



## ***Residential Patterns and Political Empowerment among Jamaicans and Haitians in the U.S. Metropolis*** **The Role of Ethnicity in New York and South Florida**

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**Abstract:** This article explores the connection between residential concentration of two prominent national groups of Caribbean descent—Jamaicans and Haitians—and their contribution to the making of a West Indian political power in the United States. Considering the significance of place (destination and origin) as major point in Caribbean social experience abroad, it focuses on a double comparative perspective in which Jamaican and Haitian immigrant experiences display similarities as well as differences, in two different metropolitan contexts. The analysis focuses on New York and the South Florida metropolitan area of Miami-Ft. Lauderdale where the majority of Black Caribbean immigrants in the United States live. In this outlook, it analyzes the fundamental role of ethnic categorization and residential geography in U.S. political life and its implication on the rise of new ethnic constituencies. Ethnic polarization and the related implementation of redistricting as a means to ensure an equal representation of all minorities are discussed. The growing presence of non-Hispanic Caribbean people in New York City and Florida and the subsequent constitution of immigrant neighborhoods where West Indians form an important component—in some cases the majority—of the population is conceptualized as a challenge to the theories of spatial assimilation and place stratification. Residential strategies of West Indians are indeed more and more distinct from the Black native ones. Black Caribbean people use their distinct residential areas as geographic bases for the constitution of an autonomous electoral force leading to political power. The main objectives of gaining political power is to address the specific needs of immigrants from the non-Hispanic West Indies and to give them more visibility on the local and national scene. The meaning of identity for Caribbean immigrants in U.S. politics is analyzed as an instrument for the constitution of a Caribbean block distinct from the African American one. Changing the focus from the ethnic category at the national scale to the ethnic community at the metropolitan level, and from a solidarity based on national origin to a broader Caribbean perspective, their strategy redefines the meaning of Caribbean identity and raises the question of the pertinence of ethnic categorization in U.S. politics. At the same time, the national ancestry card is more than often likely to be played in the political arena, especially in West Indian neighborhoods characterized by the residential concentration or overrepresentation of one national origin. Jamaican Americans tend to dominate Caribbean politics in Brooklyn and Broward County, whereas Haitian Americans are at the forefront of West Indian empowerment in Miami-Dade County. These singular experiences within different metropolitan contexts of incorporation show the importance of place as well as the relevance of the national origin in the understanding of the immigrant communities' outcome.

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For further information about the author, see the next page.

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary United States is undergoing profound demographic and cultural changes due to the increasing importance of immigration from Latin America and Asia since the 1960s. Nowhere else has this remarkable transformation been experienced as it has been in gateway cities like New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco or Miami—where immigrants make up one-third to half of the metropolitan population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). In New York City and Miami-Fort Lauderdale specifically, people born in the Caribbean are at the forefront of this demographic dynamics, with respectively 30 per cent and 55 per cent of the foreign-born stock (*ibid.*). Not surprisingly, these contemporary flows tend to make the traditional ethno-racial landscape of urban U.S. more complex. Ethnic and racial lines are increasingly blurred, with an old time black vs. white scheme being replaced by a recent newcomer vs. native scheme (Bean, Stevens, 2003). In the metropolitan context, residential as well as political strategies at the local level reveal that West Indians don't always match the Black American pattern (Audebert, 2006).

In the context of the tremendous impact of contemporary immigration on demographics, culture and urban change in the U.S., it is relevant to question the relation between ethnicity, residential settlement and political empowerment of recent immigrant communities. Indeed, this article explores the connection between the residential concentration of two prominent national groups of Caribbean descent—Ja-

maicans and Haitians—and their contribution to the making of a West Indian political power in the United States. Considering the significance of place (destination and origin) as major point in Caribbean social experience abroad, it focuses on a double comparative perspective in which Jamaican and Haitian immigrant experiences display similarities as well as differences, in two different metropolitan contexts. Our analysis focuses on New York and the South Florida metropolitan area of Miami-Ft. Lauderdale where the majority of Black Caribbean immigrants in the United States live.

In this outlook, the fundamental role of ethnic categorization and residential geography in U.S. political life will be analyzed, as well as their implications on the rise of new ethnic constituencies. Ethnic polarization and the related implementation of redistricting as a means to ensure an equal representation of all minorities will be discussed. The growing presence of English- and Creole-speaking Caribbean people in New York City and Florida and the subsequent constitution of immigrant neighborhoods where West Indians form an important component—in some cases the majority—of the population is conceptualized as a challenge to the theories of spatial assimilation and place stratification. Moreover, changing the focus from the ethnic category on the national scale to the ethnic community at the metropolitan level, and from a solidarity based on national origin to a broader Caribbean perspective, I will explore how their political strategy redefine the meaning of Caribbean identity and raises the question of the pertinence of ethnic categorization in U.S. politics.

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## I. RACE AND ETHNICITY: RESIDENTIAL PATTERNS AND POLITICS IN THE UNITED STATES

In contemporary urban U.S., the incorporation of successive immigrant waves has shown an intimate link between ethno-racial categorization, residential geography and political representation. In particular, residential concentration of immigrant communities has paved the way for the constitution of electoral constituencies entailing ethnic empowerment. The ethnic and racial lines along which newcomers have been integrated play a key role in their visibility as territorialized communities in metropolitan areas.

### *Race, Ethnicity and Residential Patterns*

Different theories have attempted to demonstrate the significance of race and ethnicity in U.S. residential patterns. According to the 'spatial assimilation' model, immigrants and their descendants are increasingly likely to live in neighborhoods occupied by the majority population—i.e. non-Hispanic whites—as they climb the rungs of the socio-economic ladder and as they incorporate into the social and cultural mainstream. This view is consistent with the traditional theories of the Chicago School (Park, Burgess, Mc Kenzie, 1925). Immigrants originally settle in inner-city impoverished enclaves, where housing is more affordable and ethnic networks stronger (Logan, Alba, Zhang, 2002). Numerous historic examples are provided by such mythic places as California's and New York's Chinatowns, Miami's Little Havana, New York's Little Italy and New York's South Bronx. As they progressively experience social upward mobility and acculturation, immigrants leave the original enclave to settle in more upscale suburbs with more amenities (Massey, 1985). Despite the fact

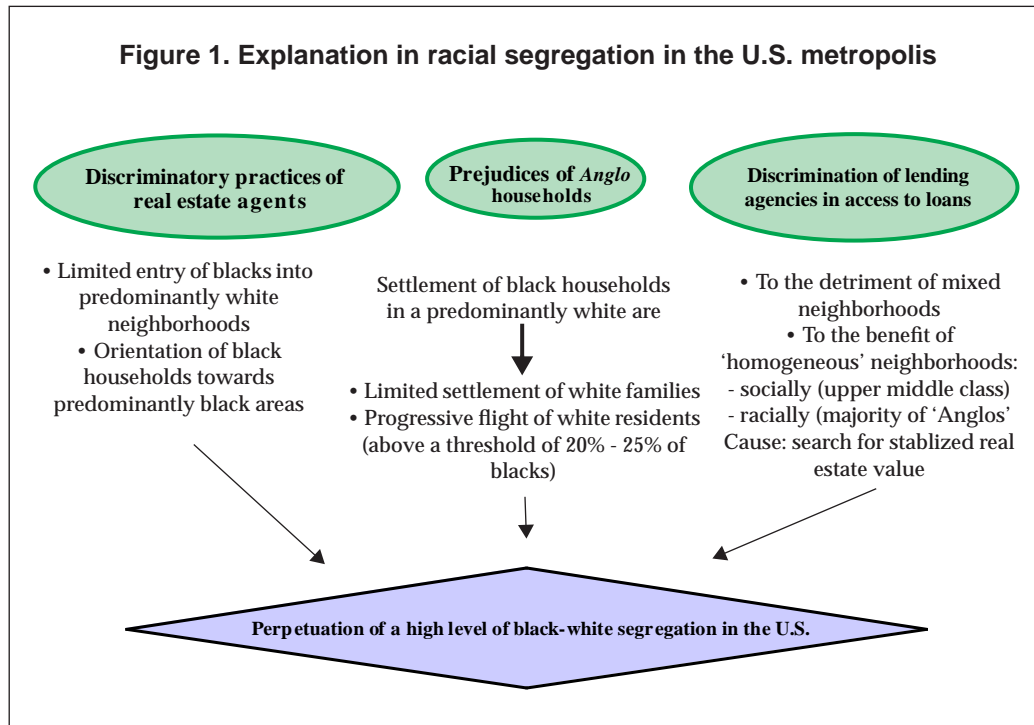
that non-Hispanic whites still generally make up the majority of the suburban population, immigrant minorities tend to live more and more in surrounding areas. Three out of five Asians and half of Hispanics presently reside in suburbia according to the U.S. Census. This trend is particularly noteworthy in gateway cities.

The second theory refers to the 'place stratification' model. In reference to the notion of racialized or segmented incorporation, it considers hierarchization of neighborhoods as a way for middle-class and upper middle-class non-Hispanic whites to maintain social distance from socially less advantaged minorities. Public and private discrimination and the link between perceived threat and minority size are important determinants in this process, which engenders a dual-housing market as shown in figure 1 (Massey and Denton, 1993). This is the case even in suburbs, where blacks—the most socially disadvantaged racial category in the U.S.—remain highly segregated from whites, with a dissimilarity index of 56.6 in 2000<sup>1</sup>. It suggests that the vast majority of West Indians are likely to settle in predominantly black neighborhoods, and that housing discrimination makes it difficult for them to convert their personal assets into more comfortable residential situations.

The third theory refers to the 'ethnic residential niche' model. As a matter of fact, immigrants with a strong cultural, social and financial capital have recently settled in suburbs where identifiable well-off immigrant neighborhoods have emerged. They are characterized by greater ethnic and racial diversity than is the case in the spatial assimilation model in inner-city en-

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<sup>1</sup> This means that 56.6% of blacks would need to move across census tracts in order to achieve an even residential distribution with non-Hispanic whites in metropolitan suburbs throughout the country. Source: Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research, from Census 2000 data.



claves as well as in suburbs (Alba, et al., 1999). Some authors have called 'ethnoburbs' these new residential patterns in reference to the formation of ethnic suburbs which contradicts the assumption that ethnicity declines with residential and socio-economic mobility (Li, 1998; Lin, Robinson, 2005). In suburbs, immigrants from Latin America or Asia reside in areas with higher co-ethnic concentrations than before. This is notably the case for Hispano-Caribbean immigrants in Miami, Mexicans and Central Americans in Southern California and Chinese in Los Angeles and San Francisco (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

As regards the Black experience as a whole, individuals remain highly segregated—with a dissimilarity index with whites of 65—and isolated from other racial groups. In terms of neighborhood standing, measured by median household income and the percentage of non-Hispanic whites among residents, Blacks are the most residentially disadvantaged. This dis-

crepancy can be accounted for by their relatively high concentration in inner cities and their relatively low socio-economic status. But their specific situation can also be explained by the persistent socio-residential gap in comparison with other racial and ethnic groups, even at the upper end of the socioeconomic scale (Iceland, Sharpe, Steinmetz, 2005; Alba, Logan, Stults, 2000). In New York and Miami, the black-white level of segregation is even higher: respectively 82 and 74 in 2000 (Logan and Deane, 2003). Thus, their experience corroborates the place stratification model and demonstrates the significance of racial categorization in U.S. residential patterns.

### *Ethno-residential concentration and political representation*

Race and ethnicity play a crucial role in U.S. politics. As a heritage of the civil rights legislation of the 1960s, racial and ethnic categorization has been institutionalized as

a way to fight against discrimination on the basis of one's origin or skin color. Through elections and representation strategies, the racial/ethnic category or community has become the institutional intermediary between citizens and the State. Simply said, ethnic or racial belonging and claim is a requirement for institutional and political existence in the U.S. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 and its amendments were enacted as a way to eliminate discriminatory electoral practices and to promote minority empowerment through law. In a society in which ethnically polarized voting is widespread, this legislation has responded to the ways in which voting electorates are manipulated through gerrymandering, annexations, at-large election systems at the expenses of minority voters. With the progressive incorporation of minorities to the U.S. political process, election contests throughout the U.S.—especially at the local level—have been more and more divided along ethnic, racial and class lines (Brownling, Marshall, Tabb, 2003; Jennings, 1997; Kasinitz, 1992).

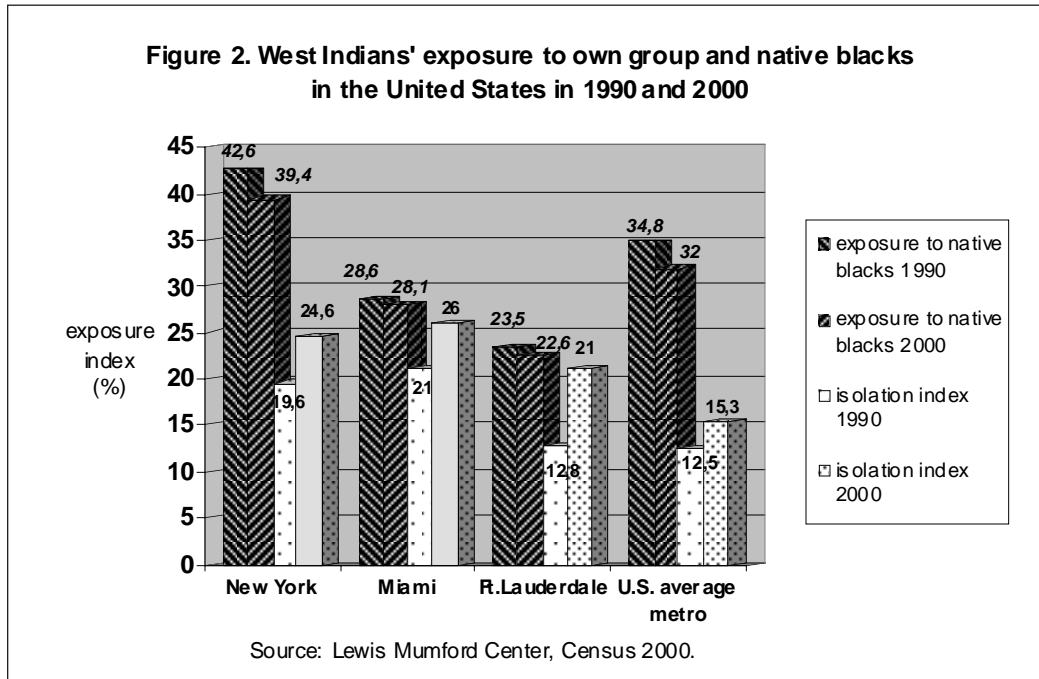
Geography is a key factor in understanding contemporary political progress of minorities at the local level in the United States. Residential patterns of minority groups and recent immigrants are characterized by concentration and the constitution of relatively distinct neighborhoods in the form of enclaves or ethnic suburbs. Under the Civil Rights Act of 1965 whose goal is to allow a fair representation for minorities, ethnic residential concentration often serves as a criterion for redistricting. The first step is the official classification of the group as a community of interest, on the basis of residential concentration and contiguity and political and cultural cohesiveness. Then, new voting districts are designed after the settlement areas of ethnic groups to ensure an equal representation of minorities. Whereas at-large citywide elections have been proven to dilute minority vote under conditions of bloc

voting by race or ethnicity, judicial intervention in the form of district elections paved the way for more minority representation (Logan, Mollenkopf, 2003).

Thus, there is a direct link between the residential concentration of ethnic groups and their political representation in the U.S. as shown by the contemporary African American experience. Not surprisingly, cities with the largest black neighborhoods were also the first to elect Black American mayors, as exemplified by Gary in 1967 and Atlanta, Detroit, Washington and Richmond in the 1970s. At the same time, urban politics is transformed by a racially and geographically more diverse immigration. New black immigrants as well as Hispanic and Asian groups tend to challenge and fragment larger ethnic and racial voting blocs, including the native black constituency. This puts into question the application of Black American residential and political patterns to West Indians.

## **II. WEST INDIAN RESIDENTIAL PATTERNS IN THE U.S.: A CHALLENGE TO CONVENTIONAL WISDOM?**

Ethno-racial categorization obviously have a remarkable impact on the residential structure of U.S. cities, especially when considering the situation of African Americans who are concerned by segregation and isolation more than any other group. Nonetheless, residential strategies of West Indians seem not to strictly conform to any of the theories enunciated above, including the 'place stratification' theory to which black urban experience best applies. Indeed, each of these models—rather than a single theory—may partially account for black Caribbean residential patterns, depending on the temporal and geographical context of incorporation and the scale of analysis.



### *West Indian Immigration and the Emergence of New Residential Patterns*

As a matter of fact, recent evolution in West Indian residential patterns does not sustain the vision that black Caribbean immigrants are increasingly likely to mix residentially with middle class non-Hispanic whites as their socioeconomic status improves and as they acculturate. Actually, the average national level of West Indian exposure to non-Hispanic whites has declined from 33.5 in 1990 to 29.9 in 2000, despite stabilized or improved socioeconomic standards. For instance, in Ft. Lauderdale where the median household income of West Indians has increased from \$35,000 to \$39,600 between 1990 and 2000, exposure to whites has dropped from 15.4 to 11.8 (Logan, Deane, 2003). There is obviously no correlation between economic ascendancy and residential heterogeneity. The rapid suburbanization of foreign-born blacks in Miami-Dade and Broward counties has ac-

tually been facilitated by middle- and upper-class white flight northward while also accelerating the flight process. The original trend in neighborhood mixing consecutive to the residential mobility of West Indians to the suburbs in the mid-1980s has rapidly been replaced in the 1990s by a pattern characterized by black-to-white succession.

Nor does the Caribbean experience fully support the incorporation of Black immigrants as racial minorities, as they tend to live in relatively identifiable neighborhoods within predominantly black areas. As was the case for black natives, West Indians' exposure to whites has diminished. But so has exposure to African Americans in urban areas with the largest West Indian populations, namely New York and Miami. Geographic concentration of blacks of Caribbean descent is remarkably reflected in their isolation (exposure to own group) index, as shown in figure 2. Within the broader black housing market, in the vicinity of African American neighborhoods, West Indians have developed their own

residential areas. There is a relative correlation between the demographic size of West Indians and their isolation index: the larger their share in the metropolitan population is, the more they are spatially concentrated in distinct neighborhoods. This is the case in South Florida where Caribbean enclaves of Little Haiti, North Miami and more recently North Miami Beach have emerged as distinct from nearby African American's Liberty City or Carol City. In Central Brooklyn, Black American and West Indian areas partially overlap, but black immigrants have recently developed distinct neighborhoods in the southern and eastern fringes of Flatbush.

In Fort Lauderdale, Miami and New York, where their share in the overall black population is among the highest nationwide—respectively 43 per cent, 34 per cent and 26 per cent—their isolation index is twice to three times as high as elsewhere in the U.S. Their relatively distinct residential patterns compared to black natives can first be accounted for by more favorable average socioeconomic characteristics. The 1965 immigration legislation which made it easier for West Indians to enter the United States first and foremost favored highly qualified and educated individuals. Employment-based and family-based immigration selectivity explains higher standards among West Indians in terms of median household income (\$43,600 against \$33,800), unemployment (8.7 per cent against 11.2 per cent) and poverty rate (18.8 per cent against 30.4 per cent) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002; Logan, Deane, 2003). Consequently, their neighborhood characteristics are also more favorable compared to native blacks. According to the Census, neighborhood median household income of the average West Indian in the U.S. is 15 per cent higher when compared to Black American residential areas (ibid.).

In detail, this residential concentration can be explained by numerous contradictory factors in relation to aggregation pro-

cesses, such as the search for relatively low cost housing close to manufacturing and service jobs in inner cities; ethnic preference and transnational networks, reinforced by immigration-fostered demographic growth; and survival strategies attracting illegal migrants to ethnic residential niches. It can also be accounted for by segregation processes such as the ethnoracial segmentation of urban housing markets, gentrification and socioeconomic forces and institutional decisions in relation to urban planning and zoning (Audebert, 2006). These metropolitan areas are therefore interesting case studies for a research on the relation between residential concentration of national groups from West Indian ancestry and their local empowerment. We will focus on Jamaicans and Haitians, the two predominant West Indian national groups in both cities.

### *Jamaicans and Haitians in New York City and Florida: Diverse Patterns in Different Urban Contexts*

At the neighborhood level, the particularity of Black Caribbean residential patterns in New York City and Miami in comparison with other places lies in the emergence of enclaves and niches largely dominated by one or two immigrant groups. However, there are differences between both settings. Whereas the New York metropolitan area is characterized by widespread cohabitation among West Indian national groups, residential segmentation based on national origin is more than often the rule among them in South Florida.

In the 'Big Apple', there is no identifiable national group with a majority within the West Indian population, Jamaicans (39 per cent), Haitians (22 per cent) and Trinidadians (14 per cent) being the most important immigrant groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002: summary file 3). The larger size of New York and the context of its older immigration history as a world gate-

way city explain the unique diversity of its newcomers in the American context. For a long time, the metropolis has served as a magnet attracting migrants from all over the Caribbean. Creole- and English-speaking Antilleans have a long history of cohabitation in the working-class sections of Brooklyn located near low-paying manufacturing and service employment areas. This mosaic is exemplified in Central Brooklyn where Jamaicans, Haitians, Trinidadians and Barbadians make up respectively 31 per cent, 26 per cent, 16 per cent and 6 per cent of the 273,600 individuals claiming a West Indian ancestry (*ibid.*).

Consequently, a fundamental difference with the South Floridian context lies in the absence of West Indian residential areas easily identifiable by the predominance of one single national ancestry. Another one is the large coexistence of foreign-born blacks with native blacks. In Central Brooklyn, Caribbean people share almost three-quarter of their residential area with Black American neighbors. They are highly concentrated in the section of Flatbush-Crown Heights, where they live in the same blocks. West Indians make up together 40 per cent of the total population, in parity with African Americans (*ibid.*). These cross-ethnic and cross-national geographic patterns have evident implications on electoral alliances and competition on the way to political representation at the local level.

In contrast, West Indian residential patterns are notably different in South Florida, with one national group making up a majority or a near majority of the non-Hispanic Caribbean population at the metropolitan level. Miami's ethno-geographic segmentation is deeply rooted in a long history of race relations characterized by high levels of segregation and enduring discrimination. The civil rights movement and desegregation legislation of the 1960s have not been able to challenge in the long run the structural emergence of two distinct black and white real estate markets.

Moreover, the massive Cuban immigration found expression in the creation of a third—Hispanic—housing market which partially substituted for the white real estate market by the mid-1970s. Meanwhile, newly arriving non-Hispanic Caribbean communities reproduced the same pattern at the neighborhood level, with the constitution of a working-class Haitian neighborhood in Miami and eventually a middle-class Jamaican residential area in Broward county.

As a matter of fact, 60 per cent of West Indians in Miami-Dade and West Palm Beach are of Haitian descent and nearly half of them in Fort Lauderdale claim a Jamaican ancestry (*ibid.*). At the neighborhood level, this pattern is strikingly confirmed. In Miami-Dade County, the West Indian sections of Little Haiti and North Miami are increasingly dominated by Haitians, respectively making up 85 per cent of non-Hispanic Caribbean population and even the majority of the total black population. In Broward, West Indian concentrations which represent one third of the populations of Lauderdale and Lauderdale Lakes are respectively 59 per cent and 50 per cent Jamaican (*ibid.*). Not surprisingly, New York and the Miami-Ft. Lauderdale metropolitan area are homes to the most important non-Hispanic Caribbean constituencies in the United States. Consequently, they are targeted as priority areas by Caribbean American political leaders running for office.

### III. FROM THE 'RACIAL' CATEGORY TO THE ETHNIC COMMUNITY: THE MEANING OF IDENTITY POLITICS FOR CARIBBEAN MIGRANTS

Ethnicization of political life in the U.S. metropolis translates itself into a segmented electoral geography, with a stronger competition within racialized categories as well as between immigrant



Table 1. Median household income by 'racial' or ethnic groups in New York, Miami and Ft. Lauderdale in 2000 (in US dollars)

	Total population	Non-Hispanic Whites	African Americans	Non-Hispanic West Indians
New York	41,053	58,417	32,364	38,758
Miami	35,966	50,341	29,556	33,873
Fort Lauderdale	41,691	49,045	33,832	39,821

Source: Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research (2002); U.S. Census Bureau 2000, summary file 3.

groups. West Indian politics in New York and Florida illustrates how demographic change and the local institutional context have paved the way for ethnic empowerment.

### *Native Blacks and Black Immigrants: Different Experiences, Different Agendas*

In a society characterized by an institutionalized ethno-racial categorization of its population, political struggles and voting preferences are generally organized along 'racial' or ethnic lines. In such a segmented context, coalitions between native blacks and black immigrants are a priori likely to be set up. In fact, Black groups have to face comparable patterns of social disadvantage and relegation throughout the country (table 1). According to the minority group theoretical view, being black in a racially segmented society with a long history of discrimination might provide a reason to have common interests. The elaboration of a shared agenda is indeed fundamental to creating formal political solidarities. More-

over, both groups reside in black sections of metropolitan areas, where they confront common social and economic challenges (Foner, 2001; Rogers, 2004: 291-292; Logan, Deane, 2003). In most cases, the West Indian enclaves of New York City and Miami-Dade have developed on the edge of larger areas that were already predominantly African American. New York and Miami's racial divisions are illustrated by the unequal distribution of the economic and political power (table 1). They also tend to strongly support the Democratic Party as shown by the statistics of the New York City Board of Elections and the Miami-Dade County Elections Department: in the nation's largest West Indian constituencies of Flatbush and North Miami, the shares of voters registered as Democrats are respectively 80.5 per cent and 77 per cent.

In spite of shared interests, nonetheless, political conflicts are becoming more and more formalized between Black Americans and West Indians in New York and South Florida. Separate agendas emerge from different experiences related to the history of both groups. On the one hand,

Table 2. Non-Hispanic West Indian elected officials in South Florida: 1996-2005

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
<i>Jamaicans in Broward</i>										
City commissioners	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	4	4
City mayors	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
State representatives	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Subtotal Jamaicans</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Haitians in Miami-D.</i>										
City commissioners	1	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	4
City mayors	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	1	1	0
State representatives	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	2	2
<i>Subtotal Haitians</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>6</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>

Source: Miami-Dade County and Broward Election Departments, 2006.

African American political history lies on the battle on civil rights and for equal access to societal resources and rewards. On the other hand, recent immigrants from the West Indies are primarily concerned with the defense of their ethnic community's specific interests within the U.S. institutional system of power, lobbying strategies to influence U.S. foreign politics toward Caribbean nations, and the elaboration of an immigration policy beneficial to their fellow countrywomen and countrymen (Kasinitz, 1992; Audebert, 2006, Rogers, op. cit.). For instance, Haitian American leaders have been particularly and constantly concerned with a fair treatment for their immigrant counterparts. The Haitian

American Grassroots Coalition's priority is the advocacy for civil liberties for immigrants from Haiti as well as the political empowerment of the Haitian community in the U.S.

Moreover, African Americans' discourse on racial solidarity is perceived by Caribbean American leaders as a way to minimize and subordinate the distinctive interests of West Indian immigrants. In their opinion, any such alliance would be built at the expenses of Afro-Caribbean political goals. Actually, native black leaders have often opposed any separate West Indian political initiative, which they perceived as a threat to their position as the dominant minority group within the Dem-

ocratic Party (Rogers, op. cit.). Residential segregation analyzed earlier explains concentration of both groups in the same electoral districts, which means that West Indian empowerment is a direct threat to traditional African American elites. This competition is especially harsh, as both groups generally compete for the same public-sector resources and positions and the same jobs at the bottom of U.S. socioeconomic ladder. In Miami, this situation is exemplified by the harsh competition between Haitians and African Americans for the same low paying service jobs in personal care and health care support, cleaning and maintenance, food preparation, transportation and security.

### *Residential Concentration and West Indian Political Empowerment in the U.S.*

In New York's and Miami's heavily West Indian districts, the strategy of ethnic representation favored over racial solidarity is accounted for and encouraged by electoral institutions themselves: electoral districts often go along with the outlines of ethnic neighborhoods. Consistent with the 1965 civil rights legislation, redistricting is implemented to offer increasing numbers of West Indians a demographic advantage. In New York City and South Florida, predominantly African American districts with important Caribbean communities are frequently redesigned to give immigrant constituencies more visibility. Consequently, political competition between both groups has gained importance with the growth of the West Indian immigrant communities and their geographic expansion related to residential concentration in distinctive neighborhoods.

In New York, the three neighborhoods of Flatbush, Jamaica and Williamsbridge have strong non-Hispanic West Indian minorities. Flatbush is the most interesting case study with the highest concentration

of West Indian immigrants in the city. In this place where half of the inhabitants are foreign-born, the 200,000 non-Hispanic black residents from Caribbean ancestry make up a third of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Locally, segregation levels among black ethnic groups are significantly higher than they are at the Flatbush level. The council districts 40 and 45 have specifically been designed in 1991 to ensure the representation of the West Indian constituency at the New York City Council on the basis of their residential concentration in this area. The Non-Hispanic Caribbean population respectively makes up 42 per cent and 46 per cent of the population in these districts (Logan, Mollenkopf, 2003: 36). Not surprisingly, they have constituted the geographical basis for the election of the first two West Indian members of the City Council of New York: Una Clarke and Lloyd Henry.

Jamaican-born Clarke clearly played the ethnic card and founded the Association of Caribbean American Officials and Leaders in order to encourage West Indian involvement and solidarity on political issues. Vincentian Kendall Stewart, who succeeded Henry, founded his success on a pan-ethnic comprehensive strategy mobilizing West Indian voters as well as native-born voters. With the continuing increase in the West Indian immigrant population and its diversification, elections are more and more polarized along national ancestry lines. Interestingly, an electoral cleavage has appeared between Haitians and Anglophone West Indians. Yvette Clarke, who succeeded her mother as a city councilwoman, was heavily backed by diverse West Indian communities (one third of the primary election votes)—except for Haitians who supported an activist from the National Coalition for Haitian Rights. This electoral split also reveals divergent priority concerns, with more attention paid by Haitian American candidates to three agendas: promoting adult training centers as a

way to help immigrant workers to move up from dead-end jobs; helping small business holders gain access to government contracts; and parental training to help prevent family breakdown.

In Florida, the attention African American Carrie Meek devoted to Haitian refugee issues gave her a strong support from the Haitian American electorate. In the 17th Congressional district—where African Americans and West Indians make up 65 per cent of eligible voters—she was invariably elected from 1992 and 2003 and was succeeded in office by her son. Nonetheless, this pan-ethnic solidarity observed at the congressional level remains an exception. In municipal and county elections, non-Hispanic West Indians are clearly developing a Caribbean American political agenda in response to the perceived lack of interest for immigrant concerns both from native black incumbents and from the Democratic Party. Residential geography plays a key role in their empowerment, as two-third of the 500,000 residents of non-Hispanic Caribbean ancestry live in the two counties of Miami-Dade and Broward. A Caribbean American Democratic Caucus was recently created with the objectives of: (1) fostering greater Caribbean representation in government; (2) increasing political power of West Indians within the Democratic Party; (3) working in the interest of the West Indian community in politics, education, and provide it with financial and social support; and (4) backing a supportive government on Caribbean issues (Charles, 2003).

In spite of this recent initiative, West Indian politics in Florida appears as notably divergent from their experience in the 'Big Apple' due to a different ethno-residential context. In particular, Haitians are more visible in the South Florida political arena than they are in New York City. Unlike their counterparts in Brooklyn, they are singularized by identifiable ethnic neighborhoods and a long experience of political struggle in a hostile Floridian society that favored con-

servative Cubans over them. Solidarity based on national ancestry appears as a dominant trend at the local level, as the West Indian electorate is dominated by Haitians in Miami-Dade and Jamaicans in Broward (table 2).

Haitian voters are heavily concentrated in northeastern Miami-Dade. Their community leaders have strongly advocated for a Florida legislature district encompassing the neighborhoods of Little Haiti, North Miami, West Miami Shores and North Miami Beach where 90 per cent of Miami-Dade Haitians live. District 108 voters sent the first Haitian American representative (P. Brutus) to the Florida legislature in 2000, and were followed by District 104 voters two years later. Western parts of North Miami and unincorporated Miami Shores are the epicenters of the Haitian American constituency with voters of Haitian ancestry making up the majority of the electorate. They put a strong emphasize on ethnicity in electoral strategies which transcend party allegiances, as exemplified in North Miami. In the 2000 Presidential election, 87 per cent of them were registered as Democrats. Yet, in 2001, they did not hesitate to back Joe Celestin, the Republican mayoral candidate of Haitian descent. First mayors of Haitian ancestry ever elected in the U.S. have gained mandates in El Portal (2000) and North Miami (2001). In Broward County, Jamaican elected officials have been at the center-stage of West Indian political organization. West Indians are concentrated in a residential triangle encompassing the cities of Miramar, Lauderhill and Lauderdale Lakes. A third of the population of this large area is of West Indian ancestry and it claims the highest number of Jamaican born elected officials anywhere outside of Jamaica: a mayor and four city commissioners as shown in table 2. In both counties, district elections which replaced at-large elections in some municipalities led to more Haitian American and Jamaican American representation.

*The 2008 Presidential Election and the 'Obama' Effect: A new deal for African American/Caribbean relations?*

In the Presidential battle, the electorate of South Florida has a crucial importance. The "swing state" of Florida is the fourth state of the Union with 7 per cent of the Nation's electoral vote. One out of four Floridian voters resides in one of the three southeastern counties of Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach. South Florida has regularly drawn a national attention during presidential races because of the local and highly symbolic opposition between two large constituencies with radically divergent positions on domestic and international issues: conservative Cubans and progressive Black groups. In front of a strong and well-organized Cuban Republican voting block, what was at stake was the ability of Black Democrats to mobilize the Caribbean American electorate along with native Blacks to register and vote. During the 2000 Election, there was a widespread feeling among native and immigrant blacks that they had been the victims of fraud and intimidation and that their vote didn't count. Many registered voters were turned away by poll officials who told them they were not registered. A lot of first-time voters in Little Haiti who had difficulty with English and a minimal high school education were not allowed any assistance from Creole-speaking interpreters and were compelled to hurry up in the booth.

As a result, predominantly African American and West Indian precincts saw their vote thrown out at more than three times the rate of Anglo precincts and at twice the rate of Cuban precincts. This situation gave native and immigrant Blacks in South Florida the sense of a common fate of political invisibility and injustice.

In 2008, for the first time in a Presidential election, they shared a widespread feeling that their voice could be heard and both

constituencies conducted a large common registration campaign, with a special focus on recent naturalized citizens.<sup>2</sup> The Haitian community had of course specific expectations from the candidate Obama—e.g. the temporary interruption of deportations to Haiti, the possibility to work legally, etc. But most important was the shared feeling among African Americans and West Indians that this election was a historical moment; after the struggle for civil rights, "an Obama win [would be] the institutionalization of progress" (Miami Herald, 2008: 10A).

Whereas a majority of Hispanics voted for John Mc Cain, more than 95 per cent of Blacks voted for Barack Obama. Little Havana and Hialeah's Hispanic strongholds respectively cast 58 per cent and 65 per cent of their votes for the Republican candidate. In contrast, in native Black and West Indian neighborhoods, similar voting attitudes were observed: in African American's Liberty City and Haitian's Little Haiti, Barack Obama respectively obtained 98 per cent and 94.6 per cent of the votes.<sup>3</sup>

**CONCLUSION: REDEFINING CARIBBEAN IDENTITY AND QUESTIONING U.S. ETHNO-RACIAL CATEGORIZATION THROUGH POLITICS**

*Changing Immigration Patterns and Ethnic Politics: Is the U.S. Ethno-racial Categorization Still Relevant?*

Significant demographic changes related to immigration in the United States transform the nature of urban politics. It reveals the inadequacy of traditional U.S. ins-

<sup>2</sup> Between 2000 and 2008, 46,340 Haitian-born immigrants have acquired U.S. citizenship in Florida, including 11,675 in the last 12 months before the 2008 Presidential election.

<sup>3</sup> Source : Miami-Dade County Department of Elections, 2008.

titutionalized categories to respond to challenges associated with these new trends. In metropolises undergoing a dramatic demographic and cultural transformation like New York and Miami, electoral competition along broad racial lines between identifiable racialized categories is outmoded at the local level. Immigration has diversified racial and ethnic categories. In areas where black immigrants predominate, black-to-white succession is being replaced with a more complex immigrant-to-native succession. In highly segregated urban contexts where the black vs. white residential dichotomy is still a current issue, West Indians tend to live in predominantly black areas while at the same time developing distinct residential patterns characterized by relative spatial concentration.

Ethnic residential polarization and the related implementation of redistricting as a means to ensure an equal representation of all minorities have played a key role in this evolution. In response to the tendency of Black American leaders and voters not to support Caribbean American candidates perceived as competitors, West Indians use their distinct residential areas as a geographic asset for the constitution of an autonomous constituency. The main objectives of gaining political power is to address the specific needs of immigrants from the non-Hispanic West Indies and to give them more visibility on the local and national scene. Changing the focus from the racialized category on the national scene to the ethnic community at the local level, their strategy redefines the meaning of Caribbean identity and raises the issue of the relevance of ethnic categorization in U.S. politics.

### *Ethnic Politics and Caribbean Identity in the United States: A Matter of Context?*

Still, Caribbean identity in the United States is not monolithic nor static, as it takes

on different and changing forms depending on the cultural context, political circumstances and the geographical level of analysis. At the national level, indispensable participation in broader and favor-dispensing political organizations—i.e. the Democratic Party and the Black Caucus—dilute Caribbean influence within a racially categorized representation. In Congress and Senate, West Indian interests are represented through broader African American lobbying channels. At the same time, this ethno-racial categorization leads to a segmentation of a broader Caribbean identity, with the non-Hispanic West Indians institutionalized incorporation into the black mainstream and Spanish-speaking West Indians entrenchment into a comprehensive Hispanic category.

At the metropolitan level, the more complex mechanics of political and governmental representation have paved the way for an open and efficient expression of pan-Caribbean solidarity. In Brooklyn and Miami, the variety and the demographic strength of West Indian immigrant groups and their residential cohabitation foster the sense of belonging to a Caribbean community transcending national barriers. The creation of a Caribbean American Democratic Caucus in Florida exemplifies this trend, which is further enhanced by second or third-generation children who claim two or three Caribbean ancestries. Today, Brooklyn and South Florida are probably the best places for the creation of original intraregional (i.e. pan-Caribbean) bonds. Nonetheless, at the neighborhood level, allegiances on the basis of national ancestry—partially related to transnational political concerns—are more salient. It is especially the case in places where Haitians and Jamaicans make up a majority or a near majority of the population. Recent events show that the smaller the geographic level of analysis, the more the national ancestry card is likely to be played in the political game.

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