

***A Jamaican Way Station in the Bronx;***  
***Community of Striving Immigrants Fosters Middle-Class Values***

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**Byline:** By ADAM NOSSITER

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## **Body**

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There is the odd hole-in-the-wall serving up fiery jerk chicken, or a greengrocer with 10 kinds of exotic yams on his shelves. Cricket matches can be glimpsed in Van Cortlandt Park on summer afternoons. But it is difficult to identify overt signs of West Indian culture among the neatly kept, modest brick houses of Williamsbridge and Wakefield.

Yet these northeastern **Bronx** neighborhoods are home to one of the largest concentrations of Jamaicans in the city, with Crown Heights and East Flatbush, Brooklyn. And they are the literal descendants of the close-knit, sociable and **striving community** of **Jamaican immigrants** in the **Bronx** that nurtured retired Gen. Colin L. Powell and launched him on his career.

Forty years after the Powells hit the numbers and left for Queens, the **Bronx**'s role in the ascent of **Jamaican immigrants** is strikingly similar to what it was when the general was a child. For while Brooklyn remains the great magnet for the bulk of **Jamaican immigrants**, the **Bronx** is the more distinct **way station** on their road to **middle-class** solidity.

In Williamsbridge and Wakefield, more than 70 percent of all **immigrants** are from the island, more than 14,000 Jamaicans in all, according to an analysis of census data for The New York Times by Dr. Andrew Beveridge, a sociologist at Queens College. And Jamaicans there are wealthier, better educated, more likely to own homes, and have more stable families than those in Brooklyn.

Precisely why this is so is unclear, but several experts pointed to the housing pattern in the neighborhoods at the northern edge of the city: street after street of plain but solid single-family brick houses, attractive to strivers looking to own rather than rent.

"The **Bronx** plays the same role for Jamaicans as it once did for Jews," said Philip Kasinitz, an expert on Caribbean immigration at Hunter College. "It's basically stable, **middle-class** neighborhoods."

The **Bronx Jamaican community** today is a recognizable echo of the world fondly evoked in Mr. Powell's autobiography -- a world of curried goat, calypso music and strong families. Ethnic pride is distinct but discrete, flourishing in tight family circles, behind the closed doors of these blocks of well-kept dwellings.

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Before Arnold Anderson, a 71-year-old former mathematics teacher, left Jamaica 30 years ago, "we were poor," he said simply. Today, all seven of his children have college degrees, and all are homeowners. Several sat around their parents' cluttered living room recently, discussing why they had made good.

Karlene Anderson, 39, an X-ray technician with a degree in sociology from Lehman College, pointed to her mother, Kathleen, a retired nurse. "Mother was the doorkeep, the gatekeeper," she said. We weren't free to go out and date other kids." Her parents made sacrifices.

"Everything we earned went into their education," Mrs. Anderson said.

The children discussed a less palpable reason for their success: their sense of Jamaicanness.

"You're Jamaican," Karlene Anderson said. "You're not going to take stuff sitting down."

Her sister, Christine Anderson Lewis, 33, said, "The longer I'm here, the more I realize how important it is to hang to who I am."

Joyce James, a Jamaican who directs the Susan E. Wagner Child Care Center in the Bronx, said of the neighborhood: "It's very cohesive. They've been here for a while. They're not necessarily comfortable flaunting the fact that they're Jamaicans."

It is a working community: among groups in the Bronx, employment rates are higher for Jamaicans than for Dominicans, Koreans and white people born in the United States. Posses, the feared Jamaican drug gangs that made headlines in the 1980's, were a Brooklyn phenomenon.

To be sure, this is a different Bronx than the one of General Powell's youth: Jamaicans, like others, fled up the borough as the South Bronx crumbled in the late 1950's, a precipitate exodus during which, General Powell wrote, he remembers hearing people ask each other, "When you getting out?"

Shifting neighborhoods in the borough was a way of holding on to the achievements of the two initial waves of migration from Jamaica, in the first decades of the century, and from the late 1930's to 1965: houses, solid jobs, mostly in service industries, and strong family ties.

Mr. Kasinitz noted that while, in Mr. Powell's era and before, immigrants from the island tended not to be from the poorest classes, in the third great wave of Jamaican migration, which began in 1965 and continues today, "everybody now leaves Jamaica." And yet today, Jamaicans within the Bronx itself show the same unmistakable signs of upward mobility as did many in Mr. Powell's youth, particularly compared to other leading immigrant groups there.

They have lower poverty rates than Asians, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans in the borough, far greater concentrations of households in upper-income categories, and a higher percentage of people reporting a 40- to 45-hour work week than any other group, including American-born whites, according to an analysis of Bronx census data by Prof. William Bosworth of Lehman College.

"The Bronx became the first suburb for West Indians," said Karl Rodney, publisher of The New York Carib News, speaking from personal experience. Mr. Rodney, himself of Jamaican origin, bought his first house in the United States in Williamsbridge, before moving to Westchester in 1969, a common migration of the last several decades.

Mr. Powell wrote in his autobiography of a "degree of clannishness among West Indians, Jamaicans included." This remains a distinctive feature of the quiet Jamaican presence in the Bronx today. Typical is the Wembley Athletic Club, described by many as one of the few expressions of Jamaican associational life in the borough.

The explanation for this paucity is characteristic: "There is some, but because they work so hard, they don't want to sacrifice the time to do these things," said Jackie Nkrumah, who owns Jackie's West Indian Bakery on East 233d Street, and works the evening shift herself to ensure the freshness of the coconut gizzardas, or sweet cakes.

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On a Friday night, the Wembley A.C., as members call it, rocks with nothing louder than a lively game of dominoes.

Many of the members have been in America for decades -- the club president is a retired I.B.M. account manager, and friends gathered around included a skilled electrician, an insurance agent, a manager in the city's Health and Hospitals Corporation, and a retired Transit Authority supervisor. They are thoroughly integrated into American economic life.

Yet this plain, two-story brick building, tucked away on a quiet corner in Wakefield, remains their chosen spot: the members are all West Indian, and mostly **Jamaican**.

The sense of ethnic identification is strong. Equally strong is the conviction that ethnicity played a vital role in what the men regarded as lives of reasonable success. General Powell's upward trajectory is no mystery to them.

"We're all proud of him as Jamaicans," said John Lyn, the president of the Wembley Club, who came to the **Bronx** in the days when Mr. Powell's family still lived on Kelly Street in Mott Haven. "That pride, that unwillingness to back down, is probably what got him where he is. If his parents were parents like the ones we had, they would not forgive him if he denied his manhood. In Jamaica, if you allow yourself to lose your dignity ----"

"You'll be thrashed," cut in Leslie Stephenson, an insurance broker who immigrated 28 years ago. "We, as best as we could, kept our **Jamaican ways**," Mr. Stephenson said.

## Graphic

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Photos: Williamsbridge and Wakefield in the **Bronx** are home to a **Jamaican immigrant community** that nurtured Colin L. Powell. It includes cricket players at Van Cortlandt Park, and , Jacqueline Nkrumah and son, Don, at their bakery. (Lenore Victoria Davis for The New York Times) (pg. B1); "We're all proud of him as Jamaicans," John Lyn, the president of Wembley Athletic Club, said of retired Gen. Colin L. Powell. Mr. Lyn, center, in suit, visited with members of the club who were playing dominoes. (Chang W. Lee/The New York Times) (pg. B2)

Chart: "AROUND THE CITY: Comparing Three **Jamaican** Neighborhoods" shows the highest concentrations of foreign-born Jamaicans in 1990. (Source: Dr. Andrew Beveridge, Queens College, from analysis of 1990 census data)

## Classification

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