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Why is the Black Population of Central Brooklyn, the Mecca of Black NYC, Diminishing?

Jamell N.A. Henderson

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

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Why is the Black Population of Central Brooklyn, the Mecca of Black NYC, Diminishing?

Mr. Jamell N.A. Henderson, MPA

M.A. Thesis

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2019
Why is the Black Population of Central Brooklyn, the Mecca of Black NYC, Diminishing?

by

Jamell N.A. Henderson

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty Political Science in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

__________________________________________
Date

In Mollenkopf
Thesis Advisor

__________________________________________
Date

Alyson Cole
Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

Why is the Black Population of Central Brooklyn, the Mecca of Black NYC, Diminishing?

by

Jamell N.A. Henderson

Advisor: John Mollenkopf

This research looks at three possible reasons that might help to explain this unfortunate exodus. The first approach is through health and examines trends in environmental, mental and physical (general) health. I will explore statistics involving the health and well-being of Central Brooklyn, how the environment plays a disparate role in the poor health and lack of access to services of its African-American residents in comparison to other regions in Brooklyn. The second task is to ask how economics or “racial capitalism” plays a role by looking at gentrification, cooperative economics, and the income inequality in Black Central Brooklyn. The last topic considered is civic engagement in the form of voter participation, the ways in which public policies have negatively affect the livelihood of the area’s Black population, and how elected officials also contributed to their decline.
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I. Acknowledgements

I want to dedicate this paper in honor of my father, the late Warren Lee Henderson and my mother, the late Nancy J. Benjamin. I want to dedicate this paper to my foster mother, the late Betty R. Robinson and every youth and young adult in foster care. I want to dedicate this paper to the honor and glory of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is the head of my life; without him there is no Jamell Henderson. I want to dedicate this paper to my brother Daheem and my sister Shakira; I will always work hard to honor our family forever. To my father’s side of the family who I’ve met for the first time this year, I honor you today with this achievement of showing the intelligence and fortitude that runs in our family.

I want to give honor to my Bridge St. AWME Church family, my pastor Rev. David B. Cousin Sr. and his family for always believing in my ability to dare to be different. To my 2nd family, the Griffins, I love you all from the bottom of my heart and I am forever grateful that you have taken me in as your son. I want to thank my Fabulous 5 that I pray to God will forever be in my life: Cameron, Antoinette, Shadae, Nick and Massah; you all know me better than I know myself and you have always been an inspiration to me and motivating me to be and do better and I am forever thankful to you.

To my CUNY family: John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Borough of Manhattan Community College, Brooklyn College, Baruch College; I do this in honor of you because you all have given me a chance when no other college in this country would; you allowed me to showcase my leadership and my passion for social justice, civic engagement and politics and because of you, I am here at the finish line receiving my 2nd Master’s degree.

To my mentor Christina Waszak; you are truly a blessing to me, you are heaven sent and I am so glad that you are my mentor and my close friend who is always showering me with love (sometimes tough) and always asking the question “What’s Next?” . To Melvin P. Miller, I honor you because from the moment you met me, you believed in me and invested in me; I’m forever thankful.

To my professor and academic mentor Dr. John Mollenkopf, I appreciate you so much for your consistent push for me to be a better scholar not only for me, but for my community and for my country; I am thankful that you have chosen to invest and encourage me to be the absolute best and I am humbled to me mentored by you. Lastly, to you the people of the U.S. this is for you as
I encourage you to always believe in the change that is to come; get ready because I am coming to serve.

II. The Question and Approach

Brooklyn. I truly believe in my heart the great words of our current borough president Eric Adams when he says there are two types of people: People who are from Brooklyn and people who wish they were. Brooklyn is the most popular and the most populous borough in the city of New York. With over 2.6 million people and counting, the borough is a massive melting pot of cultures that are proud of where they are from. Much of the African-American population of New York City has resided in Central Brooklyn for decades. They did not interfere in other neighborhoods and really tried to make their way through the concrete jungle of life, then around the beginning of the new century, gentrification took hold in the area. In Central Brooklyn today, the African-American population has dramatically decreased and this thesis represents my effort at saying why.

This research looks at three possible reasons that might help to explain this unfortunate exodus. The first approach is through health and examines trends in environmental, mental and physical (general) health. I will explore statistics involving the health and well-being of Central Brooklyn, how the environment plays a disparate role in the poor health and lack of access to services of its African-American residents in comparison to other regions in Brooklyn. The second task is to ask how economics or “racial capitalism” plays a role by looking at gentrification, cooperative economics, and the income inequality in Black Central Brooklyn. The last topic considered is civic engagement in the form of voter participation, the ways in which
public policies have negatively affect the livelihood of the area’s Black population, and how elected officials also contributed to their decline.

Each section will look at statistical data from the U.S. Census and other statistical sources. I will also provide empirical data from researchers who studied each topic and aim to find some ethnographical research to provide a hands on approach to a resident being in the experience.

Based on these three major pillars, my aim is to understand why the African-American population is declining in Central Brooklyn and to inform people about the circumstances they are in, as well as to create real and authentic conversations about policies that might prevent African-Americans from leaving the area in the future.

III. Being Black in Brooklyn

Christopher “Notorious B.I.G.” Wallace, Chris Rock, Lou Gossett Jr., Lil’ Kim, Eddie Murphy, Jay-Z, Mike Tyson, Spike Lee, and Michael Jordan (even though he doesn’t claim it) are prominent Black figures that hail from the borough of Kings. It makes me proud to be born and raised from Brooklyn because there is a special power that comes with it; it’s like being a celebrity without the financial clout behind it. All Brooklynites agree that no matter where you are in the world, you are guaranteed that you will see someone from Brooklyn or meet someone who knows someone from Brooklyn.

Being Black in Brooklyn has a very personal love and connection to one another because of the hard work, the grit and the hustle that the borough brings to you, which in turn can be utilized to go anywhere and make it. From the vibrant sounds of Caribbean on Eastern Parkway,
to the hip-hop sound in Brownsville, being Black in Brooklyn is a phenomenal feeling. Blacks in Brooklyn have great historical contributions that truly helped to make NYC what it is today.

One article in the black press talks about the Black Brooklyn Renaissance mentioning, “African dance as an essential source of inspiration since the 1960’s. It tells the culture’s story and relates its history, worship, social status and societal relationships, expressing itself through ceremonies that give voice to the community’s essence, language, rituals and self-expression.” [1]

Another article highlights how Brooklyn attracts best talent that will then change the image and role of being Black in many industries we haven’t entered before. George Tate states that “‘since the 40’s and 50’s Brooklyn has been a launching pad and landing site for a wide range of Black Talent’”. Film, music and drama are just a few of the fields that Brooklyn has blessed with its international, yet somehow distinctly New York Brand.” [2]

From Mo’ Better Blues, to Do the Right Thing; from a kid from Brownsville to become known as one of the greatest boxers of all time, to a kid from Bedford-Stuyvesant who truly revolutionized the hip-hop game today; being Black in Brooklyn provided you with an additional boost in becoming a national and international name for all to know. Research states that Over the past half-century, Brooklyn has emerged as a global crossroads of Afro-diasporic culture.

“The borough’s southern black and West Indian communities grew steadily in the first half of the twentieth century, thanks in no small part to Duke and Strayhorn’s fabled A train that connected central Brooklyn’s nascent black neighborhoods to mother Harlem. But it was the post-War migration waves from the American South, and the influx of diverse Caribbean and
African immigrants following the 1965 Immigration Act, that led to black Brooklyn’s rise to prominence.” [3]

“Brooklyn is furthermore a major center of Black arts culture.” [3], and it’s important that we realize this footing created opportunity for Black people in our great city. From Dance Africa, Afropunk, and the Annual West-Indian American Day Parade (the truly recognized Labor Day in the city) are just some of the powerful and worldwide events that really showcase and display the connection between Blacks in Brooklyn to the motherland, Africa.

While music, the arts and culture of Black people are prominent in the Borough, it has a very rich and powerful history of political activism and progressive movements that helped Black people be seen, recognized, and in many ways protected, to call a distinct location, home. Ann-Brown states in her article that “There is no comparison to the richness of African-American culture found in Brooklyn. The presence of Africans in Brooklyn is nearly as old as Brooklyn itself.” [4]

Historian Fred Laverpool, whose great contributions in studying and discovering the rich history of Blacks in Brooklyn, started the Braggin’ About Brooklyn tour to welcome the world in seeing the greatness of African-American presence in the borough. “So many people do not know Brooklyn’s contribution to America and the American Revolution.” [4] From the Underground Railroad, which had multiple stops in the borough including my church, the historic Bridge Street African Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church, the Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims to the Battle of Long Island, African-Americans played a crucial role in its efforts to push for their presence to be seen in a positive light in the United States.
“In Crown Heights, the Weeksville Houses were home to the oldest community of free Blacks in Brooklyn. Established in 1838 by James Weeks, an African-American longshoreman who worked in what is now the South Street Seaport, only four homes remain of the original, pre-Civil War Community.” [4] Brooklyn has been a major safety hub for those who were unfortunately enslaved on their road to freedom; abolitionists like Frederick Douglass spoke in Brooklyn to call out the injustices of slavery. Brooklyn has served as a place to aggressively push for progress and while it has done much effort in doing it, it has become a place where it was very challenging to be a Black person in the borough, even in today’s society.

I remember as a kid watching on TV the event that gave me the reality of tension and division as a Black person; the Crown Heights Riots. It was at that moment as a child I saw up close several things: one, the fact that it seemed to me that Jewish people hated my people; two, that justice was not going to be served and that the tension would be around for a very long time. Henry Goldschmidt’s research looks at narratives racial and religious identities in Crown Heights. “The neighborhood was engulfed in violent conflict following the deaths of Gavin Cato and Yankel Rosenbaum—an Afro-Caribbean boy struck by a car in the motorcade of the Lubavitcher Rebbe (the spiritual leader of the Lubavitch community) and an orthodox Jew stabbed by a Black teenager in the ensuing unrest. Over the following three days, Crown Heights residents faced off in angry demonstrations, hurling rocks, bottles, slogans, and slurs. The neighborhood seemed divided into warring camps of Blacks and Jews.” [5]

While many religious and elected leaders from both sides really made attempts to show unity and peace, Black Brooklyn still has not forgotten these events, especially when it seems to them that the police treat the respected races differently solely because of the color of their skin. Being Black in Brooklyn while being under the “protection” of the New York Police Department
was not a fairy tale, as Blacks had to fight multiple battles on the front lines, except they were losing the battle for many years as they were being gunned down by the NYPD.

Another example is the number of African-American men have been harassed and killed by the police who have abused the law through the unfortunate broken window’s policy. According to research by Jeffrey Bellin, — “Over the past two decades, the NYPD engaged in a steadily escalating number of coercive encounters with its citizenry. This pattern crested in 2011 when the department recorded almost 700,000 “stops” as part of a citywide effort to stop and frisk suspicious persons, ostensibly to find guns and deter gun-carrying. Almost all of those stopped (90%) were minority males, and the vast majority of the stops (88%) uncovered no evidence of wrongdoing. Given these numbers, it is not surprising that, in August 2013, a federal judge ruled that the NYPD’s use of mass stop-and-frisk (“NYC Stop and Frisk”) tactics violated the Constitution.” [6]

Despite these situations, Brooklyn is home for Black people in NYC and the name evokes the grit and toughness that they use to grind and hustle through the concrete jungle. As stated in Washington’s article, “Brooklyn’s got it going on! It’s Spike Lee making movies in the ‘hood and it’s Nelson Mandela’s first stop in NY at Boys and Girls High; Brooklyn is cookin’ with gas. It’s a carnival of festivals, where the meat patties are smoking and the streets are jumpin’. It’s got the largest concentration of Caribbean people outside the Caribbean. It’s a swingin’ African village, a diaspora reunion. It’s got more than 500 Black churches, 9,400 Black businesses and folks who are doing something about educating our children—the Afrocentric way.” [7]

In short, Brooklyn is the Black Mecca for the United States and it was that way for decades; but Brooklyn lost that title to the city of Atlanta and as we look at the three reasons why
we have lost that prestigious title, we may learn more about our power of being Black in Brooklyn.

IV. Health and Well-Being

Arlen Specter said it best: “There is nothing more important than our good health—that is our principal capital asset.”

As the NYC Department of Health stated best, “Health is rooted in the circumstances of our daily lives and the environments in which we are born, grown, play, work, love and age. Understanding how community conditions affect our physical and mental health is the first step toward building a healthier NYC.” [8] This Department of Health statement does have it spot on but differentially bad health plays a role in Blacks leaving Brooklyn, no longer making it home.

General Health Statistics in Central Brooklyn

According to the NYC Community Health Profile of Central Brooklyn, “Central Brooklyn residents experience more barriers to health care access than those in NYC overall, with nearly 3 in 10 without a regular doctor. Also, the percent of uninsured in Central Brooklyn nearly doubled between 2002 and 2004. Although the death rate due to HIV disease has decreased during the past decade in Central Brooklyn, it remains more than twice the HIV-related death rate in NYC overall.” [9]

In looking at the latest statistics of communities within the Central Brooklyn region, we can also see there has been some improvement but still an urgent need to counter the current status of the health in Central Brooklyn. According to Dr. Bassett, the Commissioner of the NYC Health and Mental Hygiene, “longstanding and rising income inequality, combined
with a history of racial residential segregation, has led to startling health inequities between neighborhoods. Poor health outcomes tend to cluster in places that people of color call home and where many residents live in poverty.” [10].

Births for example in Bedford Stuyvesant, the number of preterm births, is nearly twice the Midtown rate at 10.7 percent and teen births rate is higher than the Brooklyn and Citywide rates which is at 34.2 percent. Smoking, poor quality diet and physical inactivity are risk factors for high blood pressure, diabetes and other problems. Adults in Bedford Stuyvesant smoke, consume sugary drinks, eat fruits and vegetables and are physically active at rates similar to residents of Brooklyn and the city as a whole.

In Brownsville, tobacco retailers are more prevalent in comparison to the city, with 15 tobacco retailers per 10,000 people (ranks 10th). The neighborhood also ranks number 1 in overall non-fatal assaults with 180 per 100,000 people. Forty percent of Brownsville adults consume one or more sugary beverages per day, the second-highest rate in the city. Drug- and/or alcohol-related hospitalizations reflect acute and chronic consequences of substance misuse. In Brownsville, such hospitalization rates are more than double the rates in Brooklyn and NYC; Brownsville ranks fourth in both alcohol- and drug-related hospitalizations [11].

These statistics indicate that in Central Brooklyn—“is still the central hub for Black people where in Brownsville for example, the population is over 86,000 residents with it being 76% Black [9]; in Bedford-Stuyvesant the population is over 154,000 residents with 64% Black.” [12]

*Environmental Health in Central Brooklyn*
According to a 2014 New York Academy of Medicine report in, “Regarding environmental triggers, limited data is available. However, data on the rate of serious housing violations by Community District, i.e., housing code violations that are considered “immediately hazardous or serious,” show prevalence in many of the same neighborhoods with high numbers of preventable respiratory PQI (preventive quality indicators) hospitalizations: Bedford-Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, Williamsburg, Bushwick, Brownsville, and East New York; plus, Flatbush and East Flatbush. (In Bushwick, community members consider the prevalence of asthma to be “huge” and largely attribute it to indoor and outdoor environmental conditions, including poor housing conditions, traffic, and the historic industrial base of the community, with likely persistent toxic chemicals.” [13]

In looking at the air quality of the neighborhoods in Central Brooklyn, it is also not among the best within the borough and the city of New York. Within the region, there are several bus depots (MTA including Access-A-Ride), sanitation depots and spots where the enforcement of the engine idling is non-existent. In looking at the status of individuals who are asthmatic, the data speaks for itself.

According to research, “one in 20 adults are suffering from asthma in central Brooklyn.” [8] In looking at other neighborhoods within the region, Bedford Stuyvesant and Crown Heights and among the worse in children under 18 years old with rates that are insurmountable. See table A [14].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asthma hospitalizations in children aged 0 to 4 years, 2016</th>
<th>97.7</th>
<th>50.4</th>
<th>61.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In two other neighborhoods within the region, among youth and young adults, it’s also shown how damaging the rates are due to poor air quality. See table B.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth and Adult Asthma</th>
<th>East Flatbush - Flatbush</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age-adjusted rates per 10,000 residents (or percent where indicated)</td>
<td>compared with other NYC neighborhoods*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults aged 18 and older with asthma in the past 12 months (age-adjusted percent), 2014</td>
<td>3.1** 3.0 3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asthma hospitalizations in people aged 15 years and older, 2016</td>
<td>10.5 8.7 11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asthma emergency department visits in people aged 15 years and older, 2016</td>
<td>126.1 104.1 101.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to the data site by NYC.gov, Air pollution is one of the most important environmental threats to urban populations and while all people are exposed, pollutant emissions, levels of exposure, and population vulnerability vary across neighborhoods. Exposures to common air pollutants have been linked to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, cancers, and premature deaths.

Central Brooklyn has one of the largest concentrations of NYCHA developments in the city and because a majority of their residents are Black people. When it comes to NYCHA, there are several horrifying factors that are an impediment towards the environmental health in the region; contaminated water, infestation of rodents and roaches, and lead poisoning.

According to the Amsterdam News, “records on inspection done on water tanks on many NYCHA buildings disappeared. Many of the wooden tanks, which contained drinking water, were contaminated with dead animals, insects and other floating debris. Between 2015 and 2017, nearly 50 reports describe things such as dead birds and squirrels in tanks. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, dead animals in drinking water can carry microbial pathogens, which can cause waterborne diseases.” [15]

In looking at the data provided by the city of New York, there is a heavy influx of insects and rodents that are in buildings within the neighborhood (See table C).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homes with mice or rats in the</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>Worse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>building (percent) 2014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2002-2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homes with cockroaches (percent)</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>Worse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(percent) 2014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2008-2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults who allow smoking in the</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>Better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>home (percent) 2013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2003-2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults reporting mold in the</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>home (percent) 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In research done by La Mort, the fact public housing has become so dilapidated compared to private housing "is ironic considering the original mission of the New York City Housing Authority." There has been no shortage of recent dangerous conditions in NYCHA developments, such as playground equipment, broken lights, elevators, and smoke alarms. It has reached such critical levels that Governor Andrew Cuomo believes he can intervene because "the conditions of habitability at NYCHA-managed residential properties constitute a public nuisance affecting the security of life and health in the City of New York." [16]

**Mental Health in Central Brooklyn**

*I wish people could understand that the brain is the most important organ of our body. Just because you can’t see mental illness like you could see a broken bone, doesn’t mean it’s not as detrimental or devastating to a family or an individual—Demi Lovato*
I would like for us to visualize for a moment, the day in the life of being a Black person in Brooklyn no matter your status. You wake up, turn on the news and you see that another Black person was gunned down by internal violence in the community or by police; your image in mainstream media is seen as both positive and negative (especially under the Trump presidency); you walk out your house, worried that someone is out to harm you not just by other races but from your own, you worry about being harassed by the police; you are seen as a danger in stores, on your job, even in public transportation; this is just a small percentage of what an average Black person has to go through every single day.

The everyday struggles also include unfortunate living circumstances, lack of love or support from family or friends; and let us not forget the cost of being Black and a part of the LGBTQIA community or of a different religion. Among Black people, prior to the leadership of Mayor Bill De Blasio and first lady Chirlane McCrae, few ever talked about the importance of mental health in the city of New York.

While mental health is now becoming among the forefronts of progressive conversations, it still brings tragedy to the Black community when it’s not understood by those who are coming into the community. The police shooting of Saheed Vassell in Crown Heights has raised a number of issues for residents in a neighborhood that has seen vast demographic change over the past few years. The issue of policing was at the heart of many people’s concerns. Some at the rally condemned the lack of police officers who were local to Crown Heights and knew the community. Vassell was well known among residents in the area of Utica Avenue and Montgomery Street, where he was killed, and he was viewed as a harmless man who suffered from mental health problems. The subject of mental health is a recurring theme in police shootings. In 2015 The Counted, “a Guardian project that tracked police
shootings, found that mental health issues were reported in relation to more than one in five people killed by police.” [17]

This unfortunate tragedy that took place in Central Brooklyn is just a small piece of how mental health plays a role and not receiving the support the community needs, let alone the push for the importance of addressing and saving lives through mental health treatment. According to data provided by Mental Illness Policy Org., “approximately 239,000 adult New Yorkers had a serious mental illness (SMI). Nearly 40% of adult New Yorkers with SMI (95,000) did not receive mental health treatment in the past year.” [18]

In looking at the next table, we can see how mental health impacts the NYC Criminal Justice system, especially when the majority of those entering the system are African-American. [19] (Table C)

Per Mayor’s Task Force on Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice System (2014) While the number of people incarcerated in city jails has gone down, the percentage with mental illness shot up 30 percent from 2010 to 2014 Of the 400 people jailed more than 18 times in the last five years, 67% have a mental health need; 21% have a serious mental illness. The 400 accounted for over 10,000 jail admissions and 300,000 days in jail. 85% of their charges were misdemeanors or violations.

In looking deeper into the status of mental health, depression is definitely one of the major mental health disorders. In another report by the city of New York, “depression accounts for over 75,000 disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) which measure the number
of years of life lost as a result of illness, disability or death. Depression is a leading cause of DALYs, second only to heart disease. The economic cost of depression is high; depression in NYC is associated with $2.4 billion in lost productivity costs annually. Depression can also impact one’s social and family relationships.” [20]

In looking further at the data among the adults, we also see that depending on the locations in the city that aren’t economically strong, that the possibilities of depression are much greater. - “Adults who reported that their neighborhood was not very safe or not at all safe from crime (17%) were more likely to be depressed than those who reported that their neighborhood was very safe or somewhat safe (8%).” [20] Think and consider how challenging it is to survive in the Black community that deals with forms of paralysis that affects the upward mobility of the household; where you have to work twice as hard to obtain half of what whites have to do.

Research shows “that non-Hispanic blacks were more likely than non-Hispanic whites to be exposed to early stress and to begin to see increasing stressful life events entering young adulthood. Given that stress and depressive symptoms are typically associated, it was not surprising to find that the rate of depressive symptoms was also higher for non-Hispanic blacks.” [21] Growing up in the home of the Black family that is in poverty, lack of father-figures in the households and the intense pressure on mothers to play multiple roles, which in turn puts unfortunate pressure on the child or young adult growing up, will lead to Black young adults to turn to depressants, drugs and alcohol; the coping mechanism to unnecessary stress exposed to them at an early age.

There is research that states that-, “Black adolescents who are more integrated into their family, through closer relationships, expectations of support, and greater communication
with their kinship network, experience better psychosocial well-being and less psychosocial dysfunction.” [22] Even though this is credible, all Black families in the region doesn’t unfortunately have this great American scenario.

**Physical Health**

The third component in health in the realm of the physical. I distinctively remember this transformation of a corner store (bodegas) in Bedford-Stuyvesant; I was on the corner of Lewis Ave and Halsey Street. I remember during a time when it was *Bed-Stuy: Do or die*, where the corner store was the location for the best breakfast sandwich (bacon, egg and cheese), the best deli sandwiches and major junk food and sugary drinks with no high quality of food you could find in the store, let alone if its expired.

In 2006, this corner store was transformed into a 24-hour gourmet market and I was astonished at the quality of foods that were found in there that were high-quality and healthier products. I asked the owner why suddenly the transformation, he stated “I have to cater to a new market”. When he said that, I knew immediately what he was talking about; the people who were coming in and gentrifying the neighborhood (we will discuss that in the economics section).

From the foods we eat (and don’t eat), to exercising and the unfortunate diseases that infect the communities of Central Brooklyn; it’s remarkable how the region is surviving with the lack of resources that are available to help Black residents to live a healthy life. Looking back at the Community Health Profile for Bedford-Stuyvesant, we can see the comparison of the quality of food intake as well as consumption of sugary drinks in comparison to the borough and the city itself (Table D).
In also looking at the chart, Bedford-Stuyvesant is not among the top percentile in terms of healthy living. If you were to take a walk in the community, you can see how many top tier and second tier fast-food restaurants there are in comparison to wealthier neighborhoods especially when it comes to the ratio these establishments are per block.

In looking at Brownsville its nothing different, but even far worse among neighborhoods in Brooklyn unfortunately (Table E) where they have among the poorest smoking diet and physical activity. It is quite revealing to see how this community in this region is dealing with the lack of...
high quality foods are available for low income families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Smoking, diet and physical activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smoking, poor quality diet and physical inactivity are risk factors for high blood pressure, diabetes and other problems. Adults in Brownsville smoke, eat fruits and vegetables and are physically active at rates similar to residents of Brooklyn and the city as a whole. However, adults in Brownsville are more likely to consume sugary drinks than residents of Brooklyn and the city as a whole.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current smokers</th>
<th>14%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(RANKS 49th)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Flatbush</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(RANKS 39th)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYC</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 or more 12 oz sugary drink per day</th>
<th>40%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(RANKS 39th)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starvesan Town</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(RANKS 29th)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turtle Bay</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(RANKS 17th)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(RANKS 27th)</td>
<td>27%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At least one serving of fruits or vegetables per day</th>
<th>83%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(RANKS 49th)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayside and Little Neck</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(RANKS 17th)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton and Chelsea &amp; Midtown</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(RANKS 17th)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(RANKS 17th)</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Any physical activity in the last 30 days</th>
<th>79%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(RANKS 39th)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton and Chelsea &amp; Midtown</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(RANKS 17th)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>传染Clinton and Chelsea &amp; Midtown</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(RANKS 17th)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(RANKS 17th)</td>
<td>77%</td>
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</table>

There is research that highlights the lack of healthy food options in Central Brooklyn and in looking at the table, the researchers describe differences among Hispanic/Latino and white residents (Table F). In this research they illustrate that “the analysis of the relationship between demographic variables to food desert index components and to a total food desert index score is shown in Table 3. In comparing predominantly black/African-American block groups to block groups in which the proportion of black residents is relatively low, black
block groups had a significantly lower proportion of bodegas characterized as ‘‘most healthy’’, had fewer supermarkets, and had a lower food desert index score.” [23]

Because of the lack of quality foods, it impacts the physical health from diseases or illnesses, to obesity and stresses that impact the life expectancy in the communities. According to research, The CDC reports that “black adults at 50% more likely to die of heart disease and stroke before age 75 than whites, and that diabetes is highest amongst blacks and Hispanics, as well as those with low household incomes and without college degrees (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013b).” [24]

In the communities of Central Brooklyn, it is very challenging to find and enshroud in the essence of healthy living because of the quality of foods that is in the region. There have been great efforts by the city to promote more green market carts, and marketplaces for residents within the community to gain access to healthier foods but let’s be honest; healthy living I feel is an expensive way of living.

It is very challenging to find healthier options especially when there is a lack of healthier supermarket options (as well as the quality of food that is sold in the supermarkets) and if one is barely making ends meet, the easiest and most economic friendly thing to do is to run to the fast-food or the low-quality bodegas to get something to get you through the night. As
we look at economics, it all falls into the overall health and well-being of the communities in the region, which in turn dictates how people survive and be strong in their hopes to one day find a better outcome for their household.

The unfortunate challenges when it comes to health does impact how residents in the community move, think and operate because a vast number of residents in the region do have the resources to improve the overall health aspects that will in turn help the community to thrive where one can remain in the neighborhood they love.

There are other aspects of health that can also be explored, from spiritual, emotional and social that also play a major role in how one lives in the communities within the region. Black people in the communities of Central Brooklyn always find a way to make it through each day despite everything being thrown at them and yet rise above it all.

V. Economics

*It turns out that advancing equal opportunity and economic empowerment is both morally right and good economics, because discrimination, poverty and ignorance restrict growth, while investments in education, infrastructure and scientific and technological research increase it, creating more good jobs and new wealth for all of us*—President Bill Clinton

The second proposed reason why Black people are leaving Central Brooklyn is due to the economic atmosphere that I believe is shaped by 3 powerful entities: Real estate, the government and businesses. I want to first off begin by saying that the City of New York has always been and always will be the city of the strongest people in the world because we have the genetic ability to make something out of nothing. We are able to grind through the concrete jungle and make our way to living comfortable lives and the craziest thing, despite speculations, everyone doesn’t want to be rich in NYC.
NYC today, in the great words of Jimmy McMillan “Rent is too damn high!” The sad part is that it’s not just the rent in NYC, its everything!! From being a homeowner, to purchasing a movie ticket; everything has become very expensive and while that is welcoming for those who are not born and bred in the city to have a new way of life, its greatly affecting those who are the true New Yorkers who are really trying to figure out how they are going to make it through their everyday life.

According to an article by SmartAsset,” taking all expenses into account, the cost of living in New York City is at least 68.8% higher than the national average. If you live in the city center, however, it’s even worse. The cost of living in Manhattan is more than double the national average. In addition to parking, the price of gas in New York is often 5-10% higher than the national average, and insurance can also be pricey. According to carinsurance.com, the average insurance rate for drivers in Manhattan tops $4,000 per year.” [25]

For many years, Manhattan has always been the leading expensive borough to live within NYC and then suddenly around 2005 the city and developers looked to a new location: Brooklyn. As a resident within Central Brooklyn, I didn’t see it coming although I knew that something had to give because there was a multitude of property and opportunities for businesses just waiting to be restored. Once the city and developers began to pour in to the central region, I just knew that it would no longer be the home that I, along with many other Brooklynites have come to love.

**Racial Capitalism**

According to Harvard Law Review, “Racial Capitalism is defined as the process of deriving [to take, receive or obtain especially from a specified source] social and economic value from the
racial identity of another person.” [26] I believe that racial capitalism by way of gentrification, does play a role in the essence of looking at the stakeholders in the community that makes the livelihood of an African-American resident challenging. Those stakeholders in my opinion are real estate developers, corporations and elected officials. A phenomenal example of such tactics is the increasingly fast paced housing developments that are being built in Central Brooklyn and the number of “affordable” units they choose to provide versus market-rate units.

Also in looking in the lens of racial capitalism, I can also say that rent in Brooklyn has reached unprecedented levels since gentrification came into the great borough where it is unaffordable for African-American residents, especially for the senior population. Before looking at data, I just posed the question before my 4,000+ friends on social media and the response that I received was rather unanimous, where they simply said “RENT IS TOO DAMN HIGH”. According to research presented by Sarah Maslin, “in the contemporary United States, Atlanta has emerged as a “superlative city” (Brenner 2003) for examining the black experience, where grinding inner-city poverty and segregation coexist with other major trends: the dismantling of traditional public housing (Bayor 2003, Oakley et al. 2011); the move of black Americans back to the urban and rural South (Falk et al. 2004, Stack 1996).” [27]

When looking at racial capitalism, I feel that it is synonymous with gentrification because it is designed to force particular groups out while it welcome and benefit others into the community. I want to make it clear, while I am all for the improvement of neighborhoods, it should not be at the cost of African-Americans being forcefully displaced and thus change the cultural atmosphere of the community, which may lead to unnecessary conflict and tension.

Gentrification is defined as the process of repairing and rebuilding homes and businesses in a deteriorating area (such as an urban neighborhood) accompanied by an influx of middle-
class or affluent people and that often results in the displacement of earlier, usually poorer residents [4]. Based off the definition, there have been a sweltering of cases where African-American residents felt the complication of gentrification.

I recall a conversation with a long-term Bed-Stuy resident who purchased a brownstone back in 1973 for $25,000; today this resident’s home is worth $2.4 million dollars. This is a great improvement of value of homes in this community, however it is due to a specified group of people who are coming in and thus making it appealing to real estate developers to increase the prices of the homes to be an intimidating concept for African-American residents to move out.

Another example of gentrification is when I spoke to a long-time resident again in Bed-Stuy for 30 years. She was consistently harassed by not only real-estate developers to pressure her to sell her home via phone or mail, but he was harassed by the incoming residents who blatantly spoke to her saying that she should sell her home to them because you are not needed on the block. This is just two of hundreds of examples of what long-term residents in Central Brooklyn have to deal with.

According to an article by Gwynn Guilford, “outside investors are also pouring into the efforts of gentrification as a way to keep the money in their families and it is coming from investors in China. One 36-year-old New Yorker told the New York Times that he is borrowing nearly $1.3 million to buy a three-story brownstone in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a rapidly gentrifying Brooklyn neighborhood where prices have soared in the last few years. His loan came from the bundled savings of middle-income Chinese people investing via the app Haitou360, a New York-based investment service, which were then re-invested by way of an American crowdfunding property finance platform, such as Realty Mogul or Patch of Land.” [28]
Why is this allowed? Simply put, the essence of racial capitalism at its finest and it’s at the expense of residents who are proud to be a part of the communities of Central Brooklyn for many years. The essence of what made Central Brooklyn and even Brooklyn as a whole so unique is the authentic culture that makes Brooklyn the platinum standard of the city. Gentrifiers who are coming in to the community aren’t coming in to even learn what the neighborhood is all about.

The best example of such is the lack of respect it has for one of Brooklyn’s greatest icons, Christopher “Notorious B.I.G.” Wallace. According to the article by the NY Daily News, “A Sotheby's outpost in Park Slope recently put the iconic entertainer's childhood apartment on the market with an asking price of $725,000, naming "historic Clinton Hill" as one of the flat's many selling points — without one word about Notorious B.I.G. "It's not a historic museum," sniffed broker Judith Lief, scoffing at any mention tying 226 St. James Pl., #3L to Biggie. But Biggie included his old neighborhood on his rise to fame, frequently rhyming about life in the then crime-filled community, which he called Bedford-Stuyvesant.” [29]

You see, it’s the recognition of the lack of cultural respect that contributes that looks beyond the respect of the people that lives in the neighborhoods. According to the NY times, a resident stated, “Surely, we should resist the temptation to romanticize the drugs and violence that had a terrible impact on Brooklyn's black community. However, there was an authentic culture that bloomed in these neighborhoods (and elsewhere in the city) during the '80s and '90s.”

“We should also resist the temptation to refer to the wave of expensive and preening epicureanism as anything other than a homogenous bourgeois (and largely white) lifestyle.
Businesses that sell artisanal cheeses and 14 different varieties of vegan nut milk add little in terms of authentic culture. They do, however, result in increased rents, luxury properties and the displacement of native New Yorkers. Yeah, Brooklyn is safer and cleaner and more affluent, but it was far more interesting when it was Crooklyn.” [30].

Now that Brooklyn today has become the most expensive place to live in the United States, surpassing Manhattan, it is still a hotspot for those who want to come in and have an attempt to receive the credentials of being a Brooklynite. In fact, every time we see the typical stages of certain businesses and agencies come into the neighborhoods, we can be assured that gentrification is coming our way.

Recently, Governor Cuomo has promised to invest $1.4 Billion in Central Brooklyn, yet it does place fear for those who feel that gentrification is going to come more aggressively. According to the NY Times, “the plan would bring much-needed resources, such as health care services and new jobs, to Brownsville and other long-suffering areas of central Brooklyn, which includes East New York, Bedford-Stuyvesant and Crown Heights. The plan would pour $700 million into health care in those neighborhoods where obesity and asthma rates eclipse state and city averages. Mr. Cuomo said the plan also would create 7,600 jobs in the area where unemployment is high. Residents in central Brooklyn met the announcement with a mix of elation and skepticism. Parents who keep their children mostly inside for safety warily embraced it. Others worried about the potential for gentrification, leading to the displacement of the area’s mostly black and Latino residents.” [31]

Ujamaa-Cooperative Economics
Ujamma is one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa, created by Dr. Maulana Karenga. As it states on the website, “Ujamaa means cooperative economics which its defined as to build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.” [32] If I were to assume when one think of African-American businesses, the ones that comes to our attention are the following: OWN, Sean John, RocNation, FUBU, Tyler Perry Studios, Essence Magazine and others to name a few.

It’s no secret that black businesses once hitting the mainstream flow of national attention and economics are strangers to being successful and becoming trendsetters that revolutionize industries. But if we had to narrow it down to local businesses that are Black owned, could we remember or identify them? I recall at time where Black-owned businesses were not only just thriving but in your face within the communities across the city, especially in Brooklyn. From Brownstore Bookstore, to Nkuru Bookstore, to signature restaurants and clubs such as Sugar Hill and Temptations. These were businesses that were thriving and giving back directly into the community.

Now from my experience, Black businesses are still present in the communities and there is increasing awareness for the people in our communities to support and shop Black. There are questions however if Black businesses are truly investing back in the communities and that is a question to present. I feel however that in our communities, the presence of Black communities is not in a status where those businesses are in the majority of the economical standing in comparison to Brooklyn’s Chinatown (which is very large by the way), or Bay Ridge where you know for sure you can shop Italian, or Manhattan Beach where if you want to shop Russian, you can.
One of the major obstacles that African-American businesses face that many others don’t have to experience an inkling of is the fact of the difficulties they face when it comes to obtaining a small business loan. According to an article by Forbes Magazine, “minority-owned firms are still having a much harder time accessing small business loans than their white counterparts. Minority-owned firms are much less likely to be approved for small business loans than white-owned firms. And, even if they do get approved, minority-owned firms are more likely to receive lower amounts and higher interest rates. According to findings from the U.S. Department of Commerce Minority Business Development Agency, these discrepancies have made minority business owners more likely to not apply for small business loans, usually out of fear of rejection.” [33]

The aforementioned statement is the unfortunate reality that minority businesses have to deal with, yet being faced with the importance of establishing a business as a powerful way to grow in this capitalistic society in the United States. The article also highlights some strong, yet valid reasons why this is a major obstacle in being rejected for loans by the government: 1. Lower net worth, 2. Not the most optimal location, 3. Poor or little credit history.

Research states that, “black-owned startups also have lower levels of all other major sources of funding than do white-owned startups. In other words, they are not able to simply substitute owner equity or debt for the lack of ability to find financing through bank loans… Black entrepreneurs use substantially less startup capital than white entrepreneurs - the average level of startup capital among black entrepreneurs is $35,205 compared with $106,720 for white entrepreneurs. In the first year after startup new businesses continue to invest substantial amounts
of financial capital. The average level of investment is $81,697 for white firms. The racial
disparities remain large with black firms investing only an average of $34,462.” [34]

This among the issue of CREDIT, plays a big role in Black businesses receiving start up
loans to operate. To me, it feels as if they are being punished for having bad credit, even though
they are looking for opportunities to build and expand their income. The Forbes article “states
that the average minority small business owner has a credit score of about 707 -- 15 points lower
than the average small business owner in the U.S.” [Forbes, 35].

The data has been rather challenging to find because according to the NY Times, “City
officials in the mayor’s office and the Department of Small Business Services were unable to
provide comparative data on black-owned businesses in Brooklyn or citywide. “We don’t keep
numbers of black-owned businesses,” said Meredith Daniels, a spokeswoman for the Brooklyn
Chamber of Commerce.” [36] While this news is rather unfortunate, the article also was able to
shed light on the number of Black owned contractors in Brooklyn. Raul Contreras, a spokesman
for the mayor, offered as a stand-in the registry of certified city contractors from the Mayor’s
Office of Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises; there were 319 black-owned
contractors in Brooklyn in 2017, up from 295 in 2015.

So there is growth that is occurring in the borough and while this is good, the Black
community in Brooklyn are still facing challenged in this atmosphere of gentrification. AMNY
states that “from 2007 to 2012, gentrification helped shutter many black-owned businesses, the
study says. Whereas in 2007, African-Americans owned 13 percent of all businesses in the
Bronx and 5 percent in Queens, they owned 6 percent and 3 percent, respectively, in 2012, the
report says. New York City is one of only three large cities to see a decline even though the
number of black-owned businesses across the nation actually grew by 2.4 percent in that time period.” [37]

History shows us how challenging it was for Black residents to have options within their own neighborhood while dealing with the fact that white residents always had more options to get the items they need to live good in their neighborhoods. According to research during the time where Black communities were being overlooked, “Black neighborhoods also have fewer and less diverse retail options such as supermarkets, gyms, drugstores, and financial services. In New York City, neighborhoods with a predominantly white racial composition have twice as many food stores that are classified as supermarkets as neighborhoods with a predominantly black population. Only about 25 percent of food stores in Central Harlem and 20 percent in Central Brooklyn are supermarkets, compared to 66 percent of food stores in the Upper East Side neighborhood, a neighborhood with predominantly white residents.” [38]

Black businesses have definitely thrived when the city government and private entities didn’t interfere with the makeup of their neighborhoods because the money was flowing in and maintaining within the community; nowadays thanks to social media, residents are highlighting more aggressively the Black businesses that are around and creating apps for those who want to explicitly support their businesses. While this is a great and pivotal moment, the fact still remains that the businesses that are Black are still in need of support from the people in the communities and to be much more visible.

Income Inequality
They say this is a big, rich town/I just come from the poorest part/Bright lights, city life, I gotta make it/This is where it goes down/I just happen to come up hard/Legal or illegal, baby, I gotta make it—Lyrics to Power on Starz

In 2013, NYC Public Advocate Bill de Blasio decided to run for one of the few positions that will propel one on the national stage, Mayor of the City of New York. His vision for the city was based on unification because as he states there is a “Tale between two cities”. Now it’s been a long time since reading that book but something did strike me as I looked to see the themes behind this great novel. In looking at the themes, one of them that stood out to me is the revolution of the nation’s poor under the aristocracy of the French bourgeoisie.

Just like the theme, in NYC it has gotten to the point where the city is divided between the rich and the poor; granted the poor is not at the extreme end of the spectrum where a revolution is on the horizon, but the status of those who are struggling is getting national and even international attention. The question I love to ask myself is how NYC which has the 4th largest budget in the country (Behind U.S., California and New York State), has over 8 million people and yet the richest among the world live on one strip east to west on 57th street and the poorest are hustling their way either in shelters or on the subway?

According to Marcuse, “the economic upgrading within the neighborhood, and is generally measured in market terms, represented by changes in land values, housing prices, incomes, wealth. It can be in both directions, it will typically lead to the pricing out of originally resident lower income households and their replacement by those of higher income, the process is known as gentrification. It is the primary motor of population displacement.” [39]
To the recipient that is entering these neighborhoods, they are witnessing the results of an investment that was catered to them which doesn’t have the long-term residents cause or concern at heart. It is through these scenarios that cause major frustration among the residents in the communities who feel that these new resources should have been invested in their communities; while one cannot deny that because of economic development it did help communities within the region to be better, it shouldn’t have to wait for a gentrifier to come in to force it to happen,

“There is also an effect that hurt our neighborhoods as well, known as abandonment, where the Economic Downgrading within the neighborhood, also generally measured in market terms, which will generally be accompanied by physical downgrading and a net loss of adequate and affordable housing for those of lower income.” [40] The best example of this is what took place in Bedford-Stuyvesant where “white flight” took place and real-estate developers, along with the city had red-lined the neighborhood, saying its unfit for living; the city left the neighborhood for dead, to be abrupt and now those same homes are over a million dollars apiece at its minimum.

In looking at this map we can see that the income inequality is alive and well in Central Brooklyn in comparison to a particular part of Red Hook and Lower Manhattan (Table G). To me this can be interpreted as seeing the residents of the region still struggle despite the economic upgrading of the communities.
In an article, Mayor Bill de Blasio stated that, “We should feel some outrage at this moment,” he said. “Outrage, honest outrage, is one of the things that moves social change. There has not been a recognition that a growing concentration of wealth in the hands of the few could seriously set us back as a nation.” With chagrin, de Blasio noted 46 percent of people live at or below the poverty line in New York, while at the same time an apartment in Manhattan just sold for 100 million dollars.” [41].

A group of millionaires in a letter addressed to Governor Cuomo stated "It is a shameful fact that child poverty in New York State is at a record level, exceeding 50% in some of our urban centers," the authors wrote, in an opinion piece in The Guardian. "New York State has a record number of homeless families -- more than 80,000 people -- struggling to survive across the state. And far too many adults in our state do not have the work skills needed for the 21st century economy." "We can well afford to pay our current taxes," they stressed. "And we can afford to pay even more."[42]
To sum it up, Emily Miles, the chief program and policy officer for the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, said “that the stark difference in income within Brooklyn is exacerbated by the rising cost of living in the borough. While the number of New Yorkers in poverty has not changed substantially, there are many residents that have not reached the “self-sufficiency” threshold; they cannot meet their basic needs without public assistance despite being gainfully employed.” [41] This is the unfortunate reality of many residents within Central Brooklyn who are African-American.

VI. Politics

Voting is our right, but it is also our responsibility because if we don’t take the next step and elect leaders who are committed to building a better future for our kids, other rights, our rights to clean air, clean water, health and prosperity—are placed directly in harm’s way—Tom Steyer

The third and final proposed reason why African-Americans I feel are leaving Central Brooklyn is due to the political structure and climate that impact the communities. For several years now, I have encouraged and consistently challenged residents across the city to become civically engaged. While voting is the root and the foundation of American Democracy, it’s much more than just voting; from knowing your elected officials, to knowing your stakeholders that play a crucial role your community.

When looking at politics, it’s not just about the power of those who have a duty to represent the people, but it’s about the people themselves and the upward mobility of the people to thrive in the communities. In the African-American community, they are aware of the power of their vote on the national levels, but when it comes down to the city and state, the level of excitement in electing individuals to serve the interest of the residents in the region is not there.
From the community boards, to the elected officials (District Leaders, City Council, Mayor, NYS Senate and Assembly) are there to serve the interest of the people. While I can say that some of them are here to serve that duty, there are others who are in the pockets of the establishment (machine), corporations and the big factor: real estate developers.

Politics is not just about the elected officials who are sworn to serve the people, it’s about the policies that affect the people that changes generations of residents that are living in any neighborhood. New York City while as of today is an official true blue city on all levels of government, is not as truly progressive as it needs to be for the born and bred New Yorker that believes in the Empire State of Mind (Jay-Z), and not the Welcome to New York (Taylor Swift) experiences of this great city; especially when it comes to the African-American communities.

**Voter Participation**

Voting is the greatest and most powerful foundation of the American Democracy. When the people vote, their voices are heard loud and clear on all levels of government. There is a saying that “one vote can make a difference”, and in this country, we have witness that statement on numerous occasions throughout U.S. History. The impact that this statement is true is demonstrated on the state, city and local levels of government.

New York City, has over 8.6 million people as of today and according the statistics provided by the New York City Campaign Finance Board, “there are over 4.6 million active registered voters—more than ever before!!.” [43] If we look at the data from the 2017 voter turnout provided by the same organization, we can see that the excitement of voting really fluctuates. As we see in the chart (Table H), the number of people registered was not consistent, while it peaked in the 3rd and 4th quarters.
While registering voters is great, I strongly believe it’s nothing if the people are not coming out to vote and as we see in the next data chart (Table I), the voting turnout has gone down with a slow increase last year.
According to a report by the NYC Campaign Finance Board, “only 18 percent of these new voters turned out in last year's mayoral election, compared to 25 percent among all active registered voters. Turnout was especially low among the youngest new voters. The report shows newly registered voters in the 18-29 age group turned out at a rate of just over 13 percent, while newly registered voters 70 and older turned out at a rate of more than 30 percent. Not surprisingly, overall turnout was significantly higher for the 2016 presidential election, with more than 60 percent of voters casting ballots, and a 66 percent turnout among the newly registered.” [43]
When it comes down to the African-American voters, they have great power that can change the political climate of any level of government in the United States. No Democratic president, senator, governor, state legislator, mayor or member of congress can ever win New York State without the Black vote no matter how big or small. What I feel the problem is, is that when African-Americans don’t wield that power on the state and local levels of government.

According to the *Charlotte Post*, “African-Americans proved to themselves of how their vote truly matters despite the unfortunate laws and obstacles that stand in the way in 2018”. The reporter stated African Americans who have convinced themselves that one vote doesn’t matter, should take a very close look at what happened during the recent special election in Alabama... Jones was the first Democrat elected to represent Alabama in the U.S. Senate in 25 years. How he won is very important to African Americans across this nation.” [46]

The country witnessed the efforts of the Black vote that was in resemblance of the civil rights era when the Voting Rights Act passed and that generation of Black Voters came out in numbers to make sure that their voices were heard in whom they want to represent them. The article states, “exit polls showed that 98 percent of African American women who voted supported Jones and 93 percent of African American men who voted chose the Democratic candidate. Jones' victory by 1.5 percent clearly shows that, without the black vote, Jones wouldn't have won the special election.” [46]

Could you imagine how different the makeup of our nation would be on all levels of government if African-Americans were to consistently come out and vote as a massive bloc of over 95 percent each time there was the moment to vote? It would make a substantial difference in whom we elect, as well as what policies are passed to uplift their communities to thrive in the United States.
In looking at Brooklyn, there is something strange happening where residents who are Democrats are not even participating at all. WNYC.com states “that a WNYC analysis of state voter enrollment statistics found that the number of active registered Democrats dropped there by 63,558 voters between November 2015 and April 2016. That translates into a 7 percent drop in registered Democrats in the borough…But even though more than 60,000 people were dropped from the list of active registered Democrats in Brooklyn, there was only an increase of roughly 10,000 inactive voters in the county. That means some 50,000 voters are unaccounted for entirely.” [47]

What this illustrates to me is that due to inactive voting participation, it makes it very easy for incumbents to not only be re-elected, but on the city and state levels, you can win under 10,000 votes. This is one of the major paralysis of the true progressive direction the communities in Central Brooklyn to elect individuals who are here to serve the interest of the people. In Central Brooklyn we see the example of this in the 2017 NYC primary and general elections.

In Looking at the results from the 41st Councilmatic District (Table J) courtesy of WNYC.com, we can clearly how the voter participation took place where Councilwoman Alicka Ampry-Samuel won with less than 3500 votes
So in total, 10,557 residents participated in the 2017 NYC primary to determine who their next elected Council Member will be; a district that has over 100,000 residents in a major chunk of Central Brooklyn (which is also covered by parts of the 35th, the 36th and 40th districts). These

<table>
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<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Votes</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Alicka Ampry-Samuel</td>
<td>3,320</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Butler</td>
<td>2,318</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cory Provost</td>
<td>1,197</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moreen King</td>
<td>915</td>
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<td>Deidre Olivera</td>
<td>847</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor Jordan</td>
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<td>David Miller</td>
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<td>Leopold Cox</td>
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numbers are abysmal and it goes to show the lack of confidence the community has when it comes to electing the people who will impact them the most.

Once again, we have heard the powerful saying, “all politics happen on the local level.” yet the people in the communities don’t feel the confidence in their local elected officials because of the establishment (machine politics) that are focused on the power and not the people. When I ran for NYC Council, the average message that I received was “what makes you different from everyone else that came before you?”

That message really had me to think about the number of times the people were screwed over by individuals who knocked on their doors, headed to block parties and flooding their churches saying that they will be different, but unfortunately turned out to be the same. The African-American community in NYC must be absolutely frustrated by seeing this insane politics occur every 2-4 years (Between the City and State elections) which in turn hurts people who want to step up and lead because they are getting the brunt of the frustration.

Public Policies

“Winter is coming”—Eddard “Ned” Stark from HBO’s Game of Thrones

This three-word statement has literally changed the way we look at the season but it’s also symbolic in many ways; for the purpose of this paper we will look at it from the symbolism of gentrification. As mentioned earlier, Central Brooklyn for many decades was always Black, whether African-American or West-Indian. It wasn’t until several policies that were initiated that began opening the gates of white residents to begin to look back at the region and aim to take it back.
The first was the controversial Downtown Brooklyn Plan which according to an article by the Filipino Reporter, “allows for the creation of 4.5 million square feet of new commercial office space, 800,000 square feet of retail, 1,000 units of housing, new open space and retail amenities, as well as streetscape improvements. Already the city’s third-largest business district, the Plan builds on more than 7 million square feet of corporate office space created in the past two decades.” [48]

Now this plan appears to be going very well; if you ever take a stroll downtown Brooklyn today its absolutely amazing. With this policy however came the overall change and I dare to say colonization of what downtown Brooklyn was for the Black community in the borough. Once a mom and pop shopping district is now a mini Manhattan with expensive stores you were known for shopping at in the city. This plan pushed residents who were low-income in the area, which were majority Black, out of the neighborhood.

According to Citylimits.org., “activists, and many urban planning experts, too, contend that both the attention brought by a rezoning and the actual development that follows can transform a neighborhood into a destination, increasing demand for housing in that neighborhood and prompting landlords to raise rents.” [49]

Filmmakers Kelly Anderson and Allison Lirish Dean stated that “with this policy, many of the things we cherished about Brooklyn—its racial, economic, and social diversity, its unique independent businesses, and its vibrant street life—began to disappear. Downtown Brooklyn’s Fulton Mall, an eight-block pedestrian strip and collection of side streets sandwiched between two major city thoroughfares. Near where we both lived, Fulton Mall had been notoriously
resistant to gentrification for decades, holding out as a funky and bustling African-American and Caribbean shopping district that served Brooklyn’s working class.” [50]

The essence that made Brooklyn, well, Brooklyn for the Black community was no longer the same as Mayor Bloomberg was the architect for the gentrification that occurred nearly two decades ago. Since then, African-Americans signature stores are extinct, residents that were living in that area are displaced, changing the cultural atmosphere of the area. Brooklyn was beginning to act more like Manhattan each year.

The second policy that was enacted was the welcoming of the Barclays Center which was a partnership between the city (elected officials) and the private sector. The Barclays Center was received with a staunch divide from the residents within the borough. Mayor Bloomberg and Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz really pushed the city to make the borough be home to a professional sports team since the Dodgers left decades ago.

The Barclays center does have its benefits as it is indeed a neighborhood arena. According to the article stated by States News Service, “Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg today joined Forest City Ratner Companies Chairman and CEO Bruce Ratner to announce a plan to fill approximately 2,000 jobs at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn using the City's Workforce1 services. Priority hiring for the jobs, which will include full- and part-time positions, will be for residents of Brooklyn Community Boards 2, 3, 6 and 8, graduates of Brooklyn United for Innovative Local Development's training program, and New York City Housing Authority residents of Ingersoll, Whitman, Farragut, Atlantic Terminal, Wyckoff Gardens, Warren Street, Lafayette Gardens and Gowanus Houses.” [51]
Even to this day there are people working in the Barclays Center, who are from the neighborhoods of Central Brooklyn and NYCHA developments throughout the borough. While this is great, it really exhausted the energy of residents in the neighborhood and borough who didn’t want to this arena come to life.

According to NY Times, “facing symptoms of exhaustion, many are trying to reclaim their lives. Some sought peace by resettling dozens of blocks or thousands of miles away. But many others, especially those living in the shadow of the arena, wonder if they ever can disentangle themselves from a confrontation without an obvious endpoint. There is still the rest of the delayed development and its consequences. The $4.9 billion project of Bruce C. Ratner and his Forest City Ratner Companies calls for 15 soaring residential towers and a possible commercial building, and 25 years of construction, far longer than the initial plan. Promised low-priced housing and thousands of permanent jobs still do not exist.” [52]

The Barclays center was a major divide among the people within the borough and because it was built, it provided another example of how whole one thing looked good for the city, but greatly impacted the people in the communities around the Center especially, the African American Community.

In an article by Next City, “approximately 125 protesters led by Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE), a housing-focused community group made up largely of women of color, descended on the arena. “I feel it was a con game played by a few people against the people of Brooklyn,” said FUREE board member Beverly Corbin in front of the mesh of fashionably rusted steel and LED screens. The community has been divided since 2003, when developer Forest City Ratner first proposed building the 22-acre site in this congested part of Brooklyn. While the city and state pledged more than $300 million in subsidies and tax breaks
for the arena, some residents and activists protested and filed lawsuits against evictions, lack of community input and condemning the so-called ‘land-grab’.” [53]

What the development of the Barclays center brought was the betrayal of the elected officials in serving the people and advocating for what was best for them, sending many African-American families out of the area for it can pave a way for a new Brooklyn that involves the rich and hipsters who are changing the culture of the borough.

VII. Conclusion

After looking at each proposed reasons why African-Americans are leaving Central Brooklyn, I feel confident in saying that they are the driving force behind the unfortunate (or fortunate) exodus which is moving back to the South or heading our West. Atlanta has taken the crown as being the Mecca of Black America because it is one of, if not the only city where its population is more than 50% Black; that in itself speaks a lot because most African Americans have never experienced the sight of them in one city where they are in the majority.

Brooklyn has become very expensive and it is going through a major transformation where gentrification is taking over the entire borough one neighborhood at a time. Central Brooklyn has gone through a transformation so much so where whites are increasing in numbers, where one can predict in the next decade that elected officials who are African-American on the city and state levels, will have to compete with white residents who seek their position. On community boards, especially Boards 3 and 8, are increasing members who are a part of the gentrification movement and are expressing their voices in what they want to see in the communities.
More coffee shops, health bars and international diners are coming in the area; while it’s a
great thing, it is very costly for the long-term residents in the communities. The solution to
preventing African-Americans from leaving the region is rather simple. One, the city must be
bold in providing true affordable housing for the long-term residents in the community. The
second is that there has to be very strict policies that put an end to the harassment of African-
American homeowners who aren’t looking to sell their homes. The third is to have more training
for those who serve on the community boards, precinct council boards and other major
community organizations on knowing and connecting with the stakeholders in the community
that are of service to them.

The fourth concept is to make it easier for African-American entrepreneurs to receive startup
money to grow their businesses to serve their community. Lastly, to elect new, authentic and
innovative leaders whom will be unapologetically unbought and unbossed. These solutions are
just the beginning and not the final answer, but the change has to begin somewhere in order to
bring back the cultural and demographic identity that is Central Brooklyn: Black and Proud.

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JAMELL N.A. HENDERSON, MPA, MPP

Jamell Nimeneh Ali Henderson, born July 8, 1985 to the late Warren Henderson and the late Nancy J. Benjamin, Jamell has one brother Daheem Henderson and one sister Shakira Benjamin. Jamell is 33 years old, living in Brooklyn NY and has been independent since the age of 17. Jamell was in the NYC Foster Care System for 8 years and successfully aged out of the system at the age of 21. Jamell, during his time in foster care was blessed to have a wonderful foster mother, the late Ms. Betty Robinson. Ms. Robinson brought him to Bridge St. AME Church in Brooklyn NY, where the Rev. David B. Cousin Sr. is the pastor. Jamell has been a member of the Bridge St. family for 20 years and since being a part of the family, he has grown into a rising leader in the Church and community.

Jamell is a proud and historic 4-time CUNY Graduate, obtaining an Associate’s degree in Business Administration from the Borough of Manhattan Community College (’11), a Bachelor’s degree in Political Science from Brooklyn College (’15) and a Masters of Public Administration degree from the National Urban Fellows Graduate Program at Baruch College (’16). Jamell recently completed his 2nd Masters degree in Public Policy in the Fall of 2018 from the CUNY Graduate Center. Jamell is very proud to say that he accomplished this while being a current resident of NYCHA Kingsborough Houses in Brooklyn NY for the past 12 years. Jamell is determined to reach the pinnacle of his higher education journey by one day obtaining a PhD. Jamell continues his journey to his calling: To become the President of the United States. Each living moment he becomes one step closer as his destiny comes into fruition.

In February of 2017, Jamell has answered the challenge by President Barack Obama and decided to step into political leadership by announcing his candidacy for New York City Council in the 41st District of Brooklyn. Jamell became one of the youngest candidates to run in his district and since this bold decision, Jamell has become a rising public leader and figure in his community and city. Jamell proudly served as the

In February of 2017, Jamell has answered the challenge by President Barack Obama and decided to step into political leadership by announcing his candidacy for New York City Council in the 41st District of Brooklyn. Jamell became one of the youngest candidates to run in his district and since this bold decision, Jamell has become a rising public leader and figure in his community and city. Jamell proudly served as the
communications director for Councilwoman Alicka Ampry-Samuel of the 41st District of Brooklyn. Currently, Jamell is now taking his advocacy and leadership on the road as he looks to speak all across the nation to encourage the people to be more civic engaged and display their own unique style of leadership. Jamell delivered 4 Commencement keynote addresses and multiple keynote addresses to various organizations across the Tri-State Area. Jamell is expanding his leadership to new areas as he coached for the Hewitt School’s 5th/6th Grade Women’s Cross Country Track Team and the Friend’s Seminary 7th/8th Grade Men’s Soccer Team and Friends Seminary Varsity Men and Women’s Indoor Track Team.

On top of all that he does, Jamell decides to become an entrepreneur by becoming the founder and CEO of Jamell N.A. Henderson Consulting Group Inc., where he talks all of his gifts and talents of political and civic engagement across the country. Jamell was also elected Chairperson of Neighborhood Advisory Board #8, serving the neighborhoods of Crown Heights, Prospect Heights and Weeksville in Brooklyn, making him one of the youngest chairpersons in the City of New York.

Jamell’s consistent dedication to education, leadership and service goes unparalleled. Throughout the course of his academia, Jamell has served as senior member of the Ernesto Malave Leadership Academy for 2 years; obtained the position as IDC Chairperson for the class of 2015 CUNY NYS Model Senate Program; completed the 2015 SOMOS Internship Program where he was assigned to Assemblyman Felix Ortiz and proudly served as the Co-Chair of the Scholarship Committee of the University Student Senate. Jamell was also selected to complete a 9-month mentorship in the City of Indianapolis under the leadership of Mayor Gregory Ballard and Mayor Joe Hogsett. Jamell has led and facilitated many workshops emphasizing leadership, civic engagement, politics, church and the community.

Jamell served twice as a young adult member on Community Board 8, which is comprised of the Crown Heights, Weeksville and Prospect Heights neighborhoods in Brooklyn. Jamell continues to expand his leadership and influence, as he is now a proud member of the New York Urban League Young Professionals. As of October 31st, 2016, Jamell currently acts as President of the Young People 4 Young People, a non-profit organization focusing on providing advocacy and leadership to young people inside and outside of foster care. Jamell is a strong African-American man who feels that it is time for the youth and young adults to rise up and play a vital role in their church, school and community. Jamell’s passion for leadership has elevated him to serve in over 13 Presidential positions in various organizations, a major accomplishment that many cannot say they have done.

Jamell also educates and trains in what he is truly gifted in; the essence of leadership. Jamell’s accomplishments include, becoming the Bridge St. AME Church 2002 Youth of the Year, 2008 Young Adult of the Year; Receiving citations from the NYS Senate and NYS Assembly, a Proclamation from Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, The New York City Council and a letter of accomplishment from Mayor Michael Bloomberg for his service in leadership. Jamell has also received numerous awards from BMCC, Brooklyn
College and CUNY. Among all of this, Jamell received a letter of recognition from President Barack Obama for his contribution to the American Public in leadership and service in 2017. Jamell has traveled 23 states and 4 international countries to date. Jamell has held numerous leadership positions throughout various organizations and has made a substantial impact on all that he focused his gifts on. Jamell was a blogger for Huffington Post and has recently been featured in the NY Amsterdam News.

Outside of all of this, Jamell is a highly energetic, humorous and charismatic young man of God. Jamell enjoys cooking, traveling, spending time with his friends and family, watching his favorite show Martin, but most of all having fun while making a difference in someone’s life. Jamell truly believes that if you work hard, you can play hard and he lives by that creed. Jamells’ personal quote, change begins with one, and therefore it begins with me, reinforces his life’s purpose as a catalyst for change. Jamell feels that if he uses the gifts that God has given him to make a difference in someone’s life daily, then he has accomplished his daily work for the Lord. His humility and love for all lead him to a true message that he believes in; “Let the Work that I do for God, the work I do for the people, and the uniqueness of my character speak for me.”