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Race, Class, and the Packaging of Harlem

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In the 1970s and early 1980s, patterns of divestment dotted Harlem's landscape with abandoned buildings and the urban blight this engenders. With government subsidies, many of these properties have been refurbished and are now occupied by African American professional homeowners. Overall, capital investment in housing property is up and businesses are taking an interest in a community that was previously avoided. This article looks at the impact of gentrification in Central and West Harlem, New York. It identifies key actors and institutions involved in facilitating this transformation, examines social relations among black professional residents, and considers how these may be informed by class and race inequalities. This article is also critical of theoretical and ethnographic approaches to African American life that mythologize the middle class, erase the working class, and fail to acknowledge fragmentation in both groupings. It concludes with a brief discussion of some of the responses to this research that were shared by project participants and other anthropologists.

Key Words: race, class, African Americans, gentrification, Harlem

By now, people from Providence to Pasadena know that Harlem, that world-renowned African American community in New York City, has been the locus of some significant demographic and economic realignments over the past few decades. The impact of rapid renovations is apparent in even the most cursory tour of the area. Shiny edifices of richly stained lumber frequently mark the entrances of the homes of professionals. Moving in and out of these domiciles are teachers, artists, storeowners, and briefcase-clad architects, physicians, executives, and television producers, some of whom appear to negotiate the community in a ghostly fashion, rarely interacting with the long-term residents whom I have witnessed casting fleeting glances toward the men and women who step lively to hail a taxi, catch a train, or retrieve their cars from nearby parking lots.

There are many indicators of change in this historic community but, in its entirety, Harlem never was the foreboding and isolated

place it has all too frequently been portrayed as in film and news reports. Neither is it statically symbolic of past African American literary and artistic triumphs. Instead, this series of neighborhoods in Central and West Harlem constitute an ordinary, African American, urban community, molded and characterized by diversity, assault, immigration, abandonment, revolution, and periodic success. Harlem is not a world apart. It is home to working people, class heterogeneous, and is linked to the rest of New York City through assorted networks of kin, friends, and coworkers and a web of mass transportation routes.

This article elaborates on the changes occurring in Harlem and identifies the individuals, institutions, and macro-level forces that are helping to set these events into motion. Being keen to establish context, it explores how ideas and relationships are affected by demographic changes. It also examines the processes through which black professionals reconcile occupying a privileged socio-economic position and a historically devalued racial one simultaneously. This focus places larger, structural occurrences within a framework that explicates the layers of identity and experience specially rooted in the interstices of race and class in the United States.

I conclude this article with a brief consideration of the responses I received to this research while in the field. Throughout this time, anthropologists and laypersons shared their views and questions with me about the value of this project and its potential for contributing to a better understanding of contemporary African American life. Their comments suggest further areas of anthropological exploration into race and class in general and African American life and culture in particular.

Methods and theories

This article emerges out of a larger project and reflects years of qualitative and statistical research on Central and West Harlem. My entrée into this area of study began during the early 1990s when I was an assistant to Drs. Leith Mullings and Ida Susser of the City University of New York Graduate School, assigned to gather quantitative data on social conditions and the availability of services with the Harlem Research and Development Project. A few years later, I worked as an ethnographer for Harlem Birth Right (HBR), a community-based, qualitative research project, also headed by Dr. Mullings. Along with two additional primary investigators, an obstetrician and epidemiologist, this study was designed to ascertain the social context of reproduction for African American women in response to high rates of

preterm births and low birth weight babies delivered to black women of various socioeconomic positions.

Given my history with Harlem, the decision to conduct my doctoral research there was a pragmatic one. The previous work experience gave me access to a broad range of data and I made important connections with residents and community leaders over a two-year period. More importantly, the eclectic array of people I met and the fast pace of change I witnessed begged for anthropological attention. To make the transition from HBR to a doctoral study on professional-managerial workers (PMW), I began to reformulate my approach to the people with whom I was already engaged and cultivate new people and households with which to interact. For two additional years, I traversed the communities of Hamilton Heights, Mount Morris Park, Sugar Hill, Striver's Row, and those in between. I walked around Broadway, Convent, and Amsterdam Avenues, 125th Street, 136th Street, and their side streets to barbecue, shop, dine, babysit, attend community meetings and focus groups, protest injustices, interview individuals in their homes and workplaces, and transport folks to procure groceries, visit the incarcerated, or visit health clinics. For me qualitative research meant leaving very few stones unturned, often running around like a chicken with her head cut off, and gathering data that, even when read today, can move me to tears.

In addition to the emotional and informational appeal, there are three areas of theoretical concern to which this article speaks. The first relates to the problematic practice of emphasizing African American professionals in a way that both romanticizes this population and negates the important contributions the poor and working class have made to the larger black community. This type of an approach is evident in a range of studies, the most prominent of which maintain that the scarcity of black professionals in United States cities has hastened urban decline as areas suffer from the loss of middle class engagement with community-based institutions, participation in the local economy, and absence as role models (Anderson 1990; Wilson 1987). This article grows out of a larger study that critiques such an approach and reinserts black professionals into the contemporary literature on cities. This is not to diminish the impact of black middle class urban outmigration, but rather to argue that significant percentages of black professionals have remained in all major cities through the 1970s and beyond (Pattillo-McCoy 1999). Moreover, placing blame on demographic shifts ignores the structural inequalities that foster declining conditions in urban areas and, thus, contributes to inaccurate portrayals.

The second theoretical concern contributes to the work of scholars who focus on the issue of African American families and upward mobility. Members of households headed by black professionals are often the first in their kin networks to achieve upward mobility (Billingsley 1992). Ties of obligation can foster a sense of responsibility on the part of those who have achieved professional status and it would stand to reason that lower income kin would rely on the assistance of upwardly mobile family members. Against this backdrop, ethnographic and other data point to both distancing and reciprocal behaviors in individual responses to expectations that the upwardly mobile will assist elders and lower income siblings, aunts, and cousins (Kilson 1983; Pipes-McAdoo 1988; Stack 1975).¹ My research also found contradictory behaviors and ideologies being deployed and contributes to the literature on African American kinship practices by ethnographically documenting the perspectives and struggles of black professionals.

When viewed in tandem, both of these theoretical foci advance analyses of race and class in the United States and lead to a more specific understanding of middle-class positioning. This article is not oriented toward viewing classes in a top-down manner or as fixed entities or positions. I look at class processually and pay close attention to how socio-economic status is talked about and experienced as well as the role of history in shaping ideas and events. My theoretical orientation is also informed by acknowledging the key lines along which populations of black professionals fragment. This study sharpens the lens through which African American class differentiation is viewed and draws attention to the relations between African Americans of different socio-economic positions. In addition, this article has implications for policymakers who want to assist the poor, as it may indicate that taking steps to bolster these cross-class, intraracial linkages among African Americans may help to generate resources that assist low-income city residents.

Documenting Harlem's changes

Harlem has experienced dramatic population shifts during the last few centuries. The area began as rural farm land and evolved into a fashionable, Euro-American suburb during the colonial era (Osofsky 1963). This elite class abandoned Harlem when the real estate market stalled and immigrants from eastern and southern Europe began arriving in the 1800s. This was followed by a second phase of white flight when, on the heels of Italian and Jewish immigrants, African Americans began arriving from the United States south, the Caribbean,

and other parts of New York City. In East Harlem, immigrants from Puerto Rico would come to replace Italian Americans who headed for Long Island, Westchester County, and parts of Queens and Brooklyn.

Immigrants from the Dominican Republic have settled in West Harlem along Broadway. Not unlike many African Americans phenotypically, the presence of these Latino immigrants and their native-born kin is evident in the sights, sounds, and smells of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Today, the diverse community in and around Hamilton Heights has working-class African Americans, a sizable population of black and white PMW, and a strong showing of Latinos. Moving north along Broadway, West Harlem seamlessly merges into predominately Dominican Washington Heights, an area that also possesses pockets of eastern European Jews, many of whom are elderly.

West African travelers are a more recent element added to Harlem's immigrant history. Hailing from Senegal, Mali, Guinea, and other countries, these nurses, merchants, cab drivers, social workers, hair braiders, and others are yet to have as significant a residential presence, but their involvement in commerce and social service delivery systems injects public spaces with an added complexity and dynamism. African immigrants in Harlem also present an interesting opportunity to observe relations between black people of different national origins.

These shifts in the location of people and the institutions that serve them have left an indelible mark on this community, but even against this vibrant backdrop, the current movements are pivotal and singular. That is because the Harlem of the twenty-first century is gentrified and there is plenty of evidence to substantiate this assertion. The assessment of capital investment, property tax payments, and the number of incoming PMW indicate that the patterns of disinvestment that have characterized Harlem's economic landscape for so many years are seeing a reversal (Brash 2000). Developers, politicians, and young professionals of different racial/ethnic backgrounds have taken a renewed interest in a community some still see as a notorious and world-famous slum (Prince 2004). Census data show that median household income rose by fifty percent between 1990 and 1995 in Central Harlem, as did the number of residents who work in professional occupations (U. S. Bureau of the Census 2001). During that same period, there was a significant increase in the number of adult residents with postsecondary degrees.

Gentrification in United States cities is commonly associated with the influx or expansion of the white population.² The number of incoming white residents did rise at a faster rate than that of blacks, but that was due, primarily, to a very meager initial Euro-American

presence. African Americans constitute the majority of incoming professionals in a community that is also composed of working-class and low-income African Americans, some of whom also are newcomers. There also is a pre-existing black middle class that made up twenty-five percent of the local population (Mullings and Wali 2001).

The reconfiguration of Harlem and the impact of a fortified, black professional presence have been chronicled from multiple vantage points, by observers of various fields. Three recent ethnographies specifically examine the intricacies of cross-class relations among African Americans. In *Harlem World: Doing Race and Class in Contemporary Black America*, place is as much an interlocutor as the women and men the author engages through participant observation (Jackson 2001). This anthropologist wants readers to know the everyday Harlem—minus the fanfare or gloomy predictions. By looking at how people interpret and act out these subject positions, Jackson promotes an anti-essentialist approach and presents Harlem residents as active agents who negotiate the socio-economic divide through complex interactions with kin and community members.

Harlem Between Heaven and Hell is a sociological project that shares Jackson's nuanced approach and subject matter while maintaining its own special voice and focus (Taylor 2002). Taylor examines intra-racial class relations by analytically and ethnographically traversing the spaces between such binary oppositions as insider and outsider, ascribed and achieved status and ghettoized and gentrified space, among others. Her use of social constructionist theory is supported with ethnographic data on residents of varying ages and class backgrounds to demonstrate how standpoints generate competing views of Harlem as both a place and a life experience.

The most recent of this ethnographic trio is *Constructing Belonging: Race, Class and Harlem's Professional Workers* (Prince 2004). Like the others, it too emphasizes the unfixed aspects of race, class, and experience. This study looks at the ways a diverse group of black professionals experience and talk about belonging in Harlem and how racial identity and class consciousness are informed by past events. Movement and change are operative analytical concepts here, with one of its key contributions being the typologizing of African American professional workers based on the varied conditions in which they live and their diverse backgrounds in terms of socio-economic status, region of origin, and family type.

Anthropological inquiries are not the only contemporary studies of Central and West Harlem. The critical research of urban planners and geographers has been instrumental in mapping the origins of current changes and their impact on community members. Smith (1996)

charts processes of gentrification from their inception in the 1980s to their acceleration during the 1990s. He accomplishes this within a larger study that looks at the interconnectedness of urban policy, gentrification, displacement, and homelessness in cities in the United States and Europe. Brash's analysis (2000) focuses solely on Harlem and the work of specific programs created by city agencies. His detailed analysis classifies the relationships that exist between publicly funded redevelopment efforts and privately owned businesses. There also is *Race and Place* by Frazier et al. (2003); urban geographers who look at various United States cities to analyze issues of race, place, and equity.

A handful of journalists have written mentionable reports on the transformation of Harlem. The country's major newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and weeklies such as *The Village Voice* have examined the new Harlem from different angles (Ards 1995; Grunwald 1999). Some articles celebrate the changes uncritically (Garb 1999) while other look at the conflict between developers and members of the community who are not supportive of the direction in which change has taken the community (Horowitz 1997). There also are human-interest stories about interesting residents and new businesses, as well as features on the entrepreneurs who cannot afford the high costs of doing business in the new Harlem.

There have also been stories in *The Smithsonian*, *Essence*, *Metropolitan Home*, *Ebony*, and other magazines. These reach a set of readers who may not read ethnographies or peruse academic journals. *The Smithsonian* article was on Harlem history and the changes described in this article, while the *Essence* piece functioned more as a tourist guide that pointed out areas for dining, shopping, and sightseeing. I have also seen articles in *Metropolitan Home* that showcase the living spaces of impeccably appointed homes or apartments. The subtext for these kinds of stories is always the development of new businesses and the rehabilitation of housing stock.

Coffee table books have also embraced the Harlem subject. *Harlem Lost and Found* (Adams and Rocheleau 2002) takes readers on an architectural tour of great beauty and astonishing style. Another design-oriented book touts a "new" approach to decorating interiors. *Harlem Style: Designing for the New Urban Aesthetic* (Shade and Arango 2002) promotes the confluence of African, modern, Victorian, and traditional design elements into an eclectic approach labeled "Harlem style." Here we see a repackaging of Harlem that represents a 180-degree turn from the community's characterization during the 1970s and 1980s.

In other nonacademic treatments, women and men I met in the field have appeared on the Style Channel, The Food Channel, or Home and Garden Television. In all televised segments the pronounced setting is “The new Harlem,” reinvigorated by the talented designers, artists, chefs, writers, and educated professionals who have recently become residents. Stylish and/or middle-class residents are shown living comfortably among their things of beauty or working creatively with paints, fabrics, or the raw materials to manufacture jewelry or furniture. This is Martha Stewart’s Harlem—tasteful, creative, and camera-ready.

From the consumers of Afrocentric style manuals and other popular media to statisticians and students of ethnographic field reports, an eclectic audience has now been informed that Harlem has been made anew. What is in dispute is what the legacy the reshaping of Harlem will be as individuals and communities question whether comprehensive and sustained improvement will emerge from the dust and rubble of renovation.

Ideology, politics, and community “development”

Some observers see these transformations as steps toward urban revitalization—a few even going so far as to call what Harlem is experiencing a second renaissance (Little 2002). The idea that life in a mixed-income neighborhood will uplift the poor has been promoted by social scientists and politicians alike (Anderson 1990; Wilson 1987). Some elected officials have used the work of scholars to formulate social policy. In the distribution of federal housing grants under the HOPE VI program one hears echoes of the Wilsonian influence on policymaking. At the time of this writing HOPE II is the “only US. Federal housing program in existence that is financing new public housing development” (Clark 2002: 70). It emphasizes the establishment of mixed-income public housing but has resulted in the displacement of thousands of low-income, minority urbanites and has come under fire by a number of critical observers (Cunningham 2003; Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Reed and Bennett 1999).

This privileging of the middle class is not solely a top-down notion. Project participants, particularly those of the pre-World War II generation, often waxed nostalgic about the days of segregation and mixed-income residential communities. Frustration with the current pace of progress in race relations has fostered longing for a time of perceived greater self-reliance, fortitude, and optimism among African Americans. For these individuals, the recreation of class-heterogeneous communities has been construed as a panacea for a

variety of social problems that plague many black communities (Prince 2002).

Although the reversal of black middle-class outmigration is pushed as an ostensible solution to urban decay and decline, recent ethnographic data indicate that the mere presence of black professionals is an insufficient catalyst for facilitating meaningful social change (Prince 2002, 2004). I spoke with approximately seventy-five black women and men who work and live in Central and West Harlem and engaged twenty-seven of these persons in long-term, in-depth interviews and informal interactions. The majority of these persons was not involved in community work and did not frequent neighborhood establishments. Less than one-third of the residents I talked with were actively involved in school and community-improvement activities and none sent their children to neighborhood schools.

I did meet residents who expressed an affinity for community work. They also talked about feeling overwhelmed with their need to balance the achievement of professional success with familial and community obligations. Women and men described different barriers to their involvement in grassroots work, citing the difficulty of marrying the need for quality time with children and partners in with the responsibility of caring for aging parents and/or extended kin. Long work hours were also mentioned as obstacles that working people of various strata confront. PMW were equally divided among those who managed to squeeze in time for community work anyway, those who lamented their lack of involvement, and those who did not express strong feelings either way.

The experience of journalist Deborah Ann Davies is representative of the contingent of newcomers torn between two competing notions of responsible citizenship—caring for family and caring for community. She spoke about wanting her household to be more embedded into the greater Harlem surroundings. However, the realization of this was undermined by her family's need for educational and other resources and services that meet their "middle-class standards." This standard of living demands a secure home, comfortable furnishings, attractive surroundings, periodic vacations abroad with and without children, and access to schools that prepare their children for higher education. These lifestyle elements are commonly associated with people of Davies' profession and she and her physician-husband were working on becoming accustomed to such amenities.

In the face of this dilemma, Davies reluctantly enrolled her daughter into Jack and Jill, a status-conscious association of middle-class African American families that was established in 1938. This group only admits members who have been put through a series of interviews after being

identified as fitting candidates by other members. High socioeconomic status, as determined by education, occupation, and, in the past, light skin color, have been important criteria for acceptance into Jack and Jill. Davies was hesitant about getting her daughter, Asha, involved with an organization that has a reputation for being restrictive and elitist, but eventually resigned herself to the choice since Asha had only one black friend in the independent school she attended and did not play with any children on her Harlem block. This couple decided Jack and Jill was a better option than racial isolation in Manhattan's private schools.

Personal kin networks and not neighborhood-level interactions were the most significant area where black, professional Harlemites engaged in sustained, cross-class relations (Prince 2004). Some PMW were dissatisfied with the community relation's status quo and encouraged newcomers to attend local meetings and support grassroots events. Patrice Covington criticized other professional residents for coming home from work and not interacting with others in the community. After moving in in 1990, she immediately joined both the neighborhood homeowners association and a second community-advocacy group for which membership was not predicated upon homeowner status. Since becoming a Harlem resident, Covington has "harassed" the city into boarding up an abandoned house on her block and replacing a buckled sidewalk that she deemed dangerous to the elderly. In another instance, she acted as an intermediary between a professional newcomer and a group of young men who played basketball against her home.

These descriptions indicate that while scholars, activists, and residents debate implications and categories, there is little denying that there is a new buzz about Harlem. A new, black-owned bookstore has opened up, a resident filmmaker won a MacArthur "genius" award last year, and, for a period of time, a former American President maintained an office on 125th Street. The changes are visible and often dramatic, but some who peer from the other side of the iron gates and lead-glass doors view these developments as harbingers of the displacement of residents who will be unable to keep pace (Prince 2002; Smith 1996). Moreover, by exacerbating the vulnerability of people who are already in need of gainful employment, good schools, and access to health care and affordable housing, these processes can erase what has energized this community and contributed to Harlem's initial charm and allure.

Making the new Harlem

Harlem's new face has been forged by increased property costs and rental fees. There is also a plethora of new businesses that have

emerged, including commercial chains more readily associated with upscale addresses and suburban strip malls more so than with predominately black, urban communities. Disney, Old Navy, HMV Records, The Body Shop, and Marshalls, as well as Starbucks, Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, and a host of restaurants have encroached upon and gradually replaced numerous "Mom and Pop" businesses that sold food, stationary, clothing, albums, and other merchandise to Harlem residents for decades.

Some of the new businesses are run by savvy African American professionals. I have met black store owners who have law degrees and MBAs and know of a restaurant owner who once practiced medicine. I have spoken with individuals who left corporate positions—battle-weary and in search of working environments without interpersonal tensions. Some have opened up small, trendy shops that cater to the tastes of the well-traveled with expendable incomes. A few of these boutiques are run by the artists and designers who have appeared on style-oriented television shows and in magazines.

As a member of the HBR ethnographic team ten years ago, it was difficult to find my morning meal of orange juice and a toasted, fresh bagel with cream cheese. I only knew of one nearby place to find my breakfast of choice—a Twin Donut located on the corner of 125th Street and Nicholas Avenue. When it went out of business, with it went my opportunity to grab a quick bite just a few door down from the HBR offices, as well as the honor of chatting with the elderly and other long-term residents who frequented this diner-style establishment. Afterward, pickings for breakfast were pretty slim outside of the traditional bacon, eggs, and grits or chicken with waffles.

Today, in addition to the usual offerings of Chinese food, "soul food," and Caribbean cuisine, you can now find an assortment of gourmet and international food items in Harlem stores and restaurants. While availability has not approximated what can be obtained downtown, those familiar with the Harlem of the 1980s and early 1990s will find its landscape of the twenty-first century almost unrecognizable. The increased accessibility of goods that satisfy middle-class tastes is not mirrored in improved service delivery systems for all residents, however, and this inadequacy is a point of contention for those opposed to present urban-development strategies.

There are longstanding characteristics that have made Harlem susceptible to gentrification. One is its close proximity to Manhattan's Upper West and East sides, where rental fees are beyond the reach of many New Yorkers (Smith 1996). During the early 1990s, PMW were also attracted by the low land values and affordable rents made possible by persistent disinvestment. Residents also talked about the

historical importance of Harlem, as a mecca for African American culture and a refuge from racism (Prince 2004). Gentrification has also been bolstered by former mayor Rudolph Guiliani's drive to "get the city of New York out of the landlord business" by encouraging private investment in the housing stock (Little 2002).

In the 1980s, sixty-five percent of the residential property in Harlem, including public housing and abandoned buildings, was owned by New York City. This was a time when the city government, via the now-defunct Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDC), worked with community organizations to build affordable housing for low-income people. In subsequent years, HUDC worked with the Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement (HCCI) to put together The Bradhurst Plan, which built thousands of affordable units in Harlem (Little 2002). Unfortunately for those in need of low-cost housing, however, these community groups entered into another phase of their work—the establishment of market rate housing with a goal of building more mixed-income neighborhoods in Harlem.

New York City's housing market intensified during this same time and Harlem began feeling the pinch as the demand for affordable housing grew and spilled over from the Upper West Side. The increased influx of professional workers into Harlem, along with non-profit housing corporations' and churches' continued emphasis on building units for middle-income residents, had a symbiotic effect as the city's priorities moved even farther from its initial focus on establishing housing for the poor. Church groups and other nonprofits went with the money rather than encouraging the city to maintain its emphasis on building housing for low-income people (Little 2002).

Credible doubts notwithstanding, this very approach to improving urban communities gained political momentum during the 1990s and culminated in the establishment of the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone (UMEZ). Through the UMEZ, the state, city, and federal government, under the Clinton Administration, donated \$100 million each to various "revitalization projects" in the form of subsidies for housing contractors, low-interest bank loans, and tax breaks for area businesses (Brash 2000). These programs were projected to have a trickle-down effect that would benefit urban communities as a whole. On the ground this focus on middle-income homeowners has ignored the needs of low-income household members and has facilitated the accumulation of wealth by developers. This shift in resources has helped a segment of PMW acquire residential and commercial property and made the rich richer.

Classifying the actors in this unfolding drama by economic characteristics signals the myriad representations of power in the new Harlem

and emphasizes that groups often perceived to be homogeneous are actually divided in key ways. Developers availing themselves of government funds are the most influential and powerful entities operating within this uptown scenario. Other crucial groups include African American politicians and churches, some of whom have promoted economic development strategies that may work against a number of their constituents and congregations.

Additional categories of people living in the new Harlem include those business owners and PMW who, as first-time homebuyers, are participating in a process that is driving up the cost of housing and putting rental prices out of the reach of the average black resident. There also are professionals who do not own homes, working-class residents, and the poor who have seen a marked decline in quality of life as they spend an increasing percentage of their incomes on rent (Newfield 2003). All three of these categories of Harlemites are confronting the prospect of displacement.

Black professionals and the new Harlem

In the new Harlem, socioeconomic diversity has, in some regards, created a volatile mix that has led to heated community meetings. One major bone of contention is that homeownership is quickly becoming an obsolete option for the working class and a significant number of college-educated professionals. The Davies' bought their Harlem rowhouse for \$350,000. During a visit in March of 2003, Deborah Ann showed me dilapidated homes that recently sold for approximately \$900,000.

Some have characterized this conflict over space and urban-development strategies as a class struggle pitting professional, homeowning "newcomers" against the nonpropertied, working class African Americans who have lived in the area for decades. There are statistical and ethnographic data to mitigate this rookie vs. authentic Harlemites duality. Harlem has had a business, artistic, and political elite for decades—some taking up residence in the Sugar Hill and Striver's Row sections of Harlem of West and Central Harlem respectively.³

Moreover, less than half of the twenty-seven, black professionals with whom I extensively interacted were homeowners and all but one of the homeowners that participated in my study were married people with combined incomes in the six-figure range. Most of these homeowners, like the Davies' family and attorneys Phillip and Robin Jackson, worked in the private sector. Professionals who were unmarried, single parents under 40 or employed in either the public sector or notoriously hierarchical occupations were not favorably situated to become homeowners in Harlem. These men and women rented apartments

and one, a single parent with a daughter, shared her two-bedroom unit with a roommate to make ends meet.

Many black professionals have lived in the community since the 1960s and earlier. Attorney/fireman Lawrence Parker grew up in a single-parent, low-income household and long-time residents Janice and Byron Douchette sent their now-adult children to an elite private school in Midtown Manhattan. Student advocate Lashandra Haskins and her husband, a city high school teacher, came to Harlem in the 1960s and artist/entrepreneurs Mercy and Dennis McNair arrived in the 1970s. Further undercutting the dual model of community conflict, black professionals could also be counted among activists advocating for working-class populations by organizing rallies and holding meetings to devise strategies for confronting developers and local politicians. In addition, property owners who were not college-educated professionals are not atypical in Harlem. Elderly, working-class residents have been approached by real estate companies and pressured to sell their homes.

One such homeowner I met was Claude Banks, a retired sanitation worker who lived in Hamilton Heights, West Harlem. His wife, Colette, inherited their majestic rowhouse from her deceased Aunt Mamie. Mamie Franklin was a domestic worker who was given the house by an elderly white employer whom she served for decades. Other working-class African Americans became homeowners through more conventional means. Making these acquaintances fostered a more accurate picture of Harlem's demographic and sociocultural scene. It became clear that the simplistic equating of newcomer with middle class was a pitfall to be avoided. These discoveries also led me to more closely examine fragmentation within Harlem's black professional milieus wherein I recognized age and occupation as two important variables in the differentiation of African American PMW.

Age reflects generation and was found to have a significant influence on ideology, occupation, use of community resources, and the length of time spent in Harlem. It was the more senior professional residents who have lived in the area for twenty-five years or more. Elijah Campbell was born in his Striver's Row home in 1919 and Dr. Cynthia John came to Harlem from Antigua, West Indies, in 1918 at the age of four. Both have been residents their entire adult lives. Eugenia Haskins and Brenda Green are in their fifties and forties, respectively, and have lived in Harlem since the 1960s.

Older and/or long-term residents interacted with neighbors and moved about the community in ways most newcomers did not. Louisa Mae Campbell was born in 1926 and has lived in Harlem since she was a preteen. She knows many of her neighbors, including those who

live in single-room occupancy dwellings a few doors down. She spoke with me about individuals who had recently moved in and what they did for a living. During my visits, I noticed that she would leave her front door unlocked and even open, if weather permitted. Social worker Janice Douchette frequented restaurants within walking distance of her Striver's Row home and dined with a neighbor at a Harlem establishment every Friday evening. Both women were in their upper fifties with adult children, plenty of leisure time, and husbands at the height of their careers. In another example, Eugenia Haskins exercised with her Hamilton Heights friend and neighbor, Brenda Walker, a few days each week.

None of the newcomers I met had these types of arrangements with their neighbors. Patrice Covington had become friendly with Imani Bowers, an obstetrician who lived a few doors down on St. Nicholas Terrace. Architect Craig Skyers "hung out" with a guy he met a few floors down in his building, but for most of my project participants born after World War II, their close friends lived in Brooklyn and areas of Manhattan outside of Harlem. More often than not, they sought the company of people with whom they shared professional status for recreational and leisure activities. This observation bears particular consideration since the overwhelming majority of these professional residents, both newly arrived and long-term, are on record as saying they chose to live in Harlem because of its illustrious history, architectural riches, affordable rents, and proximity to a black majority. My ethnography *Constructing Belonging* goes into more detail about these type of contradictions (2004).

Like age, occupation is another huge variant in people's lives. The kind of remunerated work people engage in can determine earnings and impact asset building, access to resources, and standpoint. A job-related dichotomy I utilized in my study was the distinction between public- and private-sector employment. Not only were public-sector employees generally paid less than those in private corporations, but also a greater number of the professionals born before World War II worked for the city and state governments. During one visit, Janice Douchette lamented what she saw as the lack of interest younger African American professionals showed toward working in social services and other areas of the public sector. She was also fearful about the broader ramifications of this for the delivery of important services to the poor and working class.

Professional workers in both sectors were vulnerable to job loss due to statewide budget cuts and corporate downsizing that accelerated during the mid-1990s. Among my project participants, banker Carolyn Strickland took a cut in her pay and was relocated to a

smaller office. Two other women were laid off from their jobs and others, such as performing artists Eve and Anthony Irons, worked intermittently and had to contend with difficult periods stemming from lapses in income associated with an artist's way of life. As my fieldwork drew to a close, Eve, who earned a Masters degree in fine arts, was close to securing a teaching position at an area college. She later received a grant to study dance and temporarily moved the family to Ghana, West Africa. These examples demonstrate that only a portion of PMW are equipped to purchase residential property in Harlem.

Black PMW do enjoy a number of privileges and perks associated with their status. These advantages, including prestige, workplace autonomy, competitive salaries, and attractive benefit packages, are stark when contrasted against the lives of low-income and working-class Harlemites.⁴ However, it would be inaccurate to leave the impression that all these African American professionals are "well off." Black middle-class New Yorkers do not have the same access to capital, information, and networks as do wealthy, white New Yorkers. African Americans in general have historically faced severe limitations on accumulating wealth to the same degree as have European Americans (Oliver and Shapiro 1995).

All these different characteristics, including place of origin, marital status, gender, sexuality, and the other variables not talked about in detail here, lead to diversity in identity formation and the uneven distribution of power within Harlem's black professional managerial stratum. This group does not operate as a conscious socio-economic grouping that articulates a sense of we-ness by organizing and protecting its economic interest. Rather, African American PMW are a fragmented group largely composed of college graduates who earn wages paid to them by privately owned corporations or government bodies. As such, the women and men I researched are elite members of the working class who, by-and-large, enjoy the comforts of expendable incomes, but are also vulnerable to disaster and displacement if they have the misfortune to lose their jobs or experience catastrophic illness. Few middle-class African Americans have accumulated the amount of wealth needed to cushion the impact of persistent unemployment (Oliver and Shapiro 1995).

Although they sometimes go hand-in-hand, there can be a marked distinction between status and power. This study verifies this and provides readers with a sense of what is substantive behind the stories of Harlem's facelift and commodification. Harlem is being bought and sold, but not without resistance. Acknowledging events, interactions, and contradictions fosters less rigid analyses of socio-economic differentiation and demonstrates how race and class cross-cut to create

varied and contradictory conditions and standpoints regarding belonging and community development.⁵

Conclusion

Along with compelling oral histories and revealing quantitative data, my field notes also included the questions and comments I received about my research from the folks with whom I interacted in the field. The feedback I garnered was instructional and indicative of areas for future research. Legacies of racism and class inequality in the African American experience came across loud and clear in the perspectives of residents. Most people expressed support for this project, as well as a strong desire to participate in what they saw as an opportunity to show another side of the Harlem community. A number of persons expressed concern about the way African Americans, particularly those in cities, have been historically represented and discussed how the ramifications of this extend to the present time.

A smaller segment of the folks I talked with scoffed at the value of a study that focused on the “black middle class.” These individuals felt the population of black professionals in the United States was so small it did not merit this kind of attention. Patrice Covington incredulously asked, “why are you looking at this?” Jada Pinchott, a college-educated entrepreneur, was reluctant to embrace the “middle class” label. She asked me to define the concept and maintained that black folks have such an intermittent experience with success in this country that these labels really do not pertain to them. To Pinchott and others, race overshadows class in the experiences of professional African Americans and the middle-class label only refers to whites.

The comments of anthropologists have also been revealing. Among those critical of this study were individuals who found my departure from the traditional insider/outsider positioning between researcher and the researched troubling. I also encountered those who thought my project was more in line with a sociological rather than an anthropological study. These individuals pointed to my bibliographies and the dearth of anthropologists on it to substantiate this latter idea.

There also were anthropologists who questioned the value of working with populations that are not vehemently oppressed and/or marginalized. They maintained that fieldwork among United States minorities should be conducted among the poor and disadvantaged only; an idea heard from scholars whose work, although not applied, focused largely on low-income or peasant populations. This type of critique perpetuates a view of college-educated or professional minorities as inauthentic and indicates the inability of some professional observers to

see the diversity within these populations. Moreover, such comments also exemplify the discord that exists within anthropology regarding the field's colonial history and its contemporary relevance.

Of course there are disproportionate numbers of African Americans and minorities among the poor and underemployed and these groups confront other inequalities, including the educational achievement gap, as well as high rates of incarceration, exposure to environmental contaminants, and other forms of victimization. While these observations provide a persuasive argument for the need to study such processes, ethnographic data is needed on all segments of minority populations and must be gathered to formulate a complete record. According to Fainstein, overlooking African American professionals omits thirty percent of the black population from the anthropological record and neglects study of the serious racial inequalities upwardly mobile minorities face (Fainstein 1993).

Anthropological data-gathering techniques can counter flattened or stereotypical representations of the workings of race and class in urban communities, particularly when utilized to explore how unfolding events are embedded within broader political and economic contexts. I argue that these data can also be used to address the damaging impact of bad political decision-making. In the particular case discussed here, ethnographic work can inform policymakers by highlighting the damaging results of limited and poorly theorized approaches to urban renewal when there is a greater need for development strategies that are rooted in the specifics of Harlem's history and current conditions, such as demographic diversity and the varied structures of African American kin networks. As this discussion lays bare, our discipline can make both an applied and theoretical contribution toward the larger, more specific goal of ensuring that anthropology is relevant to the study of contemporary American culture and issues of social justice.

Notes

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1. Data analysis indicates that African Americans are primary caregivers for elderly kin at rates sometimes double that of whites. This has been documented in the work of Coward and Dwyer (1990) and Dilworth-Anderson et al. (1999).
2. In her Harlem ethnography, Taylor (2002) interviewed newly arrived African American homeowners with whom the categorization of them as gentrifiers did not sit well. Some preferred to frame their roles as social buffers for low-income

residents; i.e. persons who would function as role models and community advocates to prevent neighborhoods from experiencing total urban blight. Other individuals reluctantly admitted that displacement could occur in the wake of these population shifts and were not comfortable with their role in facilitating such a scenario.

3. Ten of the nineteen households that participated in my field study were located in Hamilton Heights, Striver's Row, and Mt. Morris Park, another area with a high concentration of middle-class residents. All three communities also have sizable working-class populations and black professional workers are also dispersed in other areas of Central and West Harlem.
4. Before collecting data on PMW, I researched low-income African American women for a community-based project called Harlem BirthRight (HBR). Compared to college-educated professionals, these women earned lower incomes and did not have access to the same type of information or quality of opportunities and vital services. Their housing was not as safe or well maintained as the dwellings of PMW. None of the women I met had ever travelled on an airplane before. Poverty, insecurity, and hopelessness were eroding their confidence and sense of well-being.
5. This study also leaves some compelling areas of inquiry untouched, including questions about where the displaced are going and at what rate and how Harlem institutions are faring in the wake of these realignments, as well as what strategies opponents to these policies are utilizing and how affective have they been?

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