only be overcome with increased exposure to other black ethnic groups in public as well as private domains such as family and friendship circles. Furthermore, the social stigmas around being Haitian may also hinder relations between Haitians and other black ethnic groups. However, in recent years, an increase in the visibility of Haitian musicians such as Wyclef Jean, Haitian culture through world-renowned art pieces, politicians in major cities such as New York and famous athletes such as Jean Pierre-Paul have changed the connotations around what it means to be Haitian in the black community. Therefore, in the coming years, the social boundary between Haitians and Jamaicans and African Americans is expected to blur.

In terms of class, the African American Culture of Mobility (AACM) argues that black immigrants will navigate problematic interactions with lower income blacks and coethnics as they ascend the class ladder. Findings on the Haitian and Jamaican middle class in this study provide evidence to support this hypothesis. However, ethnicity (predicted by AACM) and space (overlooked by AACM) emerged as important factors in the intensity of the class boundary. Haitians reported being solicited for financial support and participated in family and community improvement projects more so than Jamaicans. This is perhaps due to the higher number of low income individuals in the Haitian ethnic community (Zephir, 2001, Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, Nichols et al, 2008).

Furthermore, the Haitian community experiences significant boundaries to becoming middle class because they have a triple disadvantage as blacks, immigrants and non-English language speakers compared to other social groups. Therefore, the Haitian

middle class, perhaps, encounters lower income coethnic and family members at a higher frequency than Jamaicans and African Americans. Space played an important role in class boundary work, particularly since Cascades residents interacted with lower income neighbors and residents more often than Great Park residents did. Therefore, Cascades residents had a culture of mobility which was embedded in defending and protecting their class identity, while Great Park residents rarely reported such beliefs or behaviors.

Integration into the African American Middle Class

This ethnic boundary blurring of strategies and identities used to navigate racial and class cleavages provides evidence that a sort of diffusion is occurring between these middle class groups, with Haitians and Jamaicans adopting select aspects of the African American Culture of Mobility (see Table 7.1 and 7.2 for details). The select adoption of the African American culture of mobility (specific to this New York based urban and suburban population) has implications for how we think about immigrant incorporation patterns in the United States and abroad.

There is some evidence that today's middle class immigrants are becoming similar and a strong part of the pre-existing African American middle class. They encounter similar types of racial and class boundaries, but vary in their levels of attachments to their black and middle class identities. This does not equate an absence of ethnic distinction or a total rejection of their racial identity. Moving into the black middle class did not erase linguistic, cultural and class characteristics. Respondents spoke patois and Haitian Kreyol, traveled to their home country regularly, contacted family abroad often, sent remittances, listened to dancehall reggae and kompas, celebrated ethnic holidays and represented their flags during the West Indian Day parade. The entrance of

these groups in middle class spaces heightens the sense of who is a part of black middle class today. This forces us to revisit the social construction and realities of race in the imaginations of Americans in an increasingly class and ethnically diverse minority population. It will allow social scientist to keep pace of the changing social composition and needs of today's black population specifically and the minority population in general, many of whom are in non-poor economic positions and are projected to become a part of the majority population within the next 40 years in America. Of importance is redefining what it means to be a part of the American middle class but also what it means to be black in today's America.

Table 7.1: Racial Lived Experience of middle class African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans

Group	Racial Identity	Racial Practices	Racial Boundaries Encountered	Racial Boundaries Erected	Racial Boundaries Blurred
African Americans	-Prideful embrace of bi (C & GP) -Gatekeepers of nationality specific bi; define who belongs—black immigrants on the outside of black collective group (C)	-Transmit bi to children -Attached to culture and history Black social & political groups, attend all black churches	-Segregated schools (C) -Racial exclusion from white neighbors (GP) -Public spaces, differential treatment from Latinos	-School choices(C), seeks racially integrated schools -Latinos in neighborhood (C) and in shopping centers (C) -Child's non-black partner	n/a
Jamaicans	-Generation and Space matter -First generation learning and adopt bi (C & GP) -Second generation embrace bi (2 nd gen more likely to live in GP)	-Practiced by 2 nd generation -Political groups, educational and professional associations,	-Public space/shopping districts -Segregated, underperforming schools -Neighborhood political systems	-School choices; parents erect, children later blur boundary against black schools/environments -Friendship-Lack of trust in whites -Romantic Partners: prefer black partners	-White elderly neighbors (GP, few 1 st generation) -White colleague support businesses (C)
Haitians	-Reject bi (C) -Some adopt bi (C & GP) -Few embrace (1.5 generation and GP)	-Practiced by 1.5 generation -Transmit bi to children through social groups (GP) -Music and culture (C)	-Workplaces (C & GP) -Neighborhood (GP) -Law enforcement inside and outside neighborhood (C & GP)	-Predominately black schools -Suburbanize to escape low performing black schools (GP) -Choose private schools to avoid predominately black schools (C & GP) -Non-black partners	-White elderly neighbors (GP) -Non-black partners for children (C & GP)

Definitions: bi=black identity, C=Cascades, GP=Great Park

Table 7.1: Class Lived Experience of Middle Class African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans

Group	Identity	Practices	Class Boundaries Encountered	Class Boundaries Erected	Class Boundaries Blurred
African Americans	-6 figure income (C & GP)	-Culture (C & GP) -Protect class character of neighborhood through activism (C) -Social groups to reproduce class in children (GP)	-Middle class black male romantic partners are scarce (C & GP)	-Against lower class/renters entering neighborhood (C)	-Lower class blacks; use spiritual and religious language (GP) -Challenge class boundaries between self and upper class people (C)
Jamaicans	-6 figure income (C & GP) -Happiness (C) -Desire to transmit class status to children (C & GP)	-Work multiple jobs and shifts (C & GP) -Locational attainment -School choices -Shared social class values with?	-Limited career options due to immigrant status (GP) -Taxation systems and social welfare programs which overlook middle class (C & GP)	-Lower class/renters entering neighborhood (C) -Middle class blacks who forget their “origins” (C & GP) -Lower class Jamaicans who speak patios (C & GP)	-Lower class individuals, use strategies to minimize class differences (C)
Haitians	-6 figure income (C & GP) -Transnational position in status hierarchy (C & GP)	-Locational attainment (C & GP) -High remittance propensity (C & GP) -Local and transnational community building involvement (GP)	-Paying school and loan debt accrued to join middle class (C & GP) -Solicited for financial support from low income friends and family (C & GP)	-Culturally anti-public schools, lower class stigma (C & GP) -Low income neighborhood in adjacent neighborhood (C) -Romantic partners who do not have status (C)	-Low income blacks -Provide remittances and opportunity for economic mobility here and in Haiti (GP & C)

Definitions: bi=black identity, C=Cascades, GP=Great Park

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Individual Questionnaire

IID: _____

PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. What is your date of birth? _____ (mm/dd/yyyy)
2. Where is your place of residence?
Street: _____ Apt. No.: _____
City: _____ Zip Code: _____
Neighborhood: _____
3. What is your telephone number?
Your Cell #: _____ (_____-_____-_____) (area code + 7 digits)
Your Home #: _____ (_____-_____-_____) (area code + 7 digits)
4. Sex: ☐ 1. Female ☐ 2. Male
5. Highest Level of Education: _____
6. Occupation: _____
7. Religion: (Denomination) _____
8. Email Address: _____
9. Political Affiliation: _____
10. Income: 20-40, 40-60, 61-80, 81-100,000, 101,000-125,000, 126,00-150,000, 151,000+

ORIGIN AND MIGRATION

11. What country were your parent's born in?
Mother: _____ Father: _____
12. What country were you born in?
_____. If U.S. skip a.
a. When did you come to the United States? _____ (mm/yyyy)
13. How long have you lived in New York? _____
14. Are you a U.S. Citizen? ☐ 1. Yes ☐ 2. No
15. What languages are spoken at home? _____
16. How well do you speak English?
☐ 1. Very Well
☐ 2. Well
☐ 3. Not Well
17. What is your race:
☐ 1. Black
☐ 2. White
☐ 3. Asian
☐ 4. Multi-Racial
☐ 5. Asian
☐ 6. Other(specify) _____
18. How many children do you have? Number: _____
19. Marital Status: _____
20. Who currently lives in this household? (Husband, Sister, Brother, Daughter, Grandmother, Cousins, etc.):
1. _____ 6. _____
2. _____ 7. _____
3. _____ 8. _____
4. _____ 9. _____
5. _____ 10. _____

Background/Demographic Information:

Migration Background:

Where are you from originally?

Why did you decide to move to the U.S.? To New York?

How long have you lived in NY? Queens? This neighborhood?

Do you have family in your country? If yes,

Who? Where do they live?

Do you maintain contact with relatives back home?

Do you travel back home? If so, how often?, Do you remit? If so, how much per month? What is it used for, by whom?

When was the last time you were there? For what?

What are your thoughts about life on the island?[Probe: Social, political, economic]

Pre-Migration Experience/Social Class Background:

Where in ____ did you grow up?[rural, city, well off, poor]?

What kind of work did your parent's do?

How many siblings do you have? Were they all born in Haiti? If so, where are they now?

It is said that there are strong class divisions in many Caribbean nations. What class would you say that your family was a part of? Why?

Did you have house help when you were on the island?

What school did you attend?

How much education did you complete on the island?

Where are your peers from the island today?

Did you have any thoughts about what life in the US would be like before you left?

What was the adjustment process like for you?

What were the main social and political events going on in your country around the time that you left?

What are your fondest memories of home? Least fond?

City and Neighborhood

What do you think of NY as a place to live?

Is New York your permanent home? How long have you lived here?

What other boroughs or neighborhoods have you lived in?

I would like to know how you ended up living in this neighborhood. Could you explain to me, step by step, how you chose this neighborhood and why?

- a. How long have you lived here?
- b. Is this your first home?
- c. What neighborhood characteristics were you looking for (amenities, urban/suburban, proximity, distance, schools)?
- d. Were you looking for a close knit community?
- e. What other neighborhoods did you consider or exclude from consideration?

African American, Haitian and Jamaican social Identity

How do you describe yourself on the census?

In everyday interactions, how do you describe yourself to someone who asks you about your social background?[probe ethnic, racial, class identity]

OR

Some people define themselves as Italian, Korean American, black American, Russian Jew. How do you identify yourself when you are speaking to black immigrants? Whites? African Americans? Asians?

Latinos?

What is your racial identity?

Do you identify as Afro-Caribbean, West Indian or African American or Black? Why or Why not?
Do you tell others that you are from the Caribbean? Why/Why Not?

Boundaries

Ethnic

I have heard that African Americans, Haitians and Jamaicans do not get along. Is there conflict or competition between these two groups? If so, what are the sources of the conflict and have you ever experienced the tensions?
Do you get along with African Americans? Do you feel like you have things in common with them?
Do you get along with Jamaican immigrants? Do you feel like you have things in common with them?
Do you get along with other foreign born blacks? Do you feel like you have things in common with them?
Do you think that immigrants from the Caribbean share similar value and beliefs? Do you think that Af Ams, Jamaicans and Haitians are treated the same in the U.S?
Are there cultural differences between African American, Haitians and Jamaicans?
Has anyone who shares your same identity ever experienced discrimination because of where they come from and how they look? [Have you?]
Do you think that what happens to African Americans affects your ethnic group? Vice versa?
Do you think that what happens to _____ affects your ethnic group? Vice versa?
Does your ethnic group have more in common with Haitian-Jamaica-African Americans?
Is it important for people in your ethnic group to identify as immigrants, Americans, or black? Why?
Do Jamaicans/Haitian/African Americans treat you differently because of where you are from?
Do whites treat you differently because you are J/H and from the Caribbean?
Do you think that whites interact with you differently that they do with African Americans? Why or Why Not?
Do you think Haitian/Jamaicans/African Americans work harder than Haitian/Jamaicans/African Americans?
What are the advantages and disadvantages of being from your ethnic group?

Racial:

Do you interact with whites? If so, where and what is the nature of the interaction? If not, why not?

Class

Do you consider yourself middle class? If so, why, if not, why not?
Do you interact with people of other lower or higher income? If so, who are they and what are those interactions like? If not, why not?

Friendship/Romantic Relations

Where is your spouse from?
What were some important qualities that you wanted in a spouse? [imp of ethnic, class and race]
How important was it for your spouse to come from your country?
Please describe to me you 3 closest friends?
 Where did you meet them?
 Where do they come from?
 How close do you live to each other?
Who do you feel more comfortable with? Haitians? Jamaicans? African Americans? Other?
What types of people do you work with?
What are the cross racial or cross ethnic experiences at work? Do you spend time with your co-workers outside of work hours?

Neighborhood and Home

What neighborhood do you live in?
What are the boundaries? Where does your neighborhood end and begin?

Is this the suburbs or is this an urban neighborhood?
 Was it important for you to live near relatives of yours? Of your spouses?
 How important was it to live in close distance to your job?
 What are the pros and cons of where you live now?
 How much did you buy this home for? What is the current value? How much do you think you could sell if for in the current economy?
 What was the main source of the down payment on your home?[probe who contributed]
 What type of loan do you have on your home?
 How did you find this home? Realtor, Yourself, Friend?
 If realtor, what other houses or neighborhoods did you consider? What did they show you?
 Why did you choose this neighborhood? What other areas were you considering?
 How long did the process take to find this house [how many houses did you see]?
 What do you and your neighbors have in common with each other [probe eth, class, race]?
 Is this what you preferred?
 What has buying this house in this neighborhood meant to you, personally?
 Do you plan to stay here? Or do you plan to purchase more property?
 If there were no restraints, where would you choose to live?[probe racial/ethnic composition of hood]
 Has the neighborhood changed since you moved in? If so, how? If not, why not?
 Who are your neighbors? Who is the neighborhood mostly composed of [families, race, class]?
 If you described the Cambria Heights/Great Park neighborhood to someone who has never been here before, how would you describe it?
 How much time do you spend in your neighborhood?
 Are people in this neighborhood social with each other? Do you help each other?
 Is the neighborhood different today compared to when you moved? How so?
 Are there any social problems here? In neighboring areas?
 Is there a neighborhood association? Is it active? Are you a part of it?
 Are there essential shopping centers in your neighborhood? Groceries, Pharmacies?
 Where do you do your groceries?
 What do you think about the transportation services to your neighborhood?
 Do you ever travel to other parts of Queens, Long Island and the boroughs? For what?
 Can you spend your leisure time in your neighborhood? What is there to do for married people, families, singles?
 Do most of your friends live in the neighborhood? If not, where do they live? Are their neighborhoods like yours? Do you visit often?
 Are their _____ owned businesses in your area? What do you think of their services?
 Do you support a business when a person from your ethnic group opens it or works there?

Children:

How old are your children?
 Do your children have friends in the neighborhood? If not, where are most of their friends living?
 Where does/did your child go to school?
 -Public or Private? Why?
 - If not in neighborhood, why?
 What do you think of the public schools in your neighborhood?
 What do/did you think of your child's school? Are you satisfied with the education they are getting or have received?
 -what types of kids go/went to your child's school(class, race, ethnic composition)?
 -was this composition desirable?
 What do you think about your children's friends? Do you know them? Do you know their parents?
 Where do your children's friends families come from? Do you have a preference for a particular type of family[probe race, eth]?

Do you have a preference for what type of person you want your child to marry? (Probe race and ethnic question)?

Did you hear about the incident at a Queens public school when the Haitian children were told to eat on the floor? What did you think about that?

Political Views /Civic Involvement:

Are you involved in a church? Where is it located? Are your children involved?

What denomination is your church?

What types of people attend your church?

How have you been involved in the community? Professional? Socially? Politically?

Are you a part of any political groups?

What do you think about the middle class in politics today?

Blacks?

Your ethnic group?

What are the most important political issues for you?

Do you think people in your group should be more, less involved or remain the same? Why or why not?

Do you vote locally, state wide, nationally?

Endnotes

ⁱ *Cascades* is a pseudonym for the assortment of neighborhoods used as research sites in order to protect the confidentiality of most respondents.

ⁱⁱ *Great Park* is a pseudonym for the assortment of neighborhoods used as research sites in order to protect the confidentiality of most respondents.

ⁱⁱⁱ According to Kasinitz, Mollenkopf and Waters(2004) interpretation of the segmented assimilation literature, second generation immigrants are said to either “assimilate into mainstream America(white) middle class culture, remaining within an ethnic or immigrant enclave culture, or embracing a native minority oppositional culture and identity. They see the first two paths as leading to upward mobility and generally positive outcomes for the second generation. The last path leads to downward mobility, with anti-social behavior”(395). Clearly, this interpretation relegates native blacks to one class, low income/poor which will be problematized in this paper.

^{iv} Washington, Jesse. “African American Economic Gains Reversed by the Great Recession.” Huffington Post. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/07/10/black-recession-economy-african-americans_n_894046.html

^v Debates ensue about whether remaining ties to parent’s country of origin or integrating into African Americans is the best option. While segmented assimilation posits that delaying integration into African Americans is beneficial for immigrants, Kasinitz et al(2008) and Neckerman, Carter and Lee(1999) argue that the African American population in the US is varied and adopting their identity may be a positive pathway to integration and mobility. Particularly, they site the presence of civil rights institutions, ethnic studies programs, unions and social networks in facilitating the integration immigrants.

^{vi} <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/acsbr10-15.pdf>

^{vii} In Mary Waters work on West Indians in New York in the early 1990s, she notes that her original sample excluded Haitian immigrants because she perceived them as starkly different in culture and experience from Jamaicans, Trinidadians, Basian and Guyanese immigrants in her study. However, after conducting preliminary research in inner city schools, she learned the poor treatment of Haitians by their peers and decided to include them in her study so that she wouldn’t perpetuate their mistreatment in school.

^{viii} The exclusion of Haitians from studies of West Indians occurs because of Haitians speak Haitian Creole, and pose challenges of cross group comparisons with Anglophone immigrants. Data collection is also an issue, where it is more facile to interview an English speaker than and Haitian Creole speaker. Nonetheless, there is something to be learned about the differential integration pathways experienced by first and second generation black immigrants of different linguistic backgrounds.

^{ix} Second generation Jamaicans have high educational aspirations, higher dropout rates and higher reports of perceived discrimination^{ix}.

x In households where one parent is Haitian and the other is Jamaican, I will exclude these families from the formal study, but will take their information for a later study of interethnic marriage in black communities. If I come across a significant number of these cases, I may consider creating a comparison category.

xi A potential strategy will be to look at variation in my sample by time of arrival.

^{xii} Oltman, Adele. 2005. 'The Hidden History of Slavery in New York'
<http://www.thenation.com/article/hidden-history-slavery-new-york#>

^{xiii} New York Historical Society: Slavery in New York. <http://www.slaveryinnewyork.org/>

xiv "Working to Bring Jamaica back to the Heights", by Queens Courier Staff. Queens Courier Newspaper; Saturday, April 14th, 2012.

^{xv} <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/queens/queens-diverse-places-earth-new-figures-show-article-1.430744>

xvi In conversations with older white ethnics, I have come across Jewish and Italian women who were raised in Cambria Heights, but were yanked out of elementary school and moved to suburbs of Long Island. I engage in conversations with them in order to unpack what they see as the reasons why their families moved from what was considered to be one of the most desirable areas to live in in their time. Although the amount their family moves as natural processes, I know the historical contexts which inspired their parents with young-aged children to leave neighborhoods which were in racial transition, particularly since the significant fear of white parents is that their children will become friends or romantic partners with non-white children (Moody, 2001). These women were well established, in their 60s and resided in exurbs distant from cities. I wondered what the trajectories of the young black girls and boys who were and are being raised in middle class neighborhoods of Southeast Queens look like in comparison to the white ethnics I run into in predominately white institutions of work and learning. This is a part of the story that I would like to tell in this dissertation.

xvii DeChillo, Suzanne. 2012. "Historic Black Enclave in Queens Gains Landmark Status".
Cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/02/01/queens-neighborhoods

xviii Census Defined (American Community Survey 2006-2010) as First Ancestry Reported. Over all for the Cambria Height, Queens Village, Hollis and St. Albans Census Tracts, there was 91.8% of the population who were "unclassified or not reported. Therefore, these numbers could indicate a severe undercount of the ethnic composition of residents in this area. However, the numbers are telling of the prevalence of black ethnic groups.

xix Fung, Amanda. 2010. "Southeast Queens is Foreclosure Central". Crain's New York Business.com

^{xx} Great Park, like Cascades, is used as a pseudonym for the neighborhoods of study, which will be used in later chapters and publications of this research project.

xxi In Nassau county, the neighborhoods are in the form of villages, which are nestled in towns/cities.

xxii <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36/36059.html>.

xxiii Jamestown's MHI, Baldwin's MHI and Baldwin Harbors MHI; Jamestown has a higher renter occupation, which is driving the lower hh income levels.

xxiv However, it is important to note that sections of Great Park are more affluent villages, with the Western section's median household income at \$99,872 and \$95,673 in 2010. These median household incomes are higher than that of the Eastern section, which stands at \$69,081 (ACS).

xxv Includes Hispanic blacks.

xxvi

<http://www.inmotionaame.org/print.cfm;jsessionid=f8302793181357252542103?migration=1&bhcp=1>

xxvii Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference on November 10, 1963, in King Solomon Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan.

xxviii <http://www.asanet.org/footnotes/indexone.html>

xxix NY MSA which includes Long Island and New Jersey.

xxx This is a crude categorization of race relations in Jamaica during colonization, and we acknowledge that there is significant variations between the relationship of class, occupation and race, and that one could ascend the racial ladder and become "white", if they were wealthy enough.

xxxi Instead, Jamaican society is characterized by a social contract that discourages and penalizes racial thinking, leaving many people to believe that race is not an issue when a bias in favor of whites and British colonial identity pervade the society.

xxxii This estimate does not account for the second generation. Also, according to American Community Survey experts, there were large undercounts, particularly in minority communities in New York. Therefore, this number is likely an undercount of the actual number of Haitians.

xxxiii In each household with parents and children, I conducted interviews with African American teenagers and young adults. This data will be analyzed in future research. Generation is a key component of this project and the findings from the African American adult sample will serve as a framework for understanding the racial, ethnic and class identities of their children. This same approach will be taken with the Haitian and Jamaican sample.

xxxiv According to American Community Survey 2005-2009 data, the black population in New York declined since 2000. Debates ensue about whether this is a true depiction of the loss of blacks or just the lack of sampling or non-response in minority communities. This is a national trend of the loss of African American populations in major Northern cities. What is unclear, however, is how the increase in

black foreign born residents in these cities is offsetting the loss of native born black populations through “black flight” (Frey, 2011)

^{xxxv} *Black Hawk Down* (2001) was a critically acclaimed military film which had an interracial cast of actors.

^{xxxvi} Cascades residents, however, also valued interracial interactions for their children, particularly as a function of access to resources. For example, in a later section, I discuss that Cascades African Americans who send their children to schools outside of Cascades/Jamaica area, send their kids to multiracial schools with middle class families. This is their strategy for avoiding low income black schools in their area.

^{xxxvii} <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36000.html>

^{xxxviii} Decency, as a constructed middle class value, can be adopted by lower class individuals interested in becoming a part of the middle class (Patillo McCoy, 1999). The dichotomy between “decent” and “street” values and behaviors was also discussed in Elijah Anderson’s text *Codes of the Streets*(2000)

^{xxxix} Cascades Civic actively communicated with neighborhood residents about the imminent threat of the development of a commercial and residential property which violated Cascades strict zoning laws and the pending closure of the Cascades Senior Center by the city

^{xl} The term pioneer is used to describe black households who were one of the first blacks to move into all white neighborhoods.

^{xli} Measuring class in Haiti means accounting for the level of poverty which exists in the country. The respondents in the study qualified as middle class, relative to the mass population of the poor. However, they were staunchly middle class, given their parent’s occupations, homeownership and ownership of certain goods, commodities and services.

^{xlii} Recruitment in public schools and private schools were uneven, with more of my African American parents being recruited from public schools and more Haitian and Jamaican families recruited from private schools or social groups which had a higher number of private/Catholic school students.