Immigration in Canarsie
PRIMARY SOURCE PACKET
INTRODUCTORY READING

Adaptation

Originally part of Flatlands, Canarsie was the named for the native people who occupied it at the time of European settlement. It was a quiet area for fishing and farming during most of the 18th century. Germans settled the area in the 1870s, followed by the Dutch, Scottish, and Irish. By the 1920s, Italians and Jewish people began to move into the area—many of whom made their living as fishermen or oystermen.

In 1907 an amusement area called Golden City opened at Seaview Avenue and Canarsie Road. It was later destroyed by a fire in 1934 and completely torn down in 1939 for construction of the Belt Parkway.

By the late 1920s, pollution of Jamaica Bay ruined the fishing community and the local community was devastated by the Great Depression in the 1930s. Marshes were filled in the 50s and 60s to build apartment complexes and one- and two- family homes. During this time many Italians and Jewish people moved to Canarsie from Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville, Bushwick, East New York and Williamsburg.

In the 1980s, the neighborhood went through an ethnic change; a large number of people from the Caribbean nations of Jamaica, Haiti, Guyana, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Grenada as well as immigrants from Israel, China and the Soviet Union moved to Canarsie.
1. Document 1 is a map. What area is it a map of?

2. List six places you see named on this map:

3. This map has no date, but it depicts the earliest European settlements in this area. What is the name of the section of this map that you think Canarsie would be in?

4. Brooklyn is surrounded by rivers and oceans. List three rivers or creeks that you see on this map:
1. List three observations about this home: what it is built from, how it was constructed, what you see or do not see nearby:

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2. The Schenck Homestead was an early Dutch home in Canarsie. Do you think this photo was taken when the home was new? Why or why not?

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3. Based on your observations, what would you infer about the people who lived in this home? What do you think they did for a living? Do you think they were a small or large family?

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4. We can see a chimney on the home in this photo. Why was it important for this home to have a chimney?

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1. Document 3 shows us a map of Canarsie today. According to this map, what three neighborhoods are near Canarsie?

2. List four streets that are shown in Canarsie on this map:

3. Canarsie is next to a body of water. According to this map, what is the name of that body of water?

4. How do you think people in Canarsie would have used this body of water? Why do you infer that it might have been important to them?

Perched along Jamaica Bay on filled marshland in a corner of southeast Brooklyn, Canarsie is a neighborhood of about 70,000 people, mainly middle-income Jews and Italians. The community exudes an air of respectable domesticity. Two-family brick row houses line the grid of streets or, in the older Italian section, squeeze into the vacant spaces next to bungalows built earlier in the century. The residents see themselves as the backbone of America – cabbies and teachers, merchants and craftsmen, salesmen and police – who raise their families and serve their countries.

They are mostly children and grandchildren of immigrants, and some are immigrants themselves. They have come a long way from eastern Europe and southern Italy. Like many other Americans who have struggled to attain a modestly blessed position in life, the people of Canarsie feel that America has been good to them.
Caption: Famous landmark—Reminiscent of old country store—combining a bar, restaurant and grocery store—Arcadia Inn, 2136 Rockaway Ave., still boasts convenient shopping-social spot for Canarsie residents near the Belt Parkway. The old frame structure, vintage of the '90s, is as sturdy as ever despite the passing years.
1. According to Document 4A, who lives in Canarsie at the time this document was written?

2. When was Document 4A written?

3. Document 4B is a photograph of Arcadia Inn. According to the caption, what could the people of Canarsie go there to do?

4. Does the building in Document 4B look like buildings you see in Canarsie today? Why or why not?
Document 5A – Canarsie Housing Project. 1946. Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Collection
Summary: Facades of several attached, one-story, prefabricated houses on 6th Lane in Canarsie housing project with small picket fences in front; woman (Mrs. Sonia Scheffer) pushing baby carriage in foreground.
1. Document 5A shows a housing project in Canarsie. What year was this photograph taken?

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2. List four observations about the houses in this photograph. What are they built of? What size are they? What do you see happening in this photograph?

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3. Document 5B shows us a closer view of these houses. List three details you see about the houses: what is near them? Who appears to live in them?

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4. Compare these houses with houses that you see in Canarsie today. Do they look similar or different? How?

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The Hart-Celler Immigration Reform Act resulted in a tremendous increase in the number of West Indian immigrants coming to the United States. By the early 1980s, almost 60,000 legal immigrants were entering the United States annually and approximately half of them settled in New York City. The immigrants who came to the United States were from virtually every part of Caribbean society including the urban elite, children of the middle class, and large numbers of lower class poor people. High unemployment in the Caribbean region meant that most of these immigrants came to the United States seeking job opportunities.

Similar to other immigrant groups, West Indians have settled mostly in urban areas. Brooklyn, in particular, has been the recipient of many Caribbean immigrants, resulting in numerous West Indian neighborhoods including Flatbush, East Flatbush, Crown Heights, and, more recently, Canarsie. As with any group coming to a new country, West Indian immigrants have brought with them a unique culture—from food, to clothing, to barber shops, much of which is represented visually in their neighborhoods.
1. Document 6 refers to the Hart-Celler Immigration Reform Act, which was a law passed in 1965. According to the article, what was the impact of this Act?

2. According to this article, where did immigrants come from during this time period, and why did they come to the United States?

3. Document 6 explains that many of these immigrants came to Canarsie. According to the article, what parts of their culture did they bring to Canarsie?

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Caption: "Shopping area—Every Brooklyn community has its own favorite shopping street. In Canarsie, it's Rockaway parkway, pictured, near Glenwood Road. The trolley tracks are now a relic of an age not so long ago."
https://www.maps.google.com
1. Document 7A shows a shopping street in Canarsie. What kinds of things could you buy on this street?

2. What year is Document 7A from? What things do you see in this photograph that you would not see today?

3. Document 7B shows the same section of the same street, in 2017. List two things that you see that are the same in Document 7A as Document 7B:

4. Document 7B shows many things that have changed. From what you have learned about immigration to Canarsie, why would you infer that these changes happened?
You can live or work along Brooklyn’s traffic-choked Flatbush Avenue and never notice them until someone points one out: a van, speeding to and stopping at a street corner to let out passengers. Dozens upon dozens of these vans run up and down this major artery every day, inconspicuous to anyone not schooled in spotting them. Unlike the government-supported transportation systems that serve New York, nothing about the fleet is uniform: some are painted white, others black. Some are inscribed with company names and phone numbers, others entirely blank.

But once you know they’re there, these vans — known as dollar vans because of their low fares — suddenly become common along Brooklyn’s busiest corridor. They run along Flatbush as well as Utica Avenue, which connects Marine Park to Crown Heights, and Remsen Avenue, which connects Canarsie to East Flatbush.

Operated and patronized mainly by the borough’s immigrant communities from Jamaica, Trinidad, Haiti, and other Caribbean nations, dollar vans have been a frequent sight in Brooklyn for more than three decades. While far smaller than city buses, the vans move thousands of people around the borough each day. Collectively, this motley fleet of Fords (they are almost always Fords) is the city’s largest quasi-legal transportation system. And for as long as they’ve been around, the city government has struggled to figure out what to do with them.

Jean, 55, has been driving dollar vans in Brooklyn for two decades. Since moving to New York from Haiti 25 years ago, this is how he’s made a living. When we spoke, he was working as a backseat assistant to another driver. “Since I came here, I got married and divorced,” Jean said. “I had two kids. One is 25, and one is 18. So far I’m doing good. But I’ve been surviving my driving.”
1. According to Document 8A, what is one form of transportation for travelling to Canarsie?

2. Document 8A explains that mostly immigrants drive and use this form of transportation. Where do many of the drivers come from?

3. Document 8B shows a dollar van travelling on a street in Brooklyn. From what you can observe of this street, why would people want transportation here?

"A house to the Caribbean man is something very important," Samuel E. Palmer was saying. "He has to have a house, as opposed to an apartment. Whatever happens, the house comes first, so you can have a family and your friends can meet there. So when I came here, the desire also was to achieve this house, this houseness."

Mr. Palmer found his house in Brooklyn near the border of Flatlands and Canarsie. It is a two-family house that he jumped at so fast he says the real estate broker thought he was crazy. There were just a handful of black families on the block back then. But within a few years, he recalled, most of the white people up and left. "I guess they see black people coming," Mr. Palmer said, chuckling. "And they run away from black people."

In the decade between the 1990 and the 2000 censuses, the racial makeup of Canarsie changed more dramatically than that of any neighborhood in the city. The black population grew to nearly 60 percent from 10 percent. What many new residents, Caribbean immigrants, say they wanted was an integrated neighborhood; what they have ended up with is increasingly black.

"You move into a neighborhood that is integrated, and the neighborhood changes under you," said N. Nick Perry, a Jamaican-born state assemblyman who lives in nearby East Flatbush. "An integrated neighborhood transforms into an all-black neighborhood. You have a continuous transition of neighborhoods until it becomes almost one race or ethnicity."

Canarsie had what many Caribbean immigrants wanted: single-family homes with backyards for barbecuing and growing roses or tomatoes, decent schools, affordable prices, quiet streets, proximity to family. They were loyal to Brooklyn; they had no interest in Queens or Long Island. Following the route of earlier immigrant groups who moved out of central Brooklyn and south toward water, the Caribbean immigrants began buying houses in and around Canarsie.
Canarsie is teeming with new and newly revitalized civic associations these days, many of them headed by newcomers like Mr. Brazela and Mr. Duncan, lobbying and agitating for improved street lighting, road repairs, better drainage.

"You are going to move until you are convinced that it's good for you to stay here," says Mr. Palmer, who heads a civic association in Flatlands. "What am I going to do? Move because you move? I can't do that. So if I do the things that are required to have a strong community going, when you see me next time, you won't run away from me. I profoundly believe in that."
1. According to Document 9, why was owning a house important to Mr. Palmer?


2. How does Mr. Palmer describe the neighborhood of Canarsie? How does he say it has changed since he moved there?


3. According to Document 9, how did the racial makeup of Canarsie change between 1990 and 2000?


4. According to Document 9, why did many Caribbean immigrants move to Canarsie?


1. Document 10 is a menu from a Haitian restaurant in Canarsie. List two kinds of food you are familiar with.

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2. What food would be included in your email if you ordered the Tasting Platter?

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3. List four things from Document 10 that you have never eaten before:

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4. Imagine you went to this restaurant with $20. What would you buy, if you had to spend all $20?

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GLOSSARY

Artery

Bungalow – a low-level house with no second floor

Census – an official count or survey of the population

Continuous – non-stop

Corridor – hallway or route

Domesticity – home or family life

Exude – to display or give off

Fleet – a number of vehicles operating for the same reason

Great Depression – a severe worldwide economic depression that took place mostly during the 1930s, originating in the United States

Inconspicuous – not obvious; hard to notice

Integrated – an institution or neighborhood that is not racially segregated

Marshland – land that is marshy or swampy

Oystermen – people who catch oysters

Patronize – to use a service or go to a business as a customer

Perched – sitting or resting on top of something

Picket Fence – a wooden fence made of spaced pieces of wood with pointed ends, connected by horizontal rails

Quasi-legal – something that is somewhat legal; it does not entirely break the law

Racial makeup – the racial composition of something

Revitalized – given new life; repaired and restored

State assemblyman – people elected to state government