



# Review of Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race by Phillip Kasinitz,

The Harvard community has made this  
article openly available. [Please share](#) how  
this access benefits you. Your story matters

Citation	Waters, Mary C.. 1993. Review of Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race by Phillip Kasinitz, American Journal of Sociology 99 (1): 217-219.
Published Version	<a href="http://www.jstor.org/stable/2781967">http://www.jstor.org/stable/2781967</a> .
Citable link	<a href="http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:27413719">http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:27413719</a>
Terms of Use	This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <a href="http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA">http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA</a>

does not mix well with the equally repeated theme that many immigrants, owing to a lack of useful human capital and poor English skills, have no choice but to take jobs offered by coethnics. It seems to this reader that most of the "solidarity" described in *Chinatown* involves either family-based action of the sort exemplified by the "Lis" (pp. 149, 155–57) or economically rational institutional behavior. (See, e.g., p. 109: Is it ethnic solidarity that makes Chinese banks more likely to offer loans to recent immigrants, or is it that these banks have the unique ability to get borrowers' past credit histories while they are, at the same time, dependent on keeping money circulating in the community to improve their competitiveness with outside banks?) Moreover, Bailey and Waldinger ("Primary, Secondary, and Enclave Labor Markets: A Training Systems Approach," *American Sociological Review* 56 [1991]: 432–45) offer a concrete explanation of employer-employee arrangements in the New York Chinese garment trades that points more to rational action than to ethnic solidarity as the primary driving force behind the system of informal job training they observe. By the end of the book, Zhou appears to have mixed views on the subject: "This by no means suggests that immigrant Chinese willingly accept menial jobs, low wages, and long working hours. Rather, they perceive them as a shortcut to their long-term goal, which is to benefit not themselves but their children" (p. 223).

A minor annoyance with *Chinatown* is a tendency toward redundancy. However, the book is excellent for seminars and, since students are likely to have little background in this area, the redundancies may reinforce key points. Min Zhou is to be congratulated for her fine scholarship.

*Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race.* By Philip Kasinitz. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992. Pp. xv + 280. \$39.95 (cloth); 19.95 (paper).

Mary C. Waters  
*Harvard University*

Sociologists and policymakers have most often looked to black, Caribbean immigrants in the United States for answers to questions about their success relative to that of black Americans. Often such immigrants have been held up as a "model minority" in comparisons with African-Americans. Otherwise, with only a few exceptions, their immigrant status has been ignored, and they have been analyzed in racial terms. In fact, Roy Simon Bryce Laporte once called them "invisible immigrants." *Caribbean New York* offers an important and welcome break from this tradition.

In this ground-breaking work, Philip Kasinitz provides a community study of West Indian immigrants in New York, which examines them as an ethnic group, an immigrant group, and as a growing politically

organized entity in New York City politics. *Caribbean New York* is a fascinating study of this group as it evolves in New York's ethnic politics, with the added complication of race. As black immigrants and black ethnics, West Indians face a different political and cultural landscape than other immigrant groups. Kasinitz's study examines the experiences of these immigrants within the context of their racial and ethnic statuses. Because of its complex subject and its author's skills, the book thus makes important contributions to several fields. It is a traditional community study of an important post-1965 ethnic group and a sensitive study of urban ethnic politics in a pluralist environment, and it offers an important advance in ethnicity research by its specific examination of how American cultural and political forces interact with the immigrant group's ideology and cultural expectations in the formation of the ethnic group. The book is well written and engaging, filled with vivid descriptions of new ethnic neighborhoods and gatherings and intricate stories of New York politics and politicians.

Kasinitz provides an overview of the historical cohorts of West Indian immigrants to New York and shows how the post-1965 group has different sources and levels of immigration and faces a changed political, cultural, and economic landscape on arrival. By contrasting earlier West Indian immigrant cohorts in New York with the present one, Kasinitz is able to show how the creation of a group identity is influenced by a variety of forces in society that shape the opportunities available for ethnic mobilization and identity. In earlier periods, he argues, limited economic opportunities for middle-class blacks outside of the ghetto and the overwhelming influence of race on the life of black Americans made those West Indian cohorts decide to blend into the existing African-American political and social institutions. He demonstrates that the new immigrants are now in a position to "play the ethnic card" and to organize self-consciously as Caribbean-New Yorkers, rather than blend into black New York political organizations. He examines the forms this ethnic expression has taken in the city, such as the formation of a political group called "Caribbeans for Koch" in a recent mayoral election, and the cultural affirmations of the group in the West Indian Carnival held every Labor Day in Brooklyn. However Kasinitz points out that this ethnic organization and identity is always subject to the limits imposed by the reality of black racial identity in a race-conscious United States. For instance, incidents such as the Howard Beach racial murder mean that race as a master status continues to affect and shape the lives of all black Americans, immigrants and natives alike. This interplay of race and ethnicity is sensitively explored by Kasinitz as he traces the development of this community.

Like all good community studies, the book combines many methods, including analyses of statistical data on the immigrant community, studies of the Caribbean neighborhoods in the city, participant observation at ethnic festivals and meetings, and in-depth interviews with community leaders. This wealth of material is deftly woven together to convey to

the reader the dynamics of New York racial and ethnic politics and the uniqueness of this particular community.

The enormous impact of the post-1965 wave of immigrants to the United States means that groups such as West Indians can no longer be invisible in social science research or in urban politics. As West Indians in New York become part of the wider African-American community and develop their own distinctive institutions and identities, they will have a far-reaching effect on American race relations. *Caribbean New York* is thus a crucial book for anyone wanting to understand America's changing ethnic and racial dynamics.

*Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences, and the Myth of the American Dream.* By Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992. Pp. xvii + 152. \$39.95 (cloth); \$14.95 (paper).

Andrea L. Press  
*University of Michigan*

Eddie Murphy, in a comic sketch aired years ago on "Saturday Night Live," is confronted with director Ron Howard's telling him about the film *Night Shift*, in which two mortuary workers start a prostitution business. Upon learning the film has no black characters, Murphy exclaims, "It was a story about two pimps and there wasn't no brothers in it? I don't know whether to thank you or punch you in your mouth, man!" Murphy's ambivalence reflects the choice media have foisted upon American blacks, that of being either excluded altogether from film and television images or included only in extremely stereotypical form. Disproportionately, blacks are portrayed in visual media as criminals, drug dealers or users, products and perpetrators of broken families, and in other unflattering lights.

Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis warn us against the creation of another perhaps equally pernicious stereotype in *Enlightened Racism*, their study of the audience of what has been for years television's most highly rated family sitcom, "The Cosby Show." Although they were originally stereotypically cast as chauffeur and maid, Cliff and Clair Huxtable, the lead characters on Cosby (played by Bill Cosby and Phylicia Raschad), were changed (by studio executives) at the last minute to upper-middle-class professionals. This financially auspicious decision—as a black sitcom, "The Cosby Show" has been an unparalleled success with both black and white audiences—gave rise to the situation that inspired Jhally and Lewis's book. What does it signify regarding television's ideological functioning in our culture, that a show about extremely prosperous black professionals has succeeded with audiences that are usually far beyond the scope of many working-class black sitcoms? What do members of Cosby's audience make of the socioeconomic unrepresentativeness of its