Revising Canarsie

Racial Transition and Neighborhood Stability in Brooklyn

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In the early morning hours of July 17, 1991, a homemade firebomb crashed through the window of Fillmore Real Estate agency on Flatlands Avenue in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Canarsie. This bombing was the second of three bias-related attacks on the real estate agency which had been court ordered to show homes to black and Hispanic buyers in the mostly white neighborhood. On August 11 of the same year, police arrested twenty-year-old Brian Fining, a lifelong resident of Canarsie’s Avenue M, an all-white block where no homes had been sold in twenty eight years. Although he acted alone in all three attacks, Fining’s explosive anger over minorities moving into the neighborhood was a familiar sentiment among many of Canarsie’s longtime white residents (Kurtz 1991).

From the 1970s through the 1990s, the neighborhood of Canarsie in South Brooklyn underwent a dramatic period of racial tension and transition, triggered by the in-migration of black residents to what had formerly been a predominantly Italian and Jewish community. In his book Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism, Jonathan Rieder chronicled the angry, sometimes violent response of white residents against new black residents (Rieder 1985). Whites were convinced that that the safety, status, and physical quality of the neighborhood would precipitously decline if blacks moved in, and their resistance metastasized into a generalized dismissal of integrationism, liberal politics, the Democratic Party, and even rule of law.

We conducted an ethnographic revisit to compare whites’ expectations to how the neighborhood actually changed—and remained the same—as black residents became the majority.

According to U.S. Census figures, by 2000, Canarsie’s black population had grown to 60 percent from less than 20 percent a decade earlier. This
drastic racial transformation, however, is more complex than these numbers suggest because, not only were native-born African Americans moving into Canarsie, but significant numbers of Caribbean people (also called West Indians) as well. In fact, according to Butterfield (2004:288), by the year 2000, West Indian immigrants and their children comprised 54 percent of New York City’s black population. This transformation from Italian and Jewish white residents to Afro-Caribbean blacks exemplifies what Chicago School sociologist Ernest Burgess calls “succession.” The racial transition that accompanied this otherwise classic case of succession dramatically redefined the meaning of the change in the minds of white residents.

White Canarsians viewed their world as under attack from outsiders who were aided by a liberal government (Rieder 1985). They reacted angrily and sometimes violently to new black residents. Whites were convinced that the arrival of blacks would destroy their middle-class enclave and render it unrecognizable. More than twenty five years after Rieder’s study, our ethnographic revisit found that, while whites are still convinced that “things have changed,” the story of Canarsie is remarkable for how similar black Canarsie is to white Canarsie and how expectations of dramatic change and deterioration were incorrect.

Black newcomers, according to a woman who moved to the neighborhood in 1997, simply “wanted a suburb. Living in Canarsie made you feel like you didn’t have to leave Brooklyn . . . You could sit on your porch” (Fahim 2009:np). Black migrants to Canarsie shared the same goal as the Jews and Italians who had preceded and fought to exclude them: to live a middle-class life in a part of the city that offered elements of a suburban environment.

Black Canarsie residents were able to achieve that goal to a much greater degree than their white predecessors had ever imagined. That said, two forces have reconfigured the neighborhood. First, neoliberal economic policies that have reshaped the city since the period when Canarsie was all white have changed the structural context in which a “middle-class” existence is possible. Second, while contemporary racial inequality does not preclude the establishment of a black middle-class community such as Canarsie, it continues to impose particular costs on black Americans, regardless of class. During the period of our study, this additional burden was most evident in the foreclosure crisis facing Canarsie.

METHODS

The research team conducted twenty ethnographic observations in a range of settings in Canarsie, including meetings, community centers, and businesses. Researchers used several convenience samples focused on residents and busi-
ness owners. The research team conducted forty formal interviews of respondents age eighteen to eighty. Interview subjects were evenly split between men and women. Interviewees included two Asian and one Hispanic respondent, the rest were nearly evenly split between blacks and whites. The ethnographic work of the team mirrored the techniques of a rapid ethnographic assessment project, or REAP (Low, Taplin, and Scheld 2005:183–93). Such a process employs a range of qualitative and quantitative methods, and triangulates different researchers’ observations.

In addition to ethnographic observations, members of the research team conducted visual observations. On multiple field visits to Canarsie, researchers used still photography as a visual method and focused photography on the visual material culture, including smaller objects and signs, and larger visible structures such as the cemetery and building facades (Pauwels 2010). Several members of the team photographed the commercial landscape (“store windows and shop signs that are interpreted by ordinary people ethnic markers”) as well as residential areas of the neighborhood (Krase 2006:81). Members of the team also conducted formal interviews and analyzed census data.

**RACIAL TRANSITION IN CANARSIE**

Canarsie’s ethnic and racial succession began in the 1960s when black and Puerto Rican families moved into the area surrounding the Breukelen Houses in Canarsie (Rieder 1985). As these families arrived, white families began an exodus. By the mid 1970s as black families moved further south toward Seaview Village and Jamaica Bay, Canarsie residents reacted against the newcomers. White residents resorted to violence and bias attacks on minorities who were trying to buy homes in the area. The “reaction” period stretched all the way into the early nineties when Brian Fining bombed the Fillmore Real estate agency on Flatlands Avenue.

From 1990 to 2000, Jews and Italians started leaving Canarsie in ever-increasing numbers and the black population went from 10 percent to 60 percent in just ten years (Fahim 2009). As blacks became the new majority, a “climax” was reached and the few remaining white residents accepted, gladly or not, that the neighborhood was no longer a white ethnic enclave.

Despite the racial difference between the old Canarsie residents and the new, the two groups did have many similarities. DeSena (2005) points out, “as individuals leave neighborhoods, they are usually replaced by groups of the same general status as the original residents,” yet new residents will usually have different social and ethnic characteristics (p. 8). This concept holds true for Canarsians as new black residents were middle- and working-class peoples just as the white ethnics had been. After all, because Canarsie is an
area comprised mostly of one-family houses, these new families had to first be in a position to be able to purchase those houses.

White Canarsians recognized that their neighborhood was no longer a white enclave. They also recognized that complaining about that shift in racial terms was not socially sanctioned. Instead, they tried, often unsuccessfully, to articulate their discontent in “colorblind” or nonracial ways (Bonilla-Silva 2009). For instance, Canarsie’s public schools had been the site of significant racial violence. One longtime resident was a middle-schooler during the rash of school demonstrations protesting new busing initiatives that had begun bringing in new students from East Flatbush, a predominantly black outlying neighborhood, to Canarsie. She sought to deny the role of race in whites’ perception of decline: “I had black friends,” she said. “As a matter of fact, in my old school photo, I was sandwiched between two black girls. One of my best friends was black.” She paused for a few beats then leaned towards one of us with her fingernails planted on her desk. “It wasn’t about race. It was that things were changing.”

She started tapping her long, well-manicured fingernails to the rhythm of the words that followed for emphasis: “People were coming in. People from outside the community.” News articles chronicled how perceived threats to schools and, eventually, to the neighborhood were sometimes resolved violently. The justification for angry protests and violent practices seemed grounded in the “right to preserve the community” (Maeroff 1972). Some literature argues that this type of opposition to outsiders is indeed fueled by racial prejudice (Zubrinsky and Bobo 1996). Although she claimed that some of the initial opposition to outsiders “was not about race,” she eventually acknowledged that this racially troubled time provided the social conditions for the type of unrest that eventually followed. She qualified her acknowledgment somewhat, though, by explaining that racial conditions were tense throughout all of New York City. She attributed the ensuing chaos to the broader social climate of the time. “It was crazy all around,” she said, “And our little Canarsie got caught up in all the stuff [from the 70s], too.”

In his article about the Canarsie’s period of tense race relations and school protests, Gene Maeroff writes, “Preservation of community was, indeed, the prime issue in the minds of Canarsie residents. To them, the children who were being bussed into Canarsie symbolized the urban ills they were trying to hold at bay—bad schooling, crime, squalid housing, empty storefronts, drug addiction and unemployment. They saw the youngsters as the advance guard of an onslaught of blacks who ultimately would transform Canarsie into yet another slum” (Maeroff 1972:np).

For one elderly Canarsie resident who had previously held positions in the local elementary school’s PTA, the events surrounding the school protests
made the strongest impression on her during that time. She spoke of slurs that had been directed to black schoolchildren. Her facial expressions communicated some of the most brutal vitriol that she kept quiet inside. The racism and hostility of the 1970s continued to set the context in which many white Canarsians saw the neighborhood, though it was less explicitly the frame through which black residents saw the neighborhood.

IMMIGRANT HISTORY

Many black residents in Canarsie were not native African Americans, but rather Afro-Caribbean blacks. Caribbeans had been coming to New York in small but significant numbers for more than a century. The 1965 Hart-Celler Immigration Reform Act, which changed the entire focus of American immigration policy, had a great impact on Caribbean immigration. The bill eliminated certain immigration quotas that had limited the number of Caribbean immigrants coming to the United States (Kasinitz 1992:26).

The Hart-Celler Immigration Reform Act resulted in a tremendous increase in the number of West Indian immigrants coming to the United States. By the early 1980s, almost 60,000 legal immigrants were entering the United States annually and approximately half of them settled in New York City. The immigrants who came to the United States in this cohort were from “virtually every sector of Caribbean society” including the urban elite, children of the middle-class, and large numbers of lower class poor people (Kasinitz 1992:27). High unemployment and lack of economic development in the Caribbean region meant that the majority of these immigrants came to the United States seeking economic security and job opportunities.

Similar to other immigrant groups, West Indians have settled mostly in urban areas, especially New York City (Waters 2001). Brooklyn, in particular, has been the recipient of many Caribbean immigrants, resulting in numerous West Indian neighborhoods including Flatbush, East Flatbush, Crown Heights, and, more recently, Canarsie. As with any group coming to a new country, West Indian immigrants have brought with them a unique and eclectic culture—from food, to clothing, to barber shops, much of which is represented visually in their neighborhoods (Henke 2001:48).

According to Henke (2001:52), Caribbean immigrants to the United States are faced with a “fundamental contradiction” surrounding the social construction of race. Peoples of the Caribbean are socialized in societies that do not attach as much significance to race, but rather center cultural identities on ascribed characteristics including hard work, delayed gratification, and personal austerity. Vickerman (1999) echoes this sentiment by stating that West
Indians traditionally interpret race broadly and that being “‘black’, ‘white: or ‘colored: was subject to a degree of interpretation and did not predestine individuals to particular outcomes” (p 3).

Upon their arrival in the United States, however, where race is defined much more rigidly, West Indian immigrants have been simply seen as being “black.” Henke (2001:52) points out that being seen as “black” brings with it the prejudices and stigma that whites have attached to that category. This new racial dimension affects the Caribbean community in several ways including how its peoples choose to identify and represent themselves.

While West Indians of different national origins tend to live alongside African Americans, many choose to maintain a distinct ethnic identity separate from the rest of the black population. This separation stems from resistance to the American tendency to use race as a “master status” category combined with long-standing tension between African Americans and first generation West Indian immigrants (Anderson 1990). As Vickerman (1999:13) and Henke (2001:53) discuss, West Indians are often conservative and tend to interpret the situation of African Americans in the United States not in terms of structural racism but personal traits. They presume African Americans lack a proper work ethic, personal austerity, and social adeptness. In contrast, African Americans frame their situation around the ways racism affects social, political, and economic outcomes.

This schism between these two groups does not imply that West Indians are oblivious to racial discrimination. Palmer (1995) states that, despite maintaining a separate ethnic identity, West Indians nonetheless “identify with the major civil rights issues that affect blacks in American society” (p. 20). Henke (2001) also points out that West Indians have “stood at the forefront of the struggle against racism and for civil rights since the very beginning” (p. 53). Thus, in our visual study of a commercial strip in Canarsie, researchers noted locations, such as a Haitian restaurant and a tutoring center for children on Avenue L, displaying portraits of Martin Luther King Jr. and President Obama in their windows. Furthermore, how West Indians and their children frame race can shift as the time they spend in United States grows. As a general rule, the more generations West Indian Americans have been in the United States, the more their understanding of racism comports with that of other African Americans.

“THINGS JUST AREN’T THE SAME”

In numerous conversations, white long-term residents described today’s Canarsie as “different” and “not the Canarsie I knew.” When reflecting upon their experiences growing up in Canarsie, many of these respondents talked about
how Old Canarsie “was all I knew.” Somehow this statement, said in simple
opposition to the previous one, seemed to be addressing something distinctly
other. Whereas the first statement seemed to be a subtle allusion to race, the
second seemed to be lamenting the progress of advanced modern capitalism
and the ways automobiles and privatized living overtook the lifeworld and
killed their notions of simple urban village living (Habermas 1984).

Most interviews with longtime and former white Canarsie residents im-
plied racial change was the root of their perceptions of Old Canarsie’s deterio-
ration, its broken community and its fallen businesses.

Connecting with former residents of a neighborhood can be challenging.
Researchers for this project were able to obtain information about Canarsie
when it had been an all-white enclave in two different ways. First, senior citi-
zens who still lived near Canarsie came to the local senior citizen center daily,
where we were able to interview them. Second, former residents had com-
piled photos and recollections of “old” Canarsie on Facebook and other sites.

Some of the more intriguing observations on community came from the
ways former Canarsie residents from pre-transition years came together in
online forums to remember their old neighborhood. Most interesting was not
only the near-fetishistic attachment some residents had to Old Canarsie, but
also how these residents thought of Canarsie as “theirs” to the exclusion of
the people that actually live there now. For these former Canarsians, present-
day residents are still the “outsiders.” These attitudes extend to the incom-
ing businesses that replaced some of the longstanding businesses from Old
Canarsie. Long Won restaurant, for example, took over the space on Rocka-
way Parkway that Grabstein’s Deli once occupied for decades. Even though
Long Won has been in business now for over a decade, some Old Canarsie
residents refuse to visit Long Won based on their feelings of resentment that
Long Won was the outsider that “took over” (Cole Cross-Reference Directory
2011). Earlier research explains that longtime residents will perceive original
business establishments as “better-fits” for the neighborhood (Aitken 1990).
Rieder, in a follow-up paper to his book, reflected upon “myth-making” and
how Canarsie became “Canarsie” (Rieder 1992). Some social psychological
research argues that an overemphasis of bonding within groups can lead to
“alienation of outsiders” and create another sort of myth of social capital in
community development (Perkins, Hughey and Speera 2002).

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE,
THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME

Despite former residents’ conviction that the neighborhood today is utterly
different than it was when they lived there, we found striking examples of
stability. Comparing former white, Italian and Jewish residents to predominantly black Caribbean residents of today, many of the more recent residents held the same kinds of jobs, shared the same views on family and homeownership, and even shopped at the same kinds of stores. Even white respondents who sought to show how the neighborhood had changed often unintentionally presented evidence of how consistent the neighborhood has been, as when they described kinds of jobs West Indian residents had, mirroring descriptions of the kinds of jobs Italian and Jewish residents had a few decades earlier.

Much of the current data on Canarsie contradicts the assumptions held by twentieth century residents that the arrival of blacks would trigger the decline of the community. By most quantitative measures, Canarsie is a model of economic stability, ranking twelfth among neighborhoods in median household incomes in New York City (at $62,202) and sixth in the city in homeownership rates. Meanwhile, Canarsie maintains a poverty rate that is comparable to the city average (Furman Center 2011). A 2009 report from the Institute for Children and Poverty even expressed anxiety that Canarsie may have begun the process of gentrification, which the study described as the arrival of new housing investment, cultural and retail services and improvements in infrastructure by affluent and educated in-movers to the detriment of lower-income residents. In making this assessment, the report cited the marked increase in educational attainment and housing values in Canarsie from 1990–2006, and acknowledged the racial dimensions of a gentrification process in which the gentrifiers are educated blacks (Institute for Children and Poverty 2009). However, in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, the findings of the ICP may have been premature.3

Census data provides a more detailed comparison between 1970, when Canarsie was 98.2 percent white, and 2000, when it was 69.8 percent black and 18.5 percent white (The most recent, detailed employment data currently available comes from the 2000 census. According to the 2010 census, Canarsie was 83.9 percent black, 8.4 percent white, 7.6 percent Hispanic, and 2.9 percent Asian.) Certainly, there are continuities, but differences emerge as well that are attributable to both structural changes in the economic composition of New York City, and to ethnic employment niches.

Residents described Canarsie, then and now, as a neighborhood of teachers, construction workers, and police officers. In 1970, 6.8 percent of Canarsians worked in schools. In 2000, 9.2 percent did. In 1970, 4.8 percent worked in construction. In 2000, 3.5 percent did. In 1970, 607 Canarsians (2 percent) worked in the "protective services" category that included police, firefighters, security guards and other uniformed services. In 2000, 1,413 people—4.2 percent of residents (and 6.6 percent of men) worked in "pro-
Despite some consistency, the fields in which Canarians worked did change over thirty years. Many differences reflect changes in the economic composition of the city, as New York shifted from a city with many blue-collar manufacturing jobs to one with a larger percentage of financial sector, service sector, and health care jobs. In 1970, 20.3 percent of Canarians worked in manufacturing, including a heavy concentration in New York’s two largest industries: garments (7.7 percent of employed Canarians) and printing (2.8 percent). Large numbers also worked in various types of retail (17.2 percent), and wholesaling (7.3 percent).

By 2000, many of those industries had declined. The percentage working in manufacturing had shrunk dramatically to 4.5 percent. Only 2 percent worked in wholesaling. Instead, the largest sectors were those that had grown in the city: The FIRE sector (finance, insurance, and real estate) that had come to dominate New York’s economy grew from 7.4 percent of the Canarsie workforce in 1970 to 10.3 percent. A solid 26.1 percent worked in health care.

Other differences speak to nationwide shifts in employment. The most dramatic example is the sex ratio of workforce participation. In 1970, there were nearly twice as many employed men as employed women in Canarsie: 19,982 versus 10,272 (a ratio of 1.95 men for every woman in the workforce). By 2000, the ratio had shifted such that there were more women than men (15,248 men and 18,602 women), producing a ratio of 0.82 men for every woman in the workforce.

The largest influence on this ratio is the increase in women’s participation in the workforce. The ratio nationwide shifted from 1.64 men to 1.14 men per woman in the workforce. Increases in female-headed households could have shifted the ratio as well. Finally, trends in the employment of black women versus black men could have also influenced the ratio. West Indians, for instance, are highly concentrated in health care and health care has grown considerably in New York’s economy (Waters 2001). In 2000, 15.2 percent of women in Canarsie worked in health care, while only 2.0 percent of men did. The field provided far more employment opportunities for Caribbean women than men.

Median household incomes in Canarsie reflected citywide and national economic trends, as well, while remaining above boroughwide, statewide, and nationwide figures. Canarsie incomes dropped after the fiscal crisis of
the seventies, as Brooklyn and New York likewise fell more sharply than the rest of the US during that period. In the 1970s, Canarsie’s median income dropped by 22 percent. New York State’s median income fell by a similar figure, while Brooklyn’s dropped by a staggering 29 percent. Real wages in the United States dropped 13 percent in that decade. From 1980 to 1990, Canarsie incomes rose at a pace shared by Brooklyn and New York State, faster than the rate in the US. The nineties, when New York suffered a prolonged recession, were also brutal to Brooklyn, which saw incomes drop five percent during a time in which incomes nationwide increased by 6 percent. During that same period, Canarsie’s income fell by one percent. In contrast, Canarsie in the 2000s experienced faster income growth than the state or the nation, while other parts of Brooklyn registered even sharper rises. Neighborhood and borough data are not adequate for conducting a detailed analysis on the effect of race on wages. However, at the community level, it is clear that while Canarsie has experienced ups and downs since its transition to a predominantly black neighborhood, its income has not been wildly out of range with the fortunes of the borough, state, and nation. Whites’ expectations of precipitous declines were defied.4

Home values indicate the qualified way in which race shaped economic status in the newly black community. Whites expected home values to drop if blacks moved in. Between 1990 and 2000, Canarsie home values did decline by nearly 3 percent, but they fell by 10.6 percent overall in Brooklyn and dropped by more than 14 percent statewide. During the housing bubble, median prices in Canarsie jumped considerably, from $280,544 in 2000 to $488,715 in 2009. Home prices in the rest of Brooklyn, however, grew 17 percent faster than that. This comparison is complicated by the inflation of home prices during the housing bubble, from which New York housing prices have yet to fully recover. Often, long-term comparisons of black and white communities show poorer real estate appreciation in black neighborhoods than white ones. The tumultuous real estate market of the past decade makes it difficult to identify long-term trends, except to note that while the transition of Canarsie from white to black may have affected home prices, they have tracked borough and statewide prices much more closely for the last twenty years than whites fearful of black in-moving expected.

Beyond the employment and income shifts in the national and regional economy, the differences residents observed in Canarsie before and after the racial transition of the neighborhood were often lateral shifts (representing neither improvement nor deterioration) as one ethnic group replaced another. One Canarsie senior talked about her favorite stores on Avenue L (a main retail corridor in Canarsie) that have long since departed: “We used to have a Reinhardt’s. Everybody knew that bakery. Now it’s a Jamaican bakery, I
think. And next to it is daycare, I think. That one next to it... That used to be a restaurant. I tell you. We had everything on the Avenue. Bakeries and delis. Now, there’s no more.”

This speaker experienced the loss of a bakery, even though a bakery is still there. At the corner of Avenue L and 95th Street, the old vertical sign of the long-departed Home (formerly Reinhardt) Bakery remains on the front facade of the building, juxtaposed with the signage for the Jamaican Bakery that has since grown into this space (Schlitchman and Patch 2008). Likewise, a butcher shop on Avenue L called Country Butcher used to be owned by an Italian man who sold it to a Dominican man. This butcher used to specialize in veal, pork, dried meats and other essential Italian items.

Changes in the ethnic identities of stores were found to be deeply significant to old time residents, even though they turned out to not necessarily be accurate signs of the ethnic identity of store owners. Some of the newer non-Caribbean businesses that opened up in the past few years have designed storefronts with Caribbean symbols in order to attract more customers. Jono Bagels, which opened up a few doors down from one of Canarsie’s oldest retail institutions, Original Pizza, was owned by a Chinese family. The owners said the color scheme “seemed right for the neighborhood.” In another example, a few streets over from Avenue L on Rockaway Parkway (one of Canarsie’s major arteries and commercial corridors), the recently arrived Golden Mango Supermarket inhabited a large lot in a commercial strip mall once dominated by Walgreens. Clearly displayed along the rooftop were a long, row of West Indian flags, delivering another strong message of ethnic identity. Combined with the other small ethnic businesses that rounded out the rest of the spaces in the lot, the strip mall broadcasted a spirit that was decidedly West Indian. It was a surprise, then, to read that the owner of the Golden Mango was not actually West Indian, but an Asian businessman (“Now It’s Official” 2009). In these examples, changes to the retail identity of the neighborhood did not simply reflect changes in store ownership as outsiders often assumed, but, like the comments of white Canarsians themselves, were a commentary on the perceived changes in the neighborhood.

Some literature suggests that increases in ethnic entrepreneurs in an area can expedite the out-migration of those that feel as though their cultural needs and preferences are no longer being served by these ethnic businesses and institutions (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990). Some whites leave integrating black-white neighborhoods because they perceive that African Americans are “taking over” and they do not want to become part of the minority (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Krysan 2002). In the case of Old Canarsie, the perception of Jamaican inflow may have acted as a co-agent of residential out-migration.
The paradoxical way in which sameness was perceived as difference extended from bakeries and butchers to the stereotypes whites use to describe themselves and blacks. White Canarsians described themselves as the descendents of hardworking immigrants, and blacks as fundamentally lacking in that work ethic. In the exchange below, Italian and Haitian work values and work experiences merge as Haitian and Italian employees of a Canarsie cab company discuss the ethnic succession of the business:

Haitian Driver: There are about 28 drivers in this company… the majority of them are West Indian.
Q: Are most of the drivers Haitian Immigrants?
Haitian Driver: Yes, I would say 70 percent or so are Haitian Immigrants.
Q: Is the owner from Haiti also?
Haitian Driver: Yes, he is from Haiti.
Q: How long has this business been here?
Haitian Driver: Oh I don’t know . . . (turns to middle-aged Italian cab driver in the room to get answer) . . . 26 years.
Q: Has it always had the same owner?
Italian Driver: No, the current owner purchased the business in the mid 90s from one of my kind of people (laughing).
Q: Are you able to make a good living here in Canarsie?
Haitian and Italian Driver: Yeah we do ok.
Q: If you don’t mind, how much does the average driver here make in a year?
Haitian Driver: I know it doesn’t look busy now, but in the morning when people need to get to work we are very busy. Some make more than $50,000 a year, some make less.
Q: Do you get a lot of business from West Indians in Canarsie?
Haitian Driver: A lot, yeah, because most of them have city jobs and need to make it to the subway. I think that there’s this set notion among Haitians who come to the United States that the goal is to own your own home . . . My one friend he was uneducated when he came here but he got a job as a cab driver and saved up enough money for a down payment. My other friend studied hard and became a doctor.
Q: In your experience do a lot of people who come from Haiti drive cabs?
Haitian Driver: Yes it’s a common first job for immigrants from Haiti . . . most have experience with English from customers in Port au Prince; you can make a good living and it doesn’t require much education.
In addition to rendering explicit the ethnic succession in occupations, the speakers above also articulate cultural values. While declarations of such values are not, in themselves, evidence that any group actually holds or practices such values, they are indications of how the groups see themselves and wish to present themselves. Particularly during the transitional period, whites ascribed cultural values supporting home, family, and hard work to their own ethnic group while simultaneously claiming that blacks lacked these same values. For instance, a white resident quoted in Canarsie argued that “The problems of the blacks are their own fault. It’s their ignorance. Jobs are created for everyone, but their own laziness keeps them from going after it. The common black, his problem is laziness and his upbringing” (Rieder 1985:113–14). Even today, Italians and Jews make such invidious distinctions, but by viewing them beside the self-representation of West Indian Canarsians, the underappreciated similarities between the groups becomes more evident.

Several interviews we conducted with white and black Canarsians showed how whites claimed to hold superior work and family values, even as whites and blacks articulated markedly similar sets of values. Thus, a thirty-seven-year-old Italian said that “Italians honor hard work. This [business] is family owned and it’s going to be family-owned when the father dies.” He suggested that blacks did not value hard work, middle class respectability, and successful business ownership like Italians. In a separate interview, however, a forty-five-year-old Haitian law student described West Indians as strivers in very similar terms: “Haitians are really academic, I mean insanely smart,” she said.” Top schools, they’re there, top doctors . . . Jamaicans are really good at business . . . There’s this set notion among Haitians who come to the United States that the goal is to own your own home.”

Suggestively, these two residents also had opposite views of how safety in the neighborhood had changed during Canarsie’s forty-year period of racial transition. The Italian American respondent complained that “the neighborhood has gone downhill since they—the black race—has moved in . . . armed guards in schools, metal detectors; they never had any of that when I was here growing up.” Contrary to his narrative of increasing crime, fear, and violence in Canarsie, a Haitian American who lived in nearby East Flatbush felt safer in Canarsie than before, noting that crime had dropped citywide over the past twenty years, and had dropped in Canarsie as well. Just as critically, while the Italian American perceived neighborhoods with more blacks as inherently dangerous, the Haitian American remembered white neighborhoods as being more threatening because of the danger whites posed to blacks: “Things have gotten a lot better in New York; now you can go anywhere. But in the seventies—in the seventies Bensonhurst or Bay
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Ridge—forget about it. I tried to go to school one time in Bay Ridge and, when the train got to Atlantic Avenue, the train conductor would stop and pull all the blacks off the train. He said it was for our own safety, but I knew who he was working for.” Indeed, the sharp decline in crime citywide over the last two decades means that most neighborhoods are considerably safer than they were in the 1970s, the same period about which white Canarsians have such halcyon memories. Just as critically, those white residents never consider the hostility of white neighborhoods towards blacks as examples of criminality. In fact, residents in Rieder’s book considered such behavior just the opposite: law and order. Given such disparate framings and definitions of crime, violence, danger, and disorder, it is not surprising that the two groups should have opposing assessments of the changes in safety between white and black Canarsie.

We found other examples in our interviews of respondents speaking, indirectly, across the miscomprehension of the color line. An Italian American who moved from the neighborhood in the mid-nineties but still worked in Canarsie struggled to make sense of how black residents could afford to move into a middle-class neighborhood. “I don’t know where they’re getting their money but it must be from drugs.” In another interview, a forty-nine-year-old Haitian explained that “I came to Canarsie from East Flatbush to try and find a better life for my family. It’s safer here . . . I’m a schoolteacher and my daughter goes to Brooklyn College.” The assumption of illicit behavior and the reality of civil service respectability highlight the difficulty white Canarsians continue to have imagining a reality for their black neighbors that is as mundane—and familiar—as it really is.

In a similar manifestation of racial blindness, whites were unable to see social structure and social networks if they existed within the black community. Thus one twenty-nine-year-old Italian complained that “there’s not a lot of community involvement . . . especially the Caribbean blacks.” In contrast, a forty-nine-year-old Haitian high school teacher said that “there is unity in the West-Indian community, we go to school together, we go to the same churches and restaurants, some of us even work together.”

The complaint that Canarsie no longer had the vibrant social life of decades past was particularly common among the elderly, or among former residents, who no longer knew many people in the neighborhood. But it was demonstrably not the case for many current residents. On Sunday after church services had finished, the Arch Diner hosted a bustling social scene. Patrons wore their Sunday best. Easter decorations lined the walls and hung from the ceiling. Community social life, constructed around weekly rituals of religion, food, and community, was very much alive. At the same hour, the sidewalk of Avenue L was crowded with group and families walking or standing in front
of church awnings Church services were important times, and public spaces after services important places, to enact community in Canarsie. Because many whites from Canarsie had virtually no connection to these networks, the community social life embedded in the black community was lost on white residents.

Not all whites were unable to recognize the similarities between white and black residents, or to understand the needs of the black community. One store owner, who had successfully adapted the products he sold to meet the changing ethnic profile of potential customers, could also see the similarities among the jobs of earlier and more recent residents. He attributed the same cultural values to Caribbeans that white Canarsians attributed to themselves. He said, “A lot of West Indians are school teachers and cops. The city likes them because they are hard-working and know how to speak to their community.”

Racially homogenous social networks contribute to the propagation of these stereotypes. White residents lived in a network that was white enough to propagate both flattering representations of their own ethnicity as hard-working, family-centered, law abiding, and “respectable,” and to repeat racist views of their black neighbors. Similarly, black residents seem to have sufficient ethnic networks to perpetuate self-reinforcing stereotypes of West Indians as hardworking, academic, focused on family unity, valuing home ownership, and striving for higher economic achievement.

**RACE AND THE NEOLIBERAL CITY**

Independent of racial transformations of particular neighborhoods, New York in the twenty-first century is fundamentally different from New York in the 1970s. In particular, the introduction of the neoliberal order has dramatically altered the landscape of the city and constrained the possibilities for working- and middle-class residents. David Harvey defines neoliberalism as a process beginning in the late-twentieth century that took back the collective gains of middle- and working-class people, gutted social welfare programs, and re-secured elite power in economies around the world. In New York City, when the municipal government was unable to balance its budget in 1975, the bankers who held much of the city’s debt imposed draconian changes in the city (Harvey 2005:44–48). The bankers who were appointed to the Municipal Assistance Corporation that was given authority over the city’s budget intended to make changes that went beyond what was fiscally necessary to be “punitive” and “painful.” The bankers cut wages, hobbled civil service unions, laid off thousands of city workers, cut back public services (such as
education, public health, and transportation), and raised taxes and fees for working New Yorkers (Harvey 2005:45). Their goal was to restructure the city in the short-term interests of financial elites.

Thus while white Canarsians had moved into the neighborhood in a Keynesian era of low unemployment, high wages, and relatively generous public services, blacks moved to Canarsie in the neoliberal era, when wages of city jobs Canarsians had long held were being pinched, public higher education had become more expensive, and city services had been cut. Industrial jobs disappeared, union wages became more rare, and the financial industry, service sector, and health care fields grew in relative size; these employment sector shifts reshaped the labor market for Canarsians. In addition, the neoliberal ideology mandated that New York open far more aspects of society to capitalist markets. Deregulation, privatization, and marketization were key elements to the neoliberal project and reshaped the city.

One example is the changes in retailing options. Until the 1990s, zoning regulations had kept large retail stores out of New York, instead favoring smaller (often locally owned) stores on retail streets. During the Giuliani administration, the large retail chains that characterized much retailing outside of New York gained entrée into the New York market. Retail stores in Canarsie thus faced a very different competitive landscape than they had decades earlier. The lure of “big box” stores like Target, Costco, and Home Depot that had recently opened in New York City was particularly strong in neighborhoods like Canarsie, whose modest home-owning residents had to watch their pennies and lived at the edges of the city where cars were ubiquitous and more frequently used for shopping. Residents began driving to the large stores that had been built on the relatively nearby urban fringes.

One longtime businessman remembered when Avenue L was busier. Families used to line up down the block to buy school supplies. More recently, families conducted their major shopping off of the Avenue. School supplies that were once bought locally were purchased in nationwide chains. Structural changes to retailing in the city diminished Avenue L’s economic role.

Given the challenge presented by big-box competition, small business owners in Canarsie needed to find ways of restructuring their businesses to succeed in a neoliberal city. Some research suggests that some small business owners can succeed in niche markets by catering to neighborhood-specific “ethnic consumer tastes” and cultural preferences that produce a “protected market” for the entrepreneur (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990). One young Italian businessman, who spoke nostalgically about the vibrant street life of his section of Avenue L in the early 1990s, adapted his business to meet the changing demographics of the neighborhood. He devoted an entire aisle to African hair care products and sold key chains with flags from Caribbean
countries. He reported that he now “loves Caribbean food.” Still, business was not booming. “They’re cheap,” he complained, dissatisfied with the amount of money his Afro-Caribbean customers spent in the community. Instead, he believed residents focused expenditures on home ownership, and sent significant remittances to their countries of origin. His economic outlook for small business in the area was bleak, because of the growth of big-box retailers near Starrett City, the lingering effects of the recession, and the influx of corporate chains stores on nearby Glenwood Road. Although his economic assessment was grounded in non-racial attributions, he nonetheless implied that Canarsie’s neighborhood transition from white to black factored in to why his business had become stagnant. “The only places that are doing well on this strip are the Caribbean restaurants, the black churches, and the hair salons,” he said. He offered a modicum of optimism, but not without an ethnically framed view of the neighborhood, as he wondered if “maybe when the Asians take over, things will get better.”

Assumptions about Canarians’ financial capital persisted in responses like those given by one former resident who sought to explain why surveys showed Canarsie as having a high median income, even as the neighborhood seemed financially strained. The former resident said, “That’s called inflation and two people working . . . when I grew up there I didn’t know many kids I was friendly with whose moms worked . . . it was rare back then to have two income families.” Thus, to this former Canarian, there was something qualitatively different in how contemporary households generated income. In this assessment, Canarians’ relatively high incomes still lacked the social capital that single-income households once possessed. This explanation rolled several macroeconomic and social changes into one explanation: the shift toward more dual income families, falling wages for most workers (represented as “inflation” that seemed to nibble away at income when prices rose faster than salaries), and families that had enough money for mortgage payments, but not enough for some of the other markers of middle-class comfort.

Even though that resident recognized the rise of dual incomes and falling real wages, whites rarely have a solid sense of exactly how inequality is structured and instead attribute shortcomings to race, not racism. Other studies have pointed to how black Americans’ lower levels of wealth (which translates into smaller downpayments on homes, and higher monthly mortgage payments, for instance) require greater income to pay for housing. This results in African American homeowners being less likely to have as much disposable income when compared to whites with comparable incomes and homes. White neighbors who observe the arrival of blacks may then interpret these manifestations of longstanding racial inequality as evidence that blacks can’t maintain homes or neighborhoods to white standards. A current resident
lamented the racialized reputation that followed blacks into the neighborhood: “You know what, it’s strange to me. The new settlers of Canarsie of African American descent bought the homes here for almost ten times the original cost and people consider the neighborhood quote-unquote ‘bad.’”

Indeed, it is not possible to fully disaggregate the effect of neoliberal restructuring from the role of racism, since the damaging effects of neoliberalization have struck people of color harder in the United States. Racism has also aided neoliberal attacks on social welfare policies and even civil service workers, since both could be intertwined with racial stereotypes of the undeserving poor or insufficiently hard-working people. In addition, the pain of neoliberalism was greater for people of color because racism limited their ability to generate support for public policies that would address the threats they faced from neoliberal policies. One such threat was the proliferation of speculative mortgage capital and the resultant real estate bubble and foreclosure crisis.

FORECLOSURE: THE SYSTEMIC ROLE OF RACE AND NEOLIBERALISM ON HOUSING

Despite its many signs of economic health, Canarsie experienced a rapid rise in home foreclosures over the past decade, a trend that accelerated with the housing collapse of 2007. The statistical inconsistency between Canarsie’s high median income and its rate of home foreclosure is different than all other New York City neighborhoods with comparable median incomes (Furman Center 2010). Why the disparity? Using a place stratification model of locational attainment, the role of race in exacerbating the effects of the Great Recession in Canarsie is difficult to ignore (Woldoff and Odavia 2008). While racist assumptions and stereotypes helped trigger the flight of white residents from the community at the end of the twentieth century, patterns of institutional racism caught up with the black residents who had replaced them in the twenty-first, intensifying the ways the American financial crisis of 2008 were felt by Canarsians on a local level and complicating perceptions of Canarsie as a middle-class neighborhood.

No challenge to Canarsie presented the racially disproportionate damage of neoliberalism more clearly than the foreclosure crisis that struck the nation in 2008. Neoliberal models sought to make capital more mobile, extend the reach of markets, and reduce regulation. The making of the housing crisis was the product of that model: Highly mobile international capital sought profitable investments. Investment banks (in New York in particular) further marketized the home mortgage market by creating mortgage-backed securi-
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ties and collateralized debt obligations. The rush of capital into what seemed like highly profitable investment vehicles flooded the home mortgage market with capital that ultimately inflated housing prices, increased demands for mortgages to be resold on that secondary market, and induced lenders to make risky loans. Inadequate regulation of the mortgage lending, investment vehicles, their rating, and their sale contributed to bubble and its eventual collapse. The effect of that collapse was particularly evident in Canarsie.

That the foreclosure crisis hit communities of color the hardest is not a new story, nor one that is unique to Canarsie. Beginning in the 1990s, minority homebuyers who had historically faced difficulty getting mortgages due to exclusionary lending policies were brought into a tiered qualification system. Borrowers deemed “subprime” were subjected to higher or more adjustable interest rates, steeper penalties or balloon payments (Rugh and Massey 2010). Numerous studies have found that race played a direct role in the kinds of loans sold to homebuyers. Compared to whites with similar credit profiles, down payment ratios, personal characteristics, and residential locations, blacks were much more likely to receive subprime loans (Avery, Brevoort, and Canner 2007; Avery, Canner and Cook 2005; Bocian, Ernst, and Li 2006; Nichols, Pennington-Cross, and Yezer 2005). Residential segregation further compounded the prevalence of subprime lending in that it enabled financial institutions to aggressively target and market subprime loans to buyers in black neighborhoods underserved by traditional lending (Rugh and Massey 2010).

From a qualitative standpoint, race played another, more indirect role in the sale of subprime mortgages through consumers’ use of social networks to buy real estate. A housing counselor who worked with struggling homeowners in Canarsie’s Community District 18 told one of our researchers that while the overwhelming majority of his clients were black, he didn’t believe race was a factor in the kinds of loans his clients received. He simply believed instead that “people trusted the wrong people.” Many of his clients were sold mortgages through family and friends, mortgage brokers who were provided with incentives by banks to encourage clients into purchasing bad loans or buying property they were unable in actuality to afford. Thus, the counselor believed that the brokers involved in the process (who were black) were not intentionally targeting their clients because of their race. But the kinds of incentives used by banks to motivate brokers to market subprime loans to buyers within their social network do appear to be influenced by the racial composition of the area in which the transactions were taking place.

As both a cause and consequence of the collapse of the housing market in 2007, homes that had been purchased through subprime loans were more likely to enter into foreclosure. According to Sarah Ludwig, executive director of the Neighborhood Economic Development Advocacy Project, “One in
five high cost (subprime) mortgages is going to end in foreclosure . . . If one in five people with subprime loans are expected to lose their homes, it creates an urgent situation” (Buiso 2007:np). The housing crisis would soon expand beyond subprime borrowing, however. Michael Hickey, executive director of the foreclosure-prevention clearinghouse group the Center for New York City Neighborhoods, found that while earlier clients were primarily subprime borrowers, by 2010 most of the Center’s clients had conventional mortgages, but were unable to make their payments because of loss of income.

Canarsie bears witness to the relationship between segregation, subprime borrowing and high rates of foreclosure. Of the eighteen community districts in Brooklyn, Canarsie was ranked in 2006 among the highest in terms of median income (at $58,000), edging out Bay Ridge (which had a median income of $50,000). Yet, in Canarsie, where over half the residents were black, 31.7 percent of all home purchase loans issued that year were issued by a subprime lender. In Bay Ridge, where the black population was 0.8 percent (Furman Center 2011), only 3.6 percent of home purchase loans were issued by a subprime lender. By 2010, Bay Ridge was experiencing a foreclosure rate of just 5 per 1,000 1–4 family properties, compared with Canarsie’s much higher rate of 26.3 per 1,000 (Furman Center 2011).

The place stratification model helps explain the impact of the foreclosure crisis in the neighborhood. The model views race and ethnicity as more central than economic or educational factors in determining where an individual lives (Logan and Alba 1993; Logan and Molotch 1987). Thus, for a predominantly black neighborhood, quality of life cannot be as accurately determined by the economic or educational status of its residents due to the residential disparities that exist as a result of racial segregation. Furthermore, Rachael Woldoff and Seth Odavia point out that quality of life can be measured in a multitude of ways, from more quantitative criteria of measuring property values to more qualitative approaches of using residents’ assessments of neighborhood disorder (Woldoff and Odavia 2008). Both measures demonstrate that racial and ethnic disparities have contributed to a declining quality of life in Canarsie.

In their application of the place stratification model to measure racial and ethnic differences in neighborhood quality, Woldoff and Odavia predicted that differences between black and white neighborhoods would exist even after controlling for disparities in human and financial capital (Woldoff and Odavia 2008). Using property values as a barometer for neighborhood quality, the researchers concluded that, “even if African Americans in the present generation are able to close the racial gaps in college completion and income, our findings suggest that the next generation will still experience racial inequality because of their parents’ inability to convert these gains into
locational parity with whites” (Woldoff and Odavia 2008). The researchers found that resources such as income not only failed to close the gap in property values between black and white homeowners, but that the value gap grew as incomes increased (Woldoff and Odavia 2008). Indeed, even while Canarsians’ median income remained well above that of Brooklyn as a whole, during the mortgage crisis, Canarsians still saw a staggering 20 percent depreciation in the sale prices of their homes, compared to a 4 percent depreciation for Brooklyn home sales overall. Areas like predominantly white Bay Ridge had a lower median income than Canarsie, but only a 4.3 percent depreciation in sale prices.7

Distressed homeowners seeking to stave off foreclosure turned to methods of generating income that, on the one hand, enabled them to keep their homes but on the other, invited social instability. Residents subdivided their homes to rent out apartments despite their houses not being zoned as multi-family dwellings. Indeed, one housing counselor who was interviewed promoted this strategy to clients as a way of keeping up with their mortgage payments, particularly when there had been a reduction of employment income. While initially the counselor claimed to be unaware of any of his clients experiencing problems with their tenants, the counselor, in the same conversation, claimed to have received some reports of tenants “on this and that” (different government assistance programs) for whom the supplementary source of income had caused problems. State Senator John Sampson, who represented Canarsie, reported that the problem of renting illicit spaces to tenants was exacerbated by realtors who sold the homes as “two family with rentable basement,” even though the basement couldn’t be legally rented (Buiso, 2007:np) Said one resident, “The area was zoned for mostly one- and two-family homes, but there are many homes where the garages were closed and turned into basement apartments without DOB [Department of Building] approval.” Another fretted, “Most of the new homeowners were given bad mortgages; the new home owners cannot afford their mortgages without adding tenants who are not homeowners who will overpopulate the neighborhood and bring in a revolving door of residents who create crime and other problems.” Although no homeowners could be found who had experienced errant tenants to corroborate this pattern, there seemed to be consensus from both official and unofficial sources that the attempts to offset foreclosure may produce other, unintended, negative outcomes for the neighborhood. At the very least, the prevalence of unauthorized apartments in single-family homes taints Canarsie’s image as a conventionally middle-class neighborhood.

The effects of the foreclosure crisis in Canarsie can be measured using a qualitative analysis of residents’ assessments of neighborhood disorder. Canarsie’s status as a middle-class community may be threatened if home
foreclosures and the decline of property values continue. Because of its econo-

mic precariousness, conflict exists within the community over how exactly
to define it. While Jonathan Rieder’s subjects shared a collective, albeit ro-
manticized, sense of the neighborhood’s identity, current-day Canarsians can’t
seem to agree on what kind of neighborhood they live in. Competing perspec-
tives of the residents are further complicated by the neighborhood’s location
in relation to other areas. Middle-class Canarians live in relatively close
proximity to several neighborhoods, such as East New York and Brownsville,
in which lower income blacks reside. This is not altogether uncommon for
middle-class blacks. The pattern of clustering, partially a product of historic
and contemporary patterns of racially discriminatory housing and partially the
result of residential preference, tends to place middle-class black neighbor-
hoods in proximity to areas of concentrated poverty (Pattillo-McCoy 2000). In
other words, “the worst urban contexts in which whites reside are considerably
better than the average context of black communities” (Sampson and Wilson
1995). This spatial distribution affects how black middle-class identities are
reinforced and maintained. While Rieder’s subjects drew racial boundaries
around their community as a way of preserving their precarious class status,
modern day Canarians must rely instead on geographical and class markers to
identify “outsiders.” In her study of black middle-class neighborhoods, Mary
Pattillo cites the ethnographic work of Bruce Haynes and Valerie Johnson to
illustrate the “inbetweenness” of the black middle-class experience. Pattillo
points out that Haynes’ study of Runyon Heights, NY, in which blacks divided
along class lines in response to a political redistricting plan, illustrates the vul-
nerability of black middle-class neighborhoods to the encroachment of black
poverty (as well as its growth from within) and the efforts of middle-class
black residents to hold the class line (Pattillo 2005).

**CONCLUSIONS: PUNCTUATED EQUILIBRIUM**

Several decades after white residents aggressively resisted the arrival of
black residents, Canarsie has challenged many expectations about racially
transitioning neighborhoods. Despite the ongoing challenges facing blacks
in the job market, housing market, and mortgage market, black Canarians
have maintained Canarsie as a stable, working- and middle-class community.
Contrary to the expectations of white residents, the neighborhood is notable
for how similar it is after integration to its earlier demographic profile, com-
munity life, and patterns of ethically identified small businesses. Canarians
old and new articulate points of dissatisfaction about their neighborhood, but
also continue to work to sustain it.
That notable success notwithstanding, this study also identifies several threats facing African American neighborhoods like Canarsie. First, damage from the neoliberal model has had disparate impacts on black communities. In New York as in other US cities, home foreclosures are heavily concentrated in black and Latino neighborhoods.

Second, Canarsie’s long period of relative stability, only recently interrupted by the danger accompanying widespread foreclosure, suggests an alternate model to understand the trajectory of black neighborhoods. Studies of blockbusting in the mid-twentieth century concluded that neighborhoods that went from white to black declined quickly and dramatically. This has not been the case in Canarsie, where incomes and home values have remained relatively stable and rising for decades after its racial transition. It would be tempting to conclude that black middle-class families now enjoy the same level of security as their white middle-class counterparts. But the racially disproportionate impact of the foreclosure crisis argues against that conclusion. Instead, in the ecological terminology that has long held sway in urban sociology, Canarsie suggests a pattern of “punctuated equilibrium,” or long periods of stability punctuated by periods of crisis (Eldredge and Gould 1972; Gould and Eldredge 1977). It is still too early to tell how the current crisis will shape the neighborhood in the long term.

What does this all mean for the future of Canarsie? The foreclosure crisis, the impact of which was magnified by the racial composition of the neighborhood, has encouraged discussion among residents about what it means to be a middle-class neighborhood and where to place the neighborhood within the urban social landscape. It has also inspired action to correct the damage wrought by economic collapse. More than three hundred residents attended a recent “Homeowners’ Assistance and Financial Wellness” event at Holy Family Church hosted by State Senator John Sampson and major housing organizations such as CAMBA and NHS East Flatbush. Small signs of hope can be found in the work of people such as the CAMBA housing counselor who was interviewed for this project, who in the past year helped twelve Canarsie residents modify their mortgages and prevent foreclosure. Much more comprehensive efforts are needed. Yet despite the threats posed to Canarsie by the housing collapse, the community is making a concerted effort to alleviate the crisis and preserve its way of life. In this battle, residents will be confronting large social forces. Canarsians have always fought to defend their homes, their families, their communities, and their sense of class and cultural identity. The battles of the 1970s were misdirected at newcomers who were misperceived as a threat to the community. Canarsians will need to repurpose their neighborhood’s storied unity, and resolve to defend their community against the real challenges it faces today.
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NOTES

1. Throughout much of this article, we use the term “black” as a racial term, and African American and West Indian to connote to ethnic and cultural identifications.

2. For the remainder of this paper the terms West Indian and Caribbean, both refer to the peoples of the Islands of the Anglophone Caribbean including but not limited to: Anguilla, Antigua, Bahamas, Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Trinidad and Tobago, and for the purposes of this paper Haiti even though they are part of the Francophone Caribbean. I have included Haitians in this category due to the fact that in Canarsie and throughout the Caribbean neighborhoods of Brooklyn, Haitians tend to identify with and live alongside people of other West Indian nationalities.

3. Furthermore, the study based its assessment on a spatial assimilation model, in which having more resources allows people to live in better communities (Massey 1985). Because of the predominantly black population in Canarsie, this model alone proves insufficient in assessing the quality of the neighborhood.


6. The bursting of the housing bubble and resultant foreclosure crisis began somewhat later in New York than elsewhere.

7. Neighborhood median income data comes from reports generated from Trulia.com.

REFERENCES


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