

# **NEW WAVE RISES FROM GRITTY CITY STREETS Caribbean immigrants quickly ut middle-class stamp on areas earlier newcomers were entrenched**

Daily News (New York)

October 11, 2004 Monday, SPORTS FINAL EDITION

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**Section:** NEWS; Pg. 14

**Length:** 1220 words

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**Series:** LIVING THE DREAM The **New Middle Class**

## **Body**

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THE ETHNIC MAP of the **city** is changing.

As record numbers of foreign-born **New** Yorkers prosper, **immigrants** are breaking out of cramped apartments in traditional inner-**city** enclaves to buy houses in comfortable neighborhoods once home to Italians, Irish, Jews and African Americans.

The migration of Caribbeans in the **city** is typical.

Over the past decade, they have been moving from their Brooklyn base in Crown Heights to Canarsie - once solidly white and vehemently opposed to racial busing - and then up to the northeast Bronx, where they have established a comfortable **middle-class** enclave.

More than 850 **middle**-income West Indian families made their homes in the Bronx's Wakefield section between 1990 and 2000, according to the U.S. Census. They have transformed the look and feel of the neighborhood.

Wide, tree-lined **streets** feature rows of neatly tended houses with elaborate wrought-iron doors and window guards reminiscent of the **Caribbean**. Cars sit in the driveways. The **area** exudes a modest prosperity.

Churches are a bulwark of stability here as they were in the West Indies: They include Roman Catholic, Methodist, Episcopal (or its West Indian equivalent, Anglican) and a proliferation of storefronts for every evangelistic and Pentecostal persuasion.

So influential is religion that neighborhood **streets** are named after local clergymen. Signs identify a stretch of Paulding Ave. as Rev. W.P. Johnson Place; a section of Barnes Ave. goes by Rev. Patrick De S. Walker Square.

At St. Luke's Episcopal Church on E. 222nd St., warden Donald Bookal, a longtime Wakefield resident, said West Indians were pulled to the **area** by reasonable home prices in the late 1960s and **early** '70s.

"The trend of our people is to want a roof over our heads - our own roof, not someone else's," said Bookal, who came to **New** York from Jamaica in 1965. "We prefer to buy rather than rent."

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"Some of the West Indians who come here had a serious sense of middle-class life in their home countries, so a lot when they came got pretty good jobs and moved quickly into the middle class," said Hugh Beckford, founder of Caribbean American Family Services in the Bronx.

But others who arrived from Crown Heights or the tough South Bronx had to work two or three jobs to get there. They pooled their money to buy homes.

"Lots of folks," Beckford said, "use the 'susu' or 'partner' system of cooperative borrowing" in which a group of people pool their money and distribute it among themselves periodically, one by one, using peer pressure to compel themselves to save.

Bustling small businesses attest to residents' vibrant entrepreneurship.

West Indian restaurants line White Plains Road, which is the commercial heart of Wakefield, and on every block between 211th and 224th Sts. there is a Caribbean hair-braiding salon, if not two or three.

Next to the Roc-a-tone Jamaican Restaurant At 218th St. is the Meat Depot Warehouse, whose awning boasts the sale of goat heads and oxtails. Shelves of the Texas Family Grocery are stocked with coconut and yucca, White Yam and nigro, dried cod and cans of African Pride yam fufu. Down the block a Golden Krust franchise store offers Jamaican meat patties. A prominently posted sign advertises a "Jerk-roots-yam Festival" in August.

Today the neighborhood is a Little Kingston. But it was not always so. When West Indians began moving there, "there was some tension," Bookal said. "African Americans here were afraid we were after their jobs. There was some resentment and bad talk, but things have gotten better."

As John Mollenkopf, director of City University's Center for Urban Research put it: "Despite underlying anxieties, most groups learn to get along. The departure of the older white ethnic groups is a sign of their success. New groups then come in and revitalize neighborhoods and that is a sign of strength for the city."

Ethnic turnover is a timeworn city demographic. What's new now is how quickly the immigrants rise into the middle class is making that happen.

Howard Beach, Queens, a traditionally Italian community, now has more than 1,100 Indian homeowners, many of whom moved from rented apartments in Flushing and Elmhurst, the 2000 Census shows. In 1990, the area was home to only 80 Indian households.

Dominicans' numbers in the city have increased by a staggering 51% since 1990, and in the next decade they are expected to outstrip Puerto Ricans as the dominant Hispanic group in the city.

They have expanded beyond their upper Manhattan base in Washington Heights to the Bronx. In 2000, 185,808 Dominicans lived in Manhattan with almost as many, 181,400, in the Bronx.

Dominicans suffer among the worst poverty rates in the city (32% compared with 19% of all New Yorkers), but a substantial middle-class neighborhood has sprung up in the Parkchester section of the Bronx, where more than 320 Dominican families have bought homes in the last decade.

Similar changes are taking place all over the city.

Middle-class Russians have pushed beyond Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, to Sheepshead Bay and Bensonhurst, and are totally transforming Staten Island's once Irish and Italian South Shore.

In the 1970s, Koreans flowed from the Queens communities of Elmhurst and Jackson Heights into Flushing, making it their commercial hub.

Then, in the '90s, prosperity in Korea reduced immigration. The result was yet another shift in the demographics of Queens: only 2,600 Koreans moved into Flushing in the decade, compared with 6,000 Chinese.

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As Koreans dispersed and bought homes in Bayside or moved to suburbs in Long Island and **New** Jersey, successful Chinese families moved into Flushing and Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

Then, over the last 15 years or so, they forged a stronghold in the Homecrest section of Brooklyn, where Avenue U and the **streets** branching from it have become solidly Chinese.

"Look at the houses, the trees," said Don Lee, chairman of Homecrest Community Services. "This is why people come. When they make it out to Homecrest they say, 'Now I have achieved my American dream.'"

Tina Chen certainly has. She bought her three-family house on E. 14th St. in Homecrest 16 years ago for \$375,000. "Now it's worth \$1 million," she said.

But for some old-timers, the change is a mixed blessing.

Madeline Geelhoed, 66, the only Caucasian in her tai-chi **class** at the local senior center, has lived in the neighborhood since she was 4 years old.

"By me, it's all changed," she said the other day. "Especially the last three years. Now a lot of the houses are up for sale."

Geelhoed says the neighborhood used to be Irish, Italian and Jewish. But no more. Today, she complains, the neighborhood's American-style supermarket has been replaced with two large Chinese groceries and a rash of mom-and-pop operations, fruit stands and fish stores selling products she never heard of.

But to Lee - who grew up watching Chinese families move into apartments vacated by Italians as they moved from Little Italy, to Bensonhurst, then to Staten Island and Long Island - this is simply ethnic evolution.

"It's the natural progression of assimilation in America," he said.

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GRAPHIC MAPS.

**New Middle** Income Home Owners RUSSIAN.

**New Middle** Income Home Owners ASIAN-INDIAN.

**New Middle** Income Home Owners DOMINICAN.

**New Middle** Income Home Owners AFRO-**CARIBBEAN**.

**New Middle** Income Home Owners CHINESE.

## Graphic

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GRAPHIC;MAP, DEBBIE EGAN-CHIN DAILY NEWS A child dons a shawl at the Sikh Cultural Society in Queens. Sikhs are among the **new** influx of **immigrants** into the **city**. DEBBIE EGAN-CHIN DAILY NEWS Donald Bookal, warden of St. Luke's Episcopal Church on E. 222nd St., says low home prices helped draw West Indians to the Wakefield **area** of the Bronx. PHIL MANSFIELD CALVIN WRIGHT ANTHONY DEIMUNDO ZENIA YUAN MICHAEL DIDONNA MARINA KATSAN KEN MURRAY DAILY NEWS DEPALI SARKAR NEIL DECRESCENZO JOSE HERNANDEZ

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## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Document-Type:** SERIES

**Publication-Type:** Newspaper

**Subject:** RELIGION (91%); PROTESTANTS & PROTESTANTISM (90%); CHRISTIANS & CHRISTIANITY (90%); CITY LIFE (78%); RACE & ETHNICITY (78%); TRENDS (78%); HOUSING MARKET (78%); AFRICAN AMERICANS (77%); MIDDLE INCOME PERSONS (75%); IMMIGRATION (73%); HOME PRICES (73%); JEWS & JUDAISM (72%); CLERGY & RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS (72%); CENSUS (69%); FAMILY SERVICES (69%); PRICES (68%); CATHOLICS & CATHOLICISM (67%); ENTREPRENEURSHIP (60%); SMALL BUSINESS (60%)

**Industry:** HOUSING MARKET (78%); REAL ESTATE (78%); HOME PRICES (73%)

**Geographic:** NEW YORK, NY, USA (94%); NEW YORK, USA (90%); UNITED STATES (93%); CARIBBEAN ISLANDS (93%); JAMAICA (79%)

**Load-Date:** October 11, 2004