

Caribbean Migration in the Age of Globalization: Transnationalism, Race, and Ethnic Identity

Rose-Marie Chierici

Foner, Nancy (Ed.). *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York*. Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2001. viii + 304 pp. including references and index. \$55.00 cloth, \$22.50 paper.

Laguerre, Michel S. *Diasporic Citizenship: Haitian Americans in Transnational America*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. viii + 222 pp. including index. \$24.95 paper.

Levitt, Peggy. *The Transnational Villagers*. Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2001. xiii + 281 pp. including maps, references, and index. \$48.00 cloth, \$18.95 paper.

A cursory look into the history of immigration reveals a great deal about American perceptions and attitudes toward race and how these notions have influenced the process of assimilation of Caribbean people into mainstream American culture. Attention to immigration also highlights the

ROSE-MARIE CHIERICI is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the State University of New York at Geneseo. Her current focus is applied anthropology. Dr. Chierici has been doing community development research and applied work in the northwest of Haiti since 1995. She has also conducted research with Haitian migrant farm workers in upstate New York and with Haitian immigrants in general. Her publications include Demele "Making It": Migration and Adaptation among Haitian Boat People in the United States (AMS Press, 1991); "Lifting the veil of anonymity: A Haitian refugee's tale of rejections, a lesson for the anthropologist" (Identities 2(4), 1996); "Mentored experiences: from student fieldwork to development praxis" (Anthropology of Work Review XIX(4), 1999); and, with Margaret Gadon and Pat Riós, "Afro-American migrant farmworkers: A culture in isolation. A focus group study of variations in HIV risk, knowledge and health beliefs of Haitian, Jamaican and African American farmworkers" (AIDS Care 13(6), 2001).

Address correspondence to Rose-Marie Chierici, Department of Anthropology, SUNY-Geneseo, 1 College Circle, Geneseo, NY 14454. E-mail: chierici@geneseo.edu

evolution of larger social, economic, and cultural processes that characterize modern migration such as transnationalism, globalization, and diasporic citizenship. The books reviewed in this essay explore these issues by looking at Caribbean migration to the U.S. Caribbean migration to the U.S. is not a new phenomenon; it began as early as colonial times. Laguerre notes that transcontinental and intrahemispheric migration “has been of currency since the era of the European expansion and colonization of the New World. The free movement of colonists, colonial administrators, merchants and missionaries, and the forced migration of slaves created a transcontinental circulation of peoples, goods, capital and ideas that tied the New World to the Old World in a multiplex web of relationships” (p. 5).

Yet, while Caribbean migration to the U.S. is not a new phenomenon, Caribbean immigrants have found it more difficult to assimilate into American society than other groups (Foner, 1987; Pessar, 1995; Stepick, 1998). As they reach critical mass, however, Caribbean-Americans are beginning to make their presence felt in the American scene and gain political and economic strength. In the process, they challenge the American notion of a monolithic black, racialized identity and illustrate the diversity of Caribbean societies by displaying their unique ethnic identities.

What makes the Caribbean migration experience so different from other types of migration? The books reviewed here explore various facets of this question from different ethnic and theoretical perspectives. They all contrast the centrality of race as a defining characteristic in American society to the fluidity of this concept and the salience of ethnicity in Caribbean cultures. They all use a transnational perspective to study various aspects of Caribbean migration and adaptation to American culture. This focus on transnationalism and globalization as central aspects of the migration experience shed light on new legal, political, and social issues that arise as a result of the “dissolution” of the relevance of the nation-state.

In *Diasporic Citizenship*, Laguerre elaborates a theoretical framework that explains how transnational practices of immigrant communities, the flow of cultural notions, and global processes come together to create “a new kind of citizen, the *diasporic citizen*, and to imagine some of the ramifications and consequences of this *modus vivendi* for the citizen-subject and the state” (p. 178). His particular lens is the experience of Haitian immigrants in the U.S. Levitt, on the other hand, has a narrower focus. In *Transnational Villagers* she explores the transnational nature of migrant identity and the globalization of the concepts of nation and national identity through the notion of social remittances. She elaborates her very useful earlier definition of social remittances to explain how “ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital. . .flow from host to receiving-country communities” (p. 54). These exchanges bind the transnational village created between Dominican

immigrants in Boston and the town of Miraflores in the Dominican Republic. Contributors to the Foner volume stress other aspects of transnational ties among West Indian immigrants in New York City. They are more interested in the influence of race, ethnicity, and gender on the formation of transnational identity among first- and second-generation West Indians. Together, the various chapters provide a comprehensive, multidisciplinary overview of the salient issues that shape the lives of West Indians and the strategies that they use to maintain ethnic identity. In a way, these immigrants display characteristics of the diasporic citizen that Laguerre describes.

NEW PARADIGMS IN MIGRATION STUDIES: DIASPORIC CITIZENSHIP

Laguerre's aim in *Diasporic Citizenship* is to develop a theoretical framework that helps explain the "broader issues that link the diaspora to both the homeland and the receiving country" (p. 3). While his focus is the Haitian diaspora in the United States, he maintains that since the adaptation process is pretty much the same for all immigrants and is "not peculiar to any particular ethnic or racial group" (p. 95), his model can be used to study other groups as well. He uses a critical transnational perspective to analyze the adaptation of immigrants in American society and the border-crossing practices they engage in as they maintain relations with their homeland (p. 3). He notes that already in 1916 Bourne had stressed the significance of transnational processes and the limited relevance of the nation-state in his theory of transnational migration and diasporic citizenship (p. 6). Bourne drew attention not simply to the migration process but also to the transformation and hybridization of American culture and society and the impact of immigrants on the sending country. Through immigration, Bourne noted that "America is coming to be, not a nationality but a transnationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and color" (in Laguerre, p. 6). Bourne's prediction has certainly become true in the modern, multicultural U.S. described in *Diasporic Citizenship*. In this "loosely bordered," globalized space, immigrant life may be interpreted in terms of *continuity* rather than *disruption*, and *rerootedness* rather than *uprootedness* (p. 4). Immigration becomes an intrinsic mechanism in the structural deployment of the globalization process, and one that obliterates in several ways the competence and the autonomy of the nation-state.

In this book, Laguerre sets out to show that transnational processes have always been part of the ethos of immigrant life, whether in latent or overt form. He compares two waves of Haitian immigration to the U.S., one that arrived between 1791 and 1803 around the time of the Haitian revolution

and the other more recent migration that peaked in the 1980s. The first group, which represented a cross-section of the then French colony's society, left the island to escape the political and economic turmoil caused by the slave revolt that led to Haiti's independence in 1804. They settled in various cities in the U.S. like Baltimore, Charleston, and New York but maintained social, economic, and political ties with family and friends in Haiti and in other parts of the world. They left their imprint in their place of settlement by creating successful businesses and organizations. Laguerre briefly revisits these earlier diasporic communities to "present in a new light some of the incipient mechanisms that are at work in the technology of diasporic citizenship" (p. 32) and draws attention to transnational practices already in place during colonial times. Interestingly, Laguerre dedicates his book to three influential Haitian-American women who started Catholic convents in Baltimore; they represent one of the first examples where black women "moved from being household managers to being corporate managers" (p. 47).

Laguerre contrasts these early settlers to the contemporary diasporic community in New York City. Chapter 3 introduces the more recent wave of refugees and immigrants who entered the U.S. between 1957 and 1996 when tens of thousands of Haitians left the island to resettle in New York, Miami, Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, Washington DC, New Orleans, and other American cities. He identifies three main push factors that prompted this mass migration, which also unfolded in three stages. Politicians and members of the upper class were the first to leave after Francois Duvalier used brute force to establish his dictatorship. As educated professionals, they were able to find jobs in their fields and to settle in middle class neighborhoods. However, when Duvalier's son replaced him in 1971, the economic situation worsened and migrants from urban as well as rural areas began arriving in large numbers, some as undocumented "boat people." Contrary to the first group, these immigrants were not as prepared as their predecessors to enter the job market and settled mainly in service and low-paid employment. The second push factor was the rise of Castro's regime in 1957 and the closing of the sugar cane industry to Haitian seasonal workers. This dealt a major blow to the Haitian economy, which could no longer rely on remittances from migrants who had established long-term associations with growers in Cuba. The third push factor was the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which signaled a lessening of racial tension in American society and a move toward prointegration policies (p. 76). Haitians saw this shift as an opportunity for black immigrants to find a more welcoming environment and assimilate into American society.

The Haitian population in the U.S., estimated at close to 1.5 million (p. 86), is spread mainly between New York, Florida, and Massachusetts, with

New York City as the political, economic, religious, and cultural center of the diaspora. American policy toward Haitian immigrants has fluctuated over time in response to political pressures and often reflects a double standard—especially when one looks at the differential treatment of Cuban and Haitian refugees. The “color issue” seems to underlie how Haitians have been received in the U.S. “Racial considerations have been a major factor in the US government’s refusal to grant refugee or asylum status to Haitians who were fleeing state terrorism and political turmoil” (p. 14). Race and prejudice also affect how Haitians assimilate in American society, i.e., the kinds of neighborhoods they live in, the services they can access, and their options for upward mobility.

In chapters 4 through 8, Laguerre gives a sweeping overview of the salient features of the Haitian immigrant community of New York. The most interesting and promising is chapter 4, in which Laguerre articulates a model to explain how first-generation Haitian immigrant families function in the diaspora. He argues that “the Haitian immigrant family-household functions like a firm which may consist of a headquarters-household linked to one or more subsidiary-households, or of one or more subsidiary-households linked to a headquarters-household” (p. 95). Over time, the family, like a corporation, makes investments, creates and manages a budget, makes short- and long-term plans, and invests in the future well being of the institution and its members. It also goes through periods of expansion and contraction and may even engage in mergers and takeovers. This model, which draws a great deal on microeconomic theory of the firm, is useful in analyzing strategies that Haitian immigrants use to meet their survival needs. In this case, migration is a culturally viable option and a long-term solution to economic problems and education goals. It is also a group strategy that involves all family members in the decision-making process and in sharing costs (such as initial investments in travel and settlement of the migrant) and benefits (such as gifts and remittances). The model highlights the transnational aspects and dynamics of migration and can be applied in other contexts and with other first-generation groups.

The issues examined in the chapters that follow flesh out some of the elements of the model. Chapter 5 focuses on economic and entrepreneurial activities that serve the ethnic enclave and tie it to the homeland. Restaurants, freight forwarders, grocery stores, and travel agencies are part of a “transnational ethnic niche” (p. 113) that supports ethnic culture and provides cohesion to the community. The role of the Haitian media as “an important arena in the construction of diasporic citizenship and identity” and as an “effective link to the mainland, the host country and the diaspora” (p. 129) is the topic of chapter 6. In chapter 7, Laguerre explores the role of schools as the arena where assimilation begins for younger members of

the first generation and for second-generation immigrants. It is the site where ethnic identity is most strongly contested. The immigrants' cultural background and socioeconomic status, including language proficiency, parents' level of education and employment, and kind of neighborhood, also determine their ability to succeed in the school system and, ultimately, in American society. Chapter 8 looks at diasporic politics as the stage where border-crossing practices and the boundaries of nation-states are evaluated and negotiated. Political action and political changes take place on both sides: Haitian candidates campaign in New York; Haitian immigrants lobby and pressure the American government on behalf of the Haitian government and the Haitian people; and diasporic Haitians become involved in local Haitian politics through grassroots organizations, and through involvement in the political process pass on their own vision of a democratic society. It is through these processes that diasporic citizenship is elaborated and constructed. Laguerre mentions that as yet there is no legal recognition of this concept by individual nation-states, for obvious political reasons.

The heart of the book is its conclusion. Here Laguerre demonstrates how globalization and the transnational practices described in the previous chapters have brought about changes in the way citizenship is expressed and the role of the nation-state. "Transnationalism is a central process through which globalization takes hold and the global web of a multiple-layered network of sites of interactive relations is maintained" (p. 184). The end result is a blurring of the boundaries of civic, cultural, social, and economic relations and the emergence of new paradigms. These new paradigms have yet to be adequately theorized and nation-states have yet to sort out their position on these emerging concepts and generate policies to regulate new practices. For example: What are the rights and obligations of diasporic citizens? Who has control over these citizens? How are resources to be managed, allocated, and exchanged in a globalized marketplace? What are the obligations of nation-states toward citizens in a transnational framework? And, ultimately, are nation-states still relevant? Laguerre adds that diasporic citizenship is a fact of life and that globalization, international migration, and transnational practices are well entrenched (p. 191). These matters are extremely relevant to Caribbean immigrants who have held minority, second-class status in the U.S. "Diasporic citizenship provides a way of escaping complete minoritization since the link with the homeland allows one to enjoy the majority status one cannot exercise in the adopted country" (p. 192). As will be pointed out later, this kind of analysis helps contextualize the practices described by Levitt and the contributors to the Foner volume.

In this book, Laguerre offers useful analytical tools to study the flow of ideas and goods across national borders and a language to talk about diasporic and transnational practices. Its weak point is that it is short on

ethnography and that the voices of the immigrants are often absent. This is unfortunate since his earlier writings were masterful ethnographies; among my favorites are *American Odyssey* (Laguerre, 1984) and “The Impact of Migration on Haitian Family Organization” (Laguerre, 1978). However, when *Diasporic Citizenship* is read in the context of Laguerre’s other works, one appreciates its maturity and scholarship. As usual, Laguerre provides a comprehensive bibliography. This book should be consulted by anyone interested in transnationalism and diasporic issues.

TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES: DOMINICAN IMMIGRANTS IN BOSTON

In *Transnational Villagers*, Levitt illustrates the paradigm shift in migration studies away from “conventional notions about the assimilation of immigrants into host countries and about migration’s impact on sending-country life” (p. 3), to an interest in the transnational nature of contemporary migration and the emergence of what Laguerre calls “diasporic citizenship”. This study addresses three specific aspects of Dominican migration to the U.S.: the significance of transnational processes for receiving as well as sending countries; the fluid character of migrants’ identity and allegiances; and the blurring of the concepts of nation-state and national identity. To show the complex and dynamic nature of transnational migration, Levitt identifies the various players on the migration scene and describes the links between the Dominican migrant enclave of Jamaica Plains in Boston and the village of Miraflores in the Dominican Republic. She outlines a picture of migration as a series of exchanges and connections that have far-reaching impacts in both home and receiving countries and beyond the individuals and their immediate families. Ideas, goods, information, gossip, and financial and social resources flow efficiently within the “transnational village” created between Boston and Miraflores; “it is as if village life takes place in two settings” (p. 2). She also situates the transnational village within wider spheres of influence that connect it to municipal, national, and international processes. “Local-level transnational activities are also reinforced by the growing numbers of global economic and governance structures that make decision-making and problem-solving across borders increasingly common” (p. 4).

The book is divided into three parts. In Part One, Levitt provides an overview of the history of Dominican migration and introduces the concept of social remittances around which she frames her analysis. She demonstrates that the recent Dominican migration to the U.S. is the result of the two-hundred-year history of American influence in the Dominican Republic:

“U.S. economic, political, and cultural quasi-colonization of the republic throughout its history and the pattern of land tenure, commercial agriculture, and industrial development that ensued sowed the seeds of large-scale migration long before it began” (p. 31). Large-scale Dominican migration to the U.S. began at the end of the 1960s during the Bosch left-wing presidency and the unrest that followed his U.S.-sponsored overthrow. It then escalated, fueled by the failed fiscal policies of later administrations and the effects of IMF-imposed structural adjustment policies in the 1980s and 1990s (p. 42). Thus, American intrusion in Dominican affairs and the significant contributions of Dominican immigrants to their home economy have created a twin pattern of migration and dependency that has serious implications for American and Dominican societies. Levitt uses the concept of “social remittances” (p. 54) to examine how this “culture of migration” (p. 17) affects both sending and receiving communities.

In Part Two, Levitt outlines the ways in which “migration and social remittances reshape the stages of the life cycle and in the process constitute and perpetuate transnational community” (p. 74). She evaluates the benefits and costs of migration on individuals, families, and communities and shows how “migration transforms family, work, and schooling in Miraflores in ways that heighten divisions and reinforce community at the same time” (p. 96). Immigrants and nonmigrants are linked in a cycle of interdependency; nonmigrants rely on the economic support of those who work abroad, and the “migrants need those who remain behind to raise their children, manage their affairs, and show them the respect they are denied in Boston” (p. 96). Levitt focuses on three areas where this tension is most felt—gender, race, and the law.

While in Part Two Levitt focuses on the transformation of cultural patterns and values, in Part Three she highlights how institutions are influenced by transnational practices. She examines three types of institutions that foster the maintenance of a transnational identity and the importance of social remittances in creating transnational community between Boston and Miraflores—politics, religion, and community development. Each of these areas illustrates a different form of transnational exchange. Political life is increasingly enacted across borders in migrant communities. While migrants living in Boston are involved in Dominican politics and have a say in the political process back home, Dominican candidates travel to Boston to raise funds and advance their political agendas. Migrants lobby the U.S. government on behalf of people in the Dominican Republic, and U.S. politicians seek the support of immigrant communities. Social and economic remittances are so significant to the Dominican government that it is willing to accommodate migrants’ needs, such as allowing double citizenship and the right of Dominicans living abroad to vote in Dominican elections.

“The Catholic Church acts and achieves transnationally” (p. 168) and has survived through its ability to globalize its institution and its message. The Church provides emotional and spiritual support to migrants and is a natural channel through which Mirafloreños maintain ties across borders, exchange ideas, and influence social and cultural change. Cultural differences in the way Dominicans worship, their expectations of religious leaders and of lay people as well as cultural notions about God and faith and the constraints of life in Boston, often lead immigrants to rethink their participation in American church activities. Dominican communal religious practices, so reflective of Dominican culture, are challenged in the face of the individualism of American culture and religious practices.

Community development organizations are the third type of institution that Levitt profiles in the book. More than political parties and the Church, community organizations act transnationally to achieve locally (p. 180). Levitt explores the role of transnational community development groups that link immigrant development organizations in Boston with similar groups in Miraflores. The main purpose of these organizations is to orchestrate community development programs funded by migrants’ contributions and implemented by villagers. Over the years, these organizations have sponsored projects such as a village school, a funeral home, a community center, and training programs. Frustrated with their marginal position in American society, migrants also find community development an excellent opportunity to exert some influence and increase their social capital in Miraflores. Levitt observes that community development does generate friction; migrants feel that villagers have grown accustomed to remittances and assistance and do not carry their fair share of the collaboration; villagers complain that migrants want to be seen as benefactors but have lost touch with community issues.

The keystone of Levitt’s analysis is the concept of social remittances, which she defines as “the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from host to sending-communities” (p. 54). They represent “the social and cultural resources that migrants bring with them to the countries that receive them” and “the new cultural products [that] emerge and challenge the lives of those who stay behind” (p. 55). Levitt uses this concept to trace where change happens and who is affected, how change takes place, and the factors that influence change.

Levitt recognizes the transactional nature of migration when she describes the critical role of those who remain at home and make it possible for migrants to work and earn money for the extended family. In return for remittances and support, “stay-at-homes” take care of the children and property of those who work abroad. They are also the keepers of tradition and culture and help maintain the image of the homeland as the idyllic place

where one's heart is. These images and myths of home sustain the migrants as they struggle in their adopted communities. The adopted country is where migrants make money but home is where they have an identity, where they fit.

The status of migrants increases with their ability to influence change and remain involved in family and community affairs. They accumulate social capital through active participation in the home community. Through telephone calls, frequent visits, videos, gifts, and remittances, migrants model new behaviors and values and also influence how Mirafloresños perceive themselves and their culture.

"To survive you begin losing your cultural roots," says a migrant (p. 172). Among the most significant changes that Levitt identifies is the challenge of traditional gender roles and gender identity. Migrant women find it difficult to negotiate traditional values and American gender roles. They feel forced to re-evaluate these notions and to adapt to American gender expectations. Women also find fulfillment in their ability to earn money and their greater decision-making power. They model these new ideas for those back in Miraflores and thus influence how Mirafloresños perceive their social and cultural environment. "Social remittances and cross-border parenting have transformed parent-child relations" as well (p. 82). As parents often have to leave children behind or send children back to Miraflores to be cared for by grandparents and relatives, they tend to lose touch with them and neglect their education.

The cost of this turmoil on migrants' quality of life is high, and some wonder whether leaving the comforts of a tight-knit community for the anonymity of a big city is worth the effort. Migration fever, the lure of an easy life in the U.S., overshadows the reality of migrants' hard labor and the rigors of life in the U.S. Young adults as well as older people increasingly reject Dominican traditional values of hard work and rely instead on remittances from their parents and relatives. Migrants do little to dispel these perceptions. In fact, they perpetuate the myths by trying to meet the unrealistic expectations of stay-at-homes. Remittances also create social divisions among children. Those who have migrant parents are better dressed and await the day when their parents will send for them while others feel they cannot compete or keep up.

Dominican notions of race are even more resistant to change than gender. Antiblack sentiments are strong among Dominicans who stress their Spanish ancestry and think of themselves as whites. They find it difficult to accept that Americans see them as blacks. Their strategy is to differentiate themselves from African Americans and Haitians and identify as Latinos. The experience of racism and discrimination reinforces migrants' transnational attachments. Migrants realize they will never be allowed to achieve full

membership in the U.S. and prefer to focus on maintaining their status as Mirafloreños and to prepare for their return home (p. 111). However, going back is not easy and migrants find themselves stuck between two worlds and not comfortable in either.

Levitt raises interesting questions, and her analysis sheds light on a process that is difficult to document and evaluate. The framework that she uses helps to tease out how transnational migration actually works for Dominicans. Laguerre's notion of family as a corporate unit could be a useful heuristic tool to help theorize the process described in the book.

Levitt brings up an important query when she notes that remittances will keep flowing only as long as migrants have social and emotional ties with the homeland. It will be valuable to follow the second generation of Dominican Americans to assess if they will play a role in the future development of Miraflores. First-generation migrants still hold hopes of returning home to build their dream house, start a business, "be somebody." The second generation sees its future as assimilated Americans. Therefore, the tendency of sending countries to rely on remittances to support their economies is not very sound. Levitt also notes that migration has become an institutionalized strategy to solve economic problems. It does seem a short-sighted method of solving long-term problems, as the mood in receiving countries changes with economic and political situations.

Although this case study focuses on the experience of Dominican immigrants in Boston and their link to the village of Miraflores in the Dominican Republic, it is helpful in understanding the transnational nature of migration and the subtle changes in the way people view the role of nation-states and the definition of citizenship. However, this aspect is not well developed in the book; it is implied but not explicitly elaborated.

The most interesting parts of the book are chapter 2, in which Levitt outlines her analytical framework, and the ethnographically rich Part Two. The conclusion provides a good overview of the salient aspects of Levitt's analysis while the methodology is outlined in an appendix. The book also has a good bibliography. This book would be of interest to anthropology students and of great value to those involved in diasporic studies and transnationalism.

SKATING ALONG THE HYPHEN OF A DOUBLE IDENTITY: WEST INDIAN IMMIGRANTS IN NEW YORK CITY

Foner's edited volume, *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York City*, is the most interesting book of the three reviewed here. Contributors to this volume offer a comprehensive picture of the significant

issues that West Indian immigrants face as they adapt to life in New York City. The book is divided into three sections and begins with an Introduction by Nancy Foner. A conclusion by Philip Kasinitz is also the last chapter of Part III. While all of the essays are interesting and contribute to the larger picture, I find Part II, Transnational Perspectives, and Part III, Race, Ethnicity, and the Second Generation, to be particularly significant, especially when compared to the Laguerre and Levitt volumes. Using a multidisciplinary perspective, *Islands in the City* integrates different aspects of the study of West Indian migration and expands the discussions of race, ethnicity, assimilation, and the position of West Indian immigrants in American society. In her introduction to the volume, Foner notes that a “wide range of factors—economic, political, social, and cultural—in the Caribbean and New York . . . shape why (and which) West Indians leave their homelands and what happens after they move, but also the different economic and power relations in the contemporary, postcolonial world order” (p. 7). This book explores these factors successfully. While patterns of migration and the impact of migration on sending countries are not neglected, the focus is clearly on assimilation and adaptation to American culture. Transnational practices and transnational identities are explored to illuminate the American experience rather than the transactional nature of migration and its impact on sending countries. The theoretical and analytical contributions made by Laguerre and Levitt further situate these essays within the broader context of Caribbean migration and the study of migration and globalization.

Foner’s Introduction provides an overview of the main topics highlighted in the essays and notes that two major themes run through all the articles in this volume: race and transnationalism (p. 3). Being black is a salient aspect of being West Indian in New York, and blackness continues to be the “ ‘master status’ that pervades and penetrates” the lives of West Indian New Yorkers (p. 10). Their blackness determines how West Indians move around the city and interact with peer and other members of society. It also influences immigrants’ quality of life as well as their potential for social and economic success. Yet, West Indians have a strong sense of ethnic as well as racial identity that helps them cope with the effects of racism and discrimination. Advances in technology and communication make it possible for migrants to operate more or less simultaneously in New York and the West Indies, thus reducing the effects of separation and preserving social ties. Contrary to Dominican migrants described by Levitt, West Indians do not belong to transnational villages or localities and do not create village-based associations (p. 9). Rather, they form voluntary associations that cross-cut local community ties and are more island-focused. West Indians also maintain ties with peers and relatives in other parts of the world. In this sense, they are true diasporic citizens (see Laguerre volume reviewed here).

West Indian immigrants are changing the social landscape of New York City and their emigration also has important consequences for West Indian nations. Caribbean emigration is not a new phenomenon. Interisland migration as well as migration to countries bordering the Caribbean Sea has been an acceptable option for this group for quite a while. In his essay, in Foner's volume Watkins-Owens uses historical records to retrace the migration history of this group and of West Indian women in particular. She points out the contributions of women in maintaining transnational social networks and organizing West Indian neighborhoods while men focused on developing professional careers and building political alliances with African Americans. Model (also in the Foner volume) traces the employment history of West Indian immigrants and the role of employment niches in helping migrants find their place in the American economic sector. Residential *nitcking* has become a well-established adaptive strategy among this group of immigrants. West Indians congregated in ethnic neighborhoods to escape the "social and spatial stigma attached to being black in America" (p. 82). While economic and residential *nitcking* ease the transition to a new culture, it can also hinder migrants' social and economic mobility.

Race is a dominant paradigm in American culture, and the contributors to *Islands in the City* explore how it affects all aspects of West Indian immigrants' lives—from employment and residential patterns to how West Indians view themselves and how others perceive them. Vickerman observes that American racism has created and thrived on an almost monolithic view of people of African ancestry (p. 237). Americans' notions of race and their perceptions of people of African ancestry were shaped in colonial times when to be black meant to be a slave. The one-drop rule that evolved over the years reified the association between African ancestry, skin color, and inferiority by holding that individuals of even remote African ancestry are "black" (p. 239). On the other hand, West Indians' concepts of race differ significantly and provide the backdrop for immigrants' interpretations of race relations in the U.S. In the West Indies, and the Caribbean in general, race is conceptualized within a more complex framework. Since interracial mixes are more common in the Caribbean, the focus is more on skin shade and social class. The criteria for defining race are diffuse rather than sharp and take into consideration one's education, status, and wealth as well as one's skin shade. People recognize a wide range of variations in skin colors—from dark to light—rather than a plain opposition between white and black. Throughout the Caribbean there is an understanding that money and prestige whiten: a rich black person is a mulatto, and a poor mulatto is black.

West Indians arriving in the U.S. are baffled and stumped by American society's fascination with race and the use of race as a defining marker of

one's worth and position. Vickerman remarks that West Indian immigrants gradually realize the social cost of having black skin and come to see that African ancestry has serious implications in the U.S. In a sense, their situation is reversed since they come from societies where "blackness" is normal, unmarked, in the same way that "whiteness" is in the U.S. (p. 241). Blackness carries several consequences for black immigrants. Model, and Crowder and Tedrow see its effects in West Indians' patterns of employment and residence; Waters explores the impact of cultural and structural racism on West Indian immigrants' ability to assimilate into mainstream culture; Rogers notes that race has both political significance and ideological implications for West Indian immigrants; and Bobb and Clark argue that immigrant blacks "must assimilate into a social system with a racial hierarchy that structurally relegates black people of all classes to the bottom of the racial ladder" (p. 218).

Many see blacks as a homogeneous group and "ignore how class, gender, and *ethnic* [sic] divisions within race may shape reality differently for members of the group" (p. 64). In his essay, Rogers alludes to a conundrum in American racial politics that fails to appreciate that although "black immigrants share a racial group classification with African Americans; they also have claims to a distinctive ethnic identity separate from the racial status they share with native-born blacks" (p. 165). Afro-Caribbean immigrants "define themselves from a different frame of reference than their native-born counterparts" (p. 167). They see no need to make a dichotomous choice, but instead embrace both racial and ethnic identities without contradiction (p. 175). As blacks they share racial group classification with African Americans and thus are as vulnerable to racial prejudice as American blacks. Yet, as distinct ethnic groups, they tend to distance themselves from African Americans. The differences between race and ethnic identity are highlighted in patterns of residence, as West Indians form distinct ethnic enclaves within black neighborhoods (p. 110).

West Indians are often defined as a model minority group that strives to achieve economic success. Waters notes the "boomerang effect" of this kind of success which can reinforce racist views based on notions that the position of American blacks is due to their culture and not to structural barriers that keep blacks in lower positions (p. 212). She also suggests that West Indians find themselves in a particularly difficult situation: they can either assimilate and become American blacks and accept black social status, or cultivate transnational ties and retain their ethnic uniqueness by distancing themselves from African Americans.

Transnationalism can therefore be viewed as a useful strategy to combat the effects of racism in the receiving country and improve one's social and economic status in the sending country. In her essay, Olwig recalls

Basch, et al.'s (1994) observation that "transnationalism constitutes a form of resistance to being subordinated within a specific nation-state such as the United States, with its particular form of 'political and economic domination' and 'racial and cultural differentiation'" (p. 144). Migrants use transnational practices and cultivate transnational identities as strategies to combat oppression and racism. Transnational migrants live socially in the home country and materially in the receiving one (p. 269). Levitt's study of Dominican immigrants describes similar patterns.

In her essay, in *Islands in the city* Basch identifies the need to bring analytic clarity to the use of the concept of transnationalism (p. 120). She uses the example of West Indian migrants from St. Vincent and Grenada who act as political citizens of their home country even though they may live for several years in the U.S. as U.S. citizens. They also hope to be identified with and have some influence in the U.S. as well as in their countries of origin. Levitt's description of this kind of exchange among Dominicans and Laguerre's study of Haitian transnational practices reflect the same pattern.

In a transnational arena, migrants' identity is situational. In the U.S. they see themselves as part of a larger interest and ethnic group, while at home they see themselves in the narrow national context. "While broad transnational social fields offer options and opportunities to families in an insecure world, the lived experience of migrants in this expanded global space is often marked by dislocation and fragmentation" (p. 139). The families described by all the authors experience this fragmentation and dislocation—a loss of identity and of place. These feelings are accentuated by the racial tensions and prejudice migrants experience in the U.S. Waters suggests that what immigrants really love is the American dream and the promise of improvement and freedom. In reality, this is what America is about.

With this third group of Caribbean immigrants, a more ample picture of Caribbean immigration to the U.S. emerges. In the Conclusion to this volume, Kasinitz says that, compared to other immigrants, West Indians and their children stand out in two crucial ways: ease of acculturation and race (p. 265). West Indians share a common history of British colonialism, Creole culture, and linguistic background. They are the largest group of immigrants in New York City and constitute a third of its black population. This gives them the potential to develop significant clout and visibility. It remains to be seen whether they will be able to mobilize and exert their influence in the political and economic arenas to become an influential group and compete on the same footing as nonwhite immigrants and, in the process, alter American perceptions of people of African origin.

One of the interesting features of *Islands in the City* is that each of the contributors identifies topics for future research. One of the most recurring themes is the role of the second generation. Will they lose ties with their

parents' homeland and assimilate into black American culture or will they retain their ethnic identity? What are the implications of these choices for sending countries that now depend so heavily on migrants' remittances? Let's hope that those who undertake the task of answering these questions will do as good a job as the contributors to this volume. *Islands in the City* should be included in courses on the African diaspora and on postcolonial societies. It would also be a good addition to reading lists for courses that explore issues of race and ethnicity in American society. Caribbeanists and scholars interested in the study of migration and transnationalism will also find this book helpful.

CONCLUSION

The books reviewed in this essay help us organize how we think about the chaotic flow of ideas, peoples, and goods in the modern world. Appadurai has argued that "not only have recent developments blown apart older 'world systems' models, like the economic core-periphery relation but also any hope of grasping world processes from any single theoretical point of view at all; we have a world that is all chaos, fractures and flows and pivoting perspectives" (quoted in Graeber, 2002, p. 1224). These authors capture a moment in space and time and offer theoretical and analytical tools to explain what we are all living and experiencing.

Contributors to the Foner volume as well as Laguerre and Levitt share similar observations about the importance of race, ethnicity, and transnationalism for Caribbean immigrants. These immigrants all tend to maintain strong ties with their native communities and to emphasize their distinct ethnicities. They expend significant energy and resources to improve their status in their homeland communities through social remittances. They translate negative experiences of alienation, racism, and hardship into social benefits. They support families, relatives, and the economies of their nation-states. While most experience meager improvement in their economic status, which leverages them into higher social position at home, their status in American society is still marginal. Differences emerge as well when comparing these three groups. Caribbean immigrants are not a homogeneous ethnic group, and they are also ethnically distinct from African Americans. It appears that West Indians have an easier time adapting and assimilating to American culture because they speak English and have a higher level of education. To combat the effect of racial prejudice, they set themselves apart from African Americans, with whom they share a common language, and seek assimilation through hard work and strong ethnic identification. Dominicans' perception of themselves is at odds with the way they are

perceived by American society. While they view themselves as whites, Americans tend to identify them as blacks. Dominicans therefore combat the effect of racism and alienation by creating transnational villages. They maintain strong ties with their home communities and anchor their hopes for higher status in their homeland. Haitians are the ones who have the most difficulty. They suffer the compounded disadvantage of race and stigma associated with their poverty and lack of education. They also keep close ties with home, but the family as a corporation is the locus of attention.

Lessons learned from these studies and the concepts that the various authors use to analyze Caribbean migration, the effects of racial prejudice, and transnational processes can be used in other contexts as well.

REFERENCES

- Basch, Linda, Nina Glick-Schiller, & Cristina Szanton-Blanc. (1994). *Nations Unbound: Transnationalized Projects and the Deterritorialized Nation-State*. New York: Gordon and Breach.
- Foner, N. (1987). *New immigrants in New York*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Graeber, D. (2002). The anthropology of globalization (with notes on neomedievalism, and the end of the Chinese model of the nation-state). *American Anthropologist* 104(4), 1222–1227.
- Laguerre, M. (1978). The impact of migration on Haitian family organization. In R. Romer & A. Marks (Eds.), *Family and Kinship in Middle America and the Caribbean*. Leiden, Netherlands: University of the Netherlands Antilles and the Department of Caribbean Studies of the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology, 446–481.
- Laguerre, M. (1984). *American Odyssey: Haitians in New York City*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Pessar, P. R. (1995). *A Visa for a Dream: Dominicans in the United States*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Portes, A., & Stepick, A. (1993). *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Stepick, A. (1998). *Pride Against Prejudice: Haitians in the United States*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Copyright of Reviews in Anthropology is the property of Taylor & Francis Ltd and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.