
Introduction

In 1993, the sociologists Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou introduced their study of the new second generation with the rap of “Herbie,” a Haitian American who rhymed:

My name is Herb
and I’m not poor;
I’m the Herbie that you’re looking for,
like Pepsi,
a new generation
of Haitian determination—
I’m the Herbie that you’re looking for.¹

Portes and Zhou explained that Herbie’s rap, “Straight Out of Haiti,” illuminated the dilemma of assimilation for post-1965 immigrant youth. As Portes and Zhou saw it, Herbie was caught in the cultural conundrum of other second generationers in the 1990s. He, like most in his peer group, had at least three assimilation possibilities:

One of them replicate[d] the time-honored portrayal of growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle-class; a second

le[d] straight in the opposite direction to permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclass; still a third associate[d] rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community's values and tight solidarity.²

Herbie's fate, Portes and Zhou warned, depended on what choices he made as a black immigrant especially. Was his hip-hop braggadocio a sign that he had fallen victim to "adopting the outlooks and cultural ways of the native-born," meaning the urban African American population? Had he found a way to "retain [his] ethnic identity by cloaking it in black American cultural forms?"³ Or could he, despite the lure of urban African American culture, still find a way to maintain "the immigrant community's values" and attain the American dream?

Current debates over the assimilation of second-generation Caribbean immigrants have revitalized contemporary discussions of migration to the United States. Children born to parents who emigrated from Caribbean islands have been the topic of recent inquiries about the political and social formations of West Indian and Latino communities in American cities. Appearing in the 1990s, Portes and Zhou's article—along with the works of Ruben Rumbaut (1991) and Mary C. Waters (1996; 1999)—sought to challenge the straight-line models of generational assimilation into white America, models that had dominated immigration scholarship since the mid-twentieth century.⁴ Scholars such as Portes and Zhou, Rumbaut, and Waters recognized the limitations of previous models suggested by Marcus Lee Hansen (1938), William Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole (1945), and others—scholars who often focused their research exclusively on European immigrants.⁵ Contemporary social scientists realized that, as products of the migration patterns that developed after changes in U.S. immigration policy in 1965, which encouraged an increase in migration from non-European countries, recent immigrants and their children raised complex questions about America as the proverbial melting pot, while they experienced varied integration processes in the United States.

Despite the attention given to Caribbean immigrants and their negotiations of African American cultural forms in postwar America, there has yet to be an in-depth analysis of the ways in which cultural production becomes a site of cultural engagement between Caribbean second gener-

ationers and African Americans in the twentieth century. *Constructing Black Selves* is that study. Portes, Zhou, Waters, and others warn that the cultural practices of hip hop might prove inimical to the class aspirations of post-1965 immigrant parents, but they never consider what these cultural practices afford Caribbean American youth who try to locate themselves ethnically and racially in African America, American society, and even immigrant enclaves. Herbie's rap, "Straight Out of Haiti," may not articulate the prospects of his social mobility in America, but it does identify a cultural self imagined, created, and re-created through cultural production. That Herbie linguistically and culturally employs African American hip hop to talk about being "straight out of Haiti" suggests the complexities of representing Caribbean American identity. Portes and Zhou insinuate that immigrants such as Herbie often attempt to "cloak" their immigrant identities in urban African American styles like hip hop.⁶ However, Herbie's rap, as I argue about other cultural works in this study, intimates another reality: a dialogue taking place between Caribbean American youth and the African American community. "Straight Out of Haiti" uses the language of rap to negotiate and perform racial and ethnic identities in the United States.

Constructing Black Selves focuses on the cultural narratives of second-generation Caribbean immigrants like Herbie in the post-World War II era. It departs from the aforementioned studies in the social sciences with its interdisciplinary focus and emphasis on performance and cultural production. From the release of Harry Belafonte's *Calypso* in 1956, discussed in the first chapter, to *Proyecto Uno*'s merengue hip hop of the late 1990s, examined in the final chapter, the cultural texts of Caribbean second generationers have emerged in relation to the influx of Caribbean immigrants to the United States since World War II. Giving primacy to the narratives created by artists and intellectuals, this study examines the ways in which different media—music, literature, autobiography, and film—provide one means to explore the formation of Caribbean American identity for second-generation immigrants.

This study does not attempt to provide comprehensive analyses of Caribbean American immigrants. Instead, by looking at various representations of Caribbean American identity in the cultural productions of the singer-actor Harry Belafonte, the writers Paule Marshall, Audre Lorde, and Piri Thomas, and the merengue hip-hoppers of *Proyecto Uno*,

it both considers and asks questions regarding how second generationers perform and construct relationships to a parent culture on one hand and American cultures on the other. I begin with the questions that have confounded the most recent studies of twentieth-century black immigrants to the United States: how do Caribbean immigrants negotiate languages of race and ethnicity in American social and cultural politics? As black immigrants, into which America do they assimilate? I show that cultural production serves as an apt site for an investigation of discourses on racialized, ethnic, and American identity constructions. My analysis illuminates the ways in which Caribbean second generationers use literature, music, and other expressive forms as vehicles to explore interactions with white America, African America, and parent Caribbean cultures.

This project differs from recent migration scholarship in the social sciences, which often focuses on the disparities between African American and Caribbean identities in the United States. Here, I separate myself from scholars who often (mis)use new models of immigrant identities—transnationalism, pan-Caribbeanness, and ethnic culturalism—to negate the significance of dialogues between native-born and immigrant black populations.⁷ It is not that I challenge the models themselves. In fact, I employ them in my analyses of cultural texts, and I recognize their importance to the study of Caribbean American cultural formation. However, in an attempt to differentiate between black immigrant and African American identities in recent migration studies, several social scientists' employments of these models often conceal more than they reveal about the construction of Caribbean American identity for children of immigrants. Their suggestion of an either/or paradigm for black immigrants often limits our understanding of the ways in which Caribbean Americans' independence from and engagement with African Americans have not been, nor need not be, mutually exclusive. The cultural dialogue between Caribbean Americans and African Americans provides one of the most robust ways to analyze the participation of second-generation immigrants in American society.

Further, *Constructing Black Selves* fills a glaring gap in the study of black immigrants, especially of the second generation, in contemporary literary and cultural studies. While social scientists often focus on the perceived differences between black Caribbean immigrants and African

Americans after World War II, literary and cultural theorists instead oversimplify the similarities between these ethnicities as represented in the works of several artists and intellectuals featured here. Their Caribbean heritage and second-generation identity often serve as an ancillary feature, not a subject of examination itself, when anthologized in cultural compilations or studied in the African American canon. Very rarely does one find a course of study that concentrates on the formation of *Caribbean American* identity, even in its relationship with African America. The works of West Indian second generationers such as Audre Lorde and Paule Marshall are usually confined to African American literature classes, for example, or to literary and cultural studies focused on the Caribbean diaspora.

The connection between African American and black Latino cultural production suffers even more in the humanities. Artists and intellectuals who are black, Latino, and of the second generation are seldom studied for their participation in both Latino and African American cultural movements. The 1960s and early 1970s marked a moment when artists such as Piri Thomas, Felipe Luciano, and Sandra María Esteves were discussed and anthologized in black American collections and scholarly publications; however, the celebration of those connections was short-lived. Most of those who identify as Latinos of African heritage have been widely discussed as seminal figures in the U.S. Latino culture industry. But, they have not received adequate attention for the role that they have played in articulating the experiences of black and second-generation immigrants in the United States. *Constructing Black Selves* thus employs the cultural texts of black West Indian and Latino second generationers to push the boundaries of immigration scholarship in the social sciences as it engages the humanities to consider Caribbean American cultures in more meaningful ways.

Theorizing Black Immigrant Cultures in the United States

“Our choices became clear,” writes Evelio Grillo in his memoir *Black Cuban, Black American*, “to swim in black American society or drown in

the Latin ghettos of New York City, never to be an integral part of American life." He continues:

This is why the experience of black Cubans who joined with black Americans is so different from that of black Cubans who remained loosely tethered to white Cuban society. Integration presented us with simple options: join the black American society, with its rich roots deep in this country, or have no American roots at all.⁸

Grillo's story represents one seldom told about the black and immigrant experience in the United States. Grillo, the son of black Cuban immigrants, came of age in the 1930s and 1940s at the height of academic and popular debates on assimilation, cultural pluralism, and American civic nationalism. His was a lived experience virtually invisible to those most concerned with the massive waves of European immigrants as American citizens, commentators, and politicians grappled with the impact that twentieth-century immigration would have on the American way of life.

Grillo was born into a world where, between 1900 and 1930, there were at least 18.6 million immigrants to the United States. At least 6.7 million of these immigrants were from European countries; 2.5 million from Canada, Newfoundland, and Mexico; and approximately 683,000 from Asia. During this period, the Caribbean islands sent approximately 305,871 immigrants to the United States—primarily to urban centers such as New York. By 1940, the black foreign-born population had risen from 20,336 in 1900 to 83,941.⁹

America's response to this intense immigration varied. Leading educators such as Ellwood Cubberley, of Stanford University, felt that immigrant children would be a debilitating presence in American society as adults if they were not Americanized properly to understand American social, political, and cultural values. The National Education Association in the 1890s and Cubberley in the early 1900s were very vocal about their belief that this Americanization was the responsibility of the public school systems. Nativists such as Madison Grant and Harry Laughlin purported that most of the nonwhite, non-Protestant immigrants could not be assimilated and should thus be barred from entering the country. This sentiment and subsequent advocacy by the Ku Klux Klan, the Immigration Restriction League, and other nativist groups led to the most

stringent immigration laws in American history. Progressive intellectuals such as Horace Kallen and Ralph Bourne outwardly validated the survival of ethnic traditions and customs among immigrant groups, suggesting that Americanization, in its contemporary context, was not only impossible but ill advised.¹⁰

Evelio Grillo entered Xavier University, a Louisiana institution dedicated to the higher education of African Americans, in 1937—the same year that the historian Marcus Hansen shared his oft-quoted thesis, “what the son wishes to forget the grandson wishes to remember,” with the Augustana Historical Society in Rock Island, Illinois.¹¹ Marcus Hansen’s speech, like most discussions of the time, focused on the assimilation process for white immigrants and their future generations. Hansen postulated that children of immigrants often chose to relinquish their ethnic heritage to become a part of mainstream American culture. Their offspring, however, were proud of their ethnic background, seldom had an inferiority complex, and were thus more willing to explore the contributions of the immigrant ancestors to the fabric of American life. Although his speech emphasized third-generation identity in his attempts to mobilize the Swedish American “grandsons” to whom he was speaking, it was his notion of second-generation identity that resonated with postwar scholars attempting to understand the generational assimilation processes for immigrants to the United States.

I highlight Evelio Grillo’s narrative by way of introduction because the glaring absence of stories like his defines a central problem in early-twentieth-century scholarship on immigration. Not only were stories of black immigrants virtually untold; they were also undervalued in the emerging examination of American ethnicity. What is most obvious about several of the debates between 1900 and 1940—Hansen’s included—is that very few paid attention to the experiences of West Indians and other black immigrants from Caribbean islands. When discussions about assimilation and America’s black population arose, scholars concentrated primarily on native-born blacks and the prospects of their acculturation in cities such as Chicago, St. Louis, Boston, and New York.

Ira D. A. Reid’s 1939 study, *The Negro Immigrant: His Background, Characteristics, and Social Adjustment*, stands out as one of the very few in-depth documentations of black immigrants in the United States during this time. It is by far one of the best studies prior to the postwar era,

especially given its understanding of the push and pull factors that influenced immigration, as well as the assimilation processes of immigrants from not only the West Indies but the Spanish and French Caribbean islands, as well.¹² Another notable exception, although not entirely focused on black immigrants, is Lawrence Chenault's book, *The Puerto Rican Migrant in New York City*, published in the same year. This study on Puerto Ricans in New York predates several books in the 1950s that began to more closely examine the role that race, especially African heritage, played in the assimilation of black and mixed-race Puerto Ricans who migrated to major American cities.¹³

The story of Grillo and those featured in the works of Reid and Chenault suggested what most immigration scholars in the first half or more of the twentieth century clearly were not ready to acknowledge: that a growing, although largely unrecognized, transculturation was taking place between native-born blacks and black immigrants, as well as between black immigrants and the larger American society. Theirs was just the beginning of what others would learn was the undeniable presence and influence of the black foreign-born and their children in post-war America. It was an influence that Americans would increasingly be forced to face as changes in the second half of the twentieth century led to much more globalized economies and cultures, with increased movements of people and capital despite the boundaries of nation-states in the Western hemisphere.

This early oversight suggestively reflected the cultural biases of the institutions, academics, and American citizens who were most concerned with defining American nationalism through whiteness at the time. Problematic on its own, I argue that it also points to a larger issue: Early immigration scholarship in the social sciences was built on an unstable foundation that severely hindered the growth of the field after 1965, when American migration was at a height not reached since the turn of the nineteenth century. Migration to the United States in the first half of the twentieth century was greatly limited by immigration quotas in the 1920s, the Great Depression, and then World War II.¹⁴ However, the Hart-Celler Immigration Reform Act of 1965 changed all of that, opening the doors to blacks and other immigrants of color from non-European countries.

Although the intricacies of U.S. immigration law changes are beyond the scope of this discussion, one of the unexpected outcomes of the 1965 Act and its subsequent amendments was that Asian, Latin American, and Caribbean countries became the major sources of immigrants to the United States after 1965. Between 1971 and 1985, for example, Mexico and the Philippines became the countries with the greatest numbers of immigrants to the United States, averaging 64,817 and 38,759 people per year, respectively. They were followed by South Korea, with 29,198, and Vietnam, with 27,637 immigrants on average per year.¹⁵

The newly formed microstates in the Anglo Caribbean, no longer under British rule, sent roughly 40,000 people each year to major American cities between 1966 and 1984. Jamaica alone sent approximately 16,170 annually between 1971 and 1985. The Spanish Caribbean island of Cuba sent approximately 22,384 immigrants to American shores each year, while the Dominican Republic was the donor country for an average of 16,845 immigrants annually. Its neighboring country, Haiti, sent approximately 6,840 immigrants per year during this period.¹⁶

This influx was influenced not only by a change in U.S. immigration policy that supported outmigration from former European colonies in the Western Hemisphere but, in some cases, by the restrictions Britain imposed on immigration from its former colonies in 1962. Great Britain's own xenophobia about blacks from the English-speaking islands forced several former British subjects to look beyond the mother country for better opportunities. Many settled in the United States. Furthermore, revolutionary struggles and political overthrows in the Caribbean basin became a major supply of both legal and illegal immigrants, refugees, and exiles. Fidel Castro rose to leadership in Cuba in 1959. The Dominican Republic was faced with the death of Rafael Trujillo Molina and, subsequently, a loosening of its own emigration policies. Several refugees from Haiti left that small island to escape the political repressions of the Duvalier regime. All of these realities served as push factors that brought Caribbean immigrants to American cities.¹⁷

America was not quite ready for this unexpected population growth, and it was especially surprised by the demographic shift spawned by changes in U.S. immigration policies. Immigrants from countries in the Caribbean and elsewhere altered the face of America at a time when

America was undergoing its own struggles for civil rights, identity consciousness, and racial equality for native-born people of color who had been historically disenfranchised and marginalized in the United States. The arrival of blacks and other immigrants of color after 1965 was concomitant with the U.S. civil rights and ethnic consciousness movements of the late 1950s through the early 1970s. This reality had a significant impact on those with a history in America and on those immigrants and their children who were just beginning to adjust to life in the United States.

Unfortunately, at a time when race and ethnicity took center stage in American popular life, the presence of black immigrant cultures was largely absent from the limelight of public discussion in the 1960s and 1970s. American immigration scholars seemed handicapped by a legacy left them by Hansen and others from an earlier generation and ill equipped to even capture the transformations taking place among the native-born immigrants of color and a second generation of immigrants coming of age at this volatile time in American history. Immigrants of color and their second generation—especially those like Belafonte, Marshall, and Lorde, all of whom had parents who migrated to the U.S. in the 1920s and 1930s—were often trailblazers in challenging America's monolithic and provincial view of itself in the 1960s and 1970s. However, both public discourse and emerging scholarly debates focused primarily on racial minorities with a long history in the United States, or, to the contrary, on white America's mixed responses to its own ethnic diversity during this consciousness-raising era.

Mary Waters, in an attempt to understand this cultural moment, explains:

These debates were all based on an assumption—only sometimes made explicit—that what happened to white immigrants from Europe would provide a model or a comparison point for the experience of other ethnic and racial groups. In fact, the models of assimilation and cultural pluralism used by American sociologists were developed based on the experiences of these European groups—and especially important in these models is the concept of movement through generations. The further removed in generations from the earlier immigrants, the more assimilated the descendants would be. Thus the de-

bate that began in the 1960s and 1970s about the relative importance of ethnicity for groups of European origin had a great deal of significance.¹⁸

Waters notes that whatever the terminology used—melting pot, cultural pluralism, new ethnicity—a new field of inquiry arose in response to the implicit need to come to terms with the post-1965 migration increase from non-European countries. These very obvious changes to the face of America raised the bar for postmodern immigration studies, forcing scholars to question more critically the prevailing notion of generational assimilation.

Doing so may have fueled a new interest in the revival of white ethnic consciousness, but it did little to build the body of literature on or even public awareness about black immigrants. Blacks from the Caribbean were clearly recognized as a major piece of the puzzle, if only covertly. The sheer numbers of blacks coming from English-, French-, and Spanish-speaking countries not only influenced African America; they also became a salient reminder for scholars of immigration and the average American citizen that race and ethnicity were not one and the same. Some studies by scholars such as Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1963) and Ulf Hannerz (1976) made gestures toward acknowledging the presence of black immigrants when they referenced the possibilities for integration for American blacks.¹⁹ Few, if any, made the leap to closely examine how the question of generational assimilation, which had arguably defined the first half of the twentieth century, could find some answers by placing black immigrants at the center and not the periphery of scholarly enterprise.

It was not until the mid-1980s that social scientists began to seriously consider the assimilation processes and social formation of the black foreign-born and the second generation. This moment was an important one for the field, because, although problematic in its own way, it challenged the exclusive nature by which American immigration studies had been traditionally defined. From the start, these scholars were confronted with the limitation of frameworks established by Hansen in the 1930s, as well as by Joshua Fishman, Vladimir Nahirny, and Oscar Handlin in the 1960s. They found that, although these earlier frameworks might have been useful in considering the white ethnic population of the twentieth

century, they did little to address the increasingly global world in which black immigrants operated and the undeniable role both race and ethnicity played in the ways black immigrants experienced both home and host societies.²⁰ Theorizations on ethnic identity and generational assimilation processes into the American mainstream were challenged and then revamped by new frameworks on transnationalism, pan-Caribbean-ness, and postmodern notions of diasporic identities.

These new studies changed the tone of discussions in the mid-1980s and 1990s and had a critical impact on shaping the direction of immigration scholarship at the dawn of the twenty-first century. First, scholars during these two decades were able to document the ways in which black immigrants were deeply influenced by what happened both in American cities and in their island communities, with whose people, politics, and culture they maintained contact. In their 1994 study on immigrants from Grenada and St. Vincent, for instance, Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc smartly surmised that what traditionally fell under the study of “ethnicity” in the United States must be complicated by these “transmigrants” who “rework[ed] different hegemonic constructions of identity developed in their home and new nation-state(s)” to participate in a transnational sphere.²¹ Patricia Pessar and Sherry Grasmuck similarly underscored the importance of the social networks at play in the Dominican exodus to New York City. They examined the ways in which social relations “organized and directed by the circulation of labor, capital, goods” and so forth strengthened migrants’ social ties to the Dominican Republic, even if economic realities had them situated in the United States.²²

Second, and perhaps most useful, some social scientists began to consider the nuanced differences between race and ethnicity for black immigrants. Race has often been accepted as the defining factor—the master status—that helped explain housing discrimination, labor participation, and the ease or difficulty with which blacks negotiated American social life.²³ Debates about race went to the heart of debates about post-1965 immigrants. Questions resounded about whether recent immigrants of color, especially black immigrants, would suffer the same fate disproportionately experienced by native-born blacks or whether they would find or create opportunities for attaining the American dream. Scholars began to test the limits of America’s racial codes, attempting to determine

whether race or ethnicity was more critical in influencing the assimilation possibilities for foreign-born blacks and their children.

Although these scholars' conclusions may have differed in details, most began to show an emerging, and disappointing, trend in immigration studies. Several suggested that ethnicity, and not race, was the defining factor in understanding Caribbean American adjustment in the United States. Scholars such as Milton Vickerman (1999) argued that West Indian immigrants often tried to steer clear of conceptualizations of blackness in the United States, for example, using West Indian ethnicity as an indicator of class to avoid association with native-born blacks. Basch et al. (1994) concluded that transnational identities allowed black immigrants to eschew the racial politics of the United States and that West Indians preferred a transnational identity that afforded a cultural capital not supposedly provided by an African American one. Philip Kasinitz (1992) suggested that West Indians created a pan-ethnic identity in the United States that allowed them to supersede participation in African American identity politics. With the freedom to explore ethnic versus racial allegiances in the post-1965 era, according to these scholars, West Indians chose to see themselves as distinct from the African American population.

Although many of these studies gave voice and legitimacy to a growing Caribbean population in U.S. cities, several also silenced an important discussion around blackness and the transculturation between Caribbean blacks from the Spanish-, French-, and English-speaking islands and African Americans since 1965. For example, the recent emphasis on transnationalism and pan-ethnic Caribbean identity prematurely suggests that Caribbean immigrants construct black identities mostly outside African American political and social spheres. This new direction of black immigrant studies leaves questions unanswered about what Earl Lewis calls the "practice of writing African peoples into a history of overlapping diasporas" in the United States.²⁴ Caribbean immigrants may live in ethnic enclaves and participate in culturally defined activities on a day-to-day basis; yet, they constantly, if only subconsciously, negotiate their relationship with blackness as defined in the American milieu. In short, they are in ever-changing, always active discourse with African American culture and cultural expression. This reality is particularly true for the second generation.

If postwar Caribbean immigrants live mostly outside African America, what accounts for the rise in arts festivals that celebrate the African diaspora in major urban cities? Why the focused attention on black Caribbean and African American fusions in popular urban media for music, business, and film? Why the number of Caribbean immigrants and their children who continue to participate in historically African American institutions and organizations? Why the concern over the choices of the Caribbean second generation?

Social scientists are right to argue that the second (and future) generation(s) will provide the litmus test for understanding the assimilation processes for black immigrants. However, they are often blinded by a one-sided focus on economic mobility, or at least the corollary, how these second generationers self-identify (as immigrant, as African American, as part of the American mainstream) and the prospect for their class status in the United States. The growing sense that contact with African American culture means arrested development for the second and future generations of Caribbean immigrants at best simply denies the regenerative influence that African American culture has had on other cultures in the diaspora and at worst falsely suggests that American racism and unwillingness to fully accept racial minorities may be the true hindrances to black immigrants' attaining American ideals of success. Social scientists have thus gone from turning a blind eye to the differences between African American and Caribbean immigrants—not seeing Caribbean immigrants as a legitimate subject of examination in the quest to understand American ethnics—to devaluing the constant interchange between Caribbean immigrants and blacks native to the United States.

Constructing Black Selves

Against these recent trends in reading Caribbean American identity, I argue that the second-generation artists and intellectuals discussed in *Constructing Black Selves* make blackness an attractive and useful site for self-discovery. The use of blackness is a focal point of this book, which engages the term as it is used in migration studies while seeking to un-

derstand the political, social, and cultural meanings of blackness suggested by second-generation immigrants in postwar America.²⁵ For these artists and intellectuals, representations of blackness demand negotiations of African American *and* Caribbean identities, although these negotiations are fraught with the tensions of narrating racial, ethnic, and gendered selves to an American public. The fear of African Americanization often constructed in literatures of the social sciences undermines the voices of second-generation artists, like those examined here, who work through and in between the Caribbean and African America to explore their relationships to their parent cultures, African Americans, and other populations in the United States and beyond.

Further, I suggest that the black immigrant experience and the performance of culture are intimately linked. When Portes and Zhou use Herbie's rap "Straight Out of Haiti" as a signifier of Herbie's conundrum, they rightly suggest that this young artist's choice of expression comes about not just because he is black but, more tellingly, because he is black, immigrant, and of the second generation. Although flawed on various levels, scholarship by Portes, Zhou, Kasinitz, and others has been very successful at acknowledging the multiplicity of black ethnicities in the United States and their cultural expressions. The recognition of this multiplicity—arguably not yet understood in a sustained way in black cultural studies—is at the heart of my work.

If *Constructing Black Selves* has an implicit, overarching critique of contemporary scholarship from literary and cultural studies, it is that cultural critics seldom push their thinking to really examine this difference in black experiences. Acknowledging that some of the richest theorizing on ethnicity emanates most recently from the humanities, I also suggest that humanists who write on and research black culture are either often unaware of or not concerned with the cutting-edge work of ethnic populations in disciplines of the social sciences or unwilling to look beyond what have become canonized understandings of U.S. black literary and cultural traditions.

Part of the problem lies in what I see as the reluctance to have one's scholarship in the humanities too closely associated with the social sciences in a post-1960s, post-identity politics era. Ethnic and cultural studies, in many ways, developed as a product of the consciousness-raising of students, alumni, and scholar-activists on many college campuses

across the country in the 1960s and early 1970s. There was much public debate about the validity of departments, programs, and areas of inquiry dedicated to the study of people of color and other marginalized groups. As Thomas Ferraro points out in *Ethnic Passages*, an examination of twentieth-century white immigrant writers, the words “ethnic” and “literature,” when juxtaposed, were and continue to be pejoratively read as oxymoronic by more than a few. Consequently, scholars in these fields too often struggle with the question of how to validate ethnic literature and cultural production as artistic, while exploring the sociological undercurrents frequently evidenced in works by ethnic artists and intellectuals.

Leading associations such as the Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature in the United States (MELUS) and the Modern Language Association (MLA), for example, have attempted to deal with this question at least since the early 1980s by promoting the message that ethnic literature is in fact *American* literature. MLA, through its Committee on Literature and Languages of America, understands American literature as a “patchwork quilt” and argues that literary criticism should be based on a model that celebrates the multiracial heritage of the United States and not just its European influences.²⁶ MELUS similarly suggests that one of the inherent values of ethnic literature is that it forces us to rethink our definition of U.S. mainstream literature. Since 1973, it has made a commitment to expanding understandings of American literature and asserts this commitment as the bedrock of its constitution and by-laws. In recent years, this public message from both associations has been supported by the studies of scholars such as William Boelhower, Mary Dearborn, Werner Sollors, and others who have tried to establish the relationship between ethnic literature and what academia has traditionally identified as quintessentially American about works that make up the mainstream literary canon.²⁷

Except for the theoretical frameworks developed by scholars such as Ferraro and Sollors, or, more recently, young scholars such as Heather Hathaway (1999), there are very few literary and cultural studies that acknowledge the value of creating a discourse with the social sciences as a means of providing a new and important way to examine cultural narratives written and performed by ethnic populations. This unwillingness to cross academic borders has particular implications for understanding

the cultural production of black West Indian and Latino immigrants of the second generation in the twentieth century. In an attempt to legitimate them as part of an American—and, in some cases, an African American—cultural canon, contemporary literary and cultural criticisms seldom deal with the impact of the immigrant experience itself. More often than not, immigrants are simply reduced to ethnics—despite generational differences, their arrival during different immigration phases, and the uniqueness of the host communities in which they settle.

Dearborn (1986) thus discusses Zora Neale Hurston as part of an African American tradition and makes only a peripheral nod to her West Indian background and its influence on her writing. The actors Harry Belafonte and Sidney Poitier are featured as important to creating a new image for blacks after World War II in Daniel Leab's comprehensive work on blacks in film; yet, their second-generation identities are never carefully examined for how they shaped Belafonte's and Poitier's lives both on and off the screen. Audre Lorde is heralded for her contributions to the feminist, African American, and Caribbean aesthetics by gifted cultural critics as varied as AnaLouise Keating, Claudine Raynaud, and Chinosole. But, unfortunately, few have taken the time to carefully consider how her experience as a child of black immigrants influenced not only her work but the ties she established to multiple communities throughout her life. In essence, the immigrant impulse in several bodies of scholarship featuring black immigrants of the second generation is simply an anecdotal provocation in the task of deconstructing tropes and giving close textual readings of literature, music, and other narratives in the American culture industry. The study makes the important claim that the performative value of blackness in Caribbean American cultural production does not supersede the import of immigrant identity construction as explored by Harry Belafonte, Paule Marshall, Audre Lorde, Piri Thomas, and the hip-hoppers of *Proyecto Uno*.

This book thus engages in conversation with cultural critics whose work explores linkages between ethnicity, identity politics, and the performance of culture, scholars such as Frances Aparicio, Hazel Carby, Juan Flores, Robin Kelley, George Lipsitz, and the social scientist Paul Gilroy. Although several of these scholars do not focus on the intersections between black, immigrant, and generational identities specifically, all have pushed the boundaries of academic silos to make much-needed

connections between lived experience and the culture industry of blacks, Latinos, and other people of color. From Frances Aparicio and Hazel Carby's scholarship on gender and class to Paul Gilroy's work on ethnicity and the black diaspora, the work of these scholars stands as a constant and important reminder of the ways in which literature, music, film, and autobiography can become sites for exploring and working through issues of race, gender, sexuality, and class. Beyond its individual merits, their scholarship presents tools on which I often rely or theoretical frameworks with which I am often in dialogue as I explore the cultural production of black Latino and West Indian immigrants of the second generation after World War II.

Framing Narratives

Constructing Black Selves focuses on the period after World War II, when Caribbean American communities of size and distinct identity were taking form in urban enclaves. The first easily identifiable population of second-generation immigrants, with parents who migrated from the Caribbean around the 1920s, was nurtured and influenced by the emerging black cultures in the United States. These second generationers were also deeply affected by the growing number of black immigrants to the United States after 1965—the same time that America was undergoing a cultural metamorphosis that would change future race relations. Thus, starting in the postwar era allows this study to both examine some of the first cultural expressions of second-generation artists from the late 1940s through the early 1960s and connect these earlier cultural texts with works subsequently produced by second-generation immigrants in the late twentieth century. It further provides the chance to explore how second-generationers constantly reinvented and renegotiated their identities in relation to America's changing cultural landscape during the Civil Rights era, the consciousness movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and the increasingly globalized world at the turn of the century.

I must admit that, at the start of this project, I had not intended to engage a cultural history of social movements in the United States. As the project emerged, however, I recognized how important most of the lead-

ing social movements—Civil Rights, Black Power, Pan-Africanism, Feminism, Hip Hop—were to Belafonte, Marshall, Lorde, Thomas, and the members of *Proyecto Uno*, both as second-generation immigrants of African descent and as artists and intellectuals. The timing of these movements and their respective trajectories after World War II often reveal as much about the artists and their cultural productions as do their individual relationships with parent communities, white society, and African America. It is always a slippery slope to begin to discuss the impact of movements on people's identity politics, let alone the growth of their artistic consciousness. Yet, the postwar moment was a period of great change in America, and there were very few who were left unaffected by mass attempts to challenge white supremacy, gender norms, and sexual, racial, and class biases in concerted, strategic ways. Belafonte, Marshall, Lorde, Thomas, and even *Proyecto Uno* are not very different in that respect from most Americans who came of age after World War II.

Because it became increasingly difficult to talk about the cultural productions of the second-generation artists collected in this study without discussing the relevance of key social movements, these movements share a small part of the stage with my analyses of the actual works themselves. Several movements—especially those of import during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s—often find a place in my examination of multiple artists, many of whom are contemporaries of each other. True to the individual nature of identity construction, these artists often have very different responses to the ideological underpinnings of each cultural moment. For example, Marshall's response to the integrationist politics of the Civil Rights Movement does not mirror Belafonte's, although both make use of Caribbean cultures in their works. Audre Lorde's understanding of Pan-Africanism engages the mainstream Feminist Movement in ways that Marshall's does not, despite the presence of Africa as a central motif in their writings. Thus, even as I acknowledge that social and cultural movements are crucial to how these second generationers understand and explore Caribbean American identity in the narratives they produce, this study is careful to point out that each artist has his or her own unique response to these movements as a second generationer from a particular cultural and individual background. The works explored in this study are reflective of that uniqueness.

This project is deliberately bounded by chapter in its discussion of artists' negotiations of Caribbean and African American cultures. Harry Belafonte, Paule Marshall, Audre Lorde, Piri Thomas, and *Proyecto Uno*, of course, are not the only artists and intellectuals who could have been chosen for this study. Still, each employs black identities at various stages in the postwar period in ways that prove useful to an examination of second-generation identity, representation, and performance. Collectively, they provide a framework through which to map second-generation identity while analyzing ethnicity as it intersects with issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality.

These artists range in ethnic origin from the West Indies to the Spanish Caribbean islands, and their cultural texts create overlapping, yet often dissonant, dialogues with each other. Although I focus on negotiations of black identities, I have been careful to resist choosing artists who produce discourses in similar ways. My goal is not to establish a unified articulation of second-generation identity for Caribbean immigrants but to illustrate the ways in which multiple factors affect and underscore narrations of Caribbean American selves for second-generationers.

The study begins by examining representations of Harry Belafonte's performative body in 1950s America. Born in New York to Jamaican and Martiniquan parents, Belafonte was one of the first second-generation West Indian immigrants to experience success as an American pop icon in the culture industry. Although questions remain about Belafonte's commodification in mass culture, I maintain that the emphasis on his body in the postwar period presents a provocative and discursive site for illuminating what was at stake in performances of racial and ethnic identities for black immigrants. Belafonte was successful as the "King of Calypso" at a moment when white Americans were becoming increasingly aware of West Indian cultures through music, films, and an increase in American tourism to Caribbean islands. Their engagement with Caribbean culture paralleled the growing tensions at home with African Americans after World War II. An analysis of Belafonte's performative body illustrates the challenges of participating in mainstream America for native-born and foreign blacks while asserting one's cultural and racial self. I argue that Belafonte invoked his Caribbean heritage to challenge the boundaries of black male citizenship in 1950s America.

Through performing a Caribbean identity, Belafonte altered mainstream imaginings of blacks in the United States at the dawn of the civil rights era.

The next chapter examines the literature and political activism of Paule Marshall, a second-generation immigrant of Barbadian descent. It focuses on the ideological crises of black and leftist politics that Paule Marshall explored in her fiction between 1959 and 1983. In contrast to Belafonte, Marshall provided an alternative stage for the examination of racial, ethnic, and gender locations. Belafonte's work suggests the importance of integration into American society, whereas Marshall's literature intimates the necessity of maintaining and preserving ties with black diasporic cultures. Here, I suggest that Marshall attempted to avoid assimilation into mainstream American culture by establishing links between Caribbeans and African Americans. I explore the ways in which Marshall established these ties by reconciling her leftist sensibilities with imaginings of an African diaspora in her work. Offering a close reading of her novel *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), the chapter contends that Marshall used the Caribbean and African America as sites that enacted a turn away from the white American mainstream and a movement toward an African diasporic identity.

The third chapter considers Audre Lorde's use of Africa, building on the previous chapter's discussion of the African diaspora in Paule Marshall's literature. Reading Lorde after Marshall, I suggest that Africa and the African diaspora become imaginative *American* constructions for both of these women who are influenced by their affiliations with social and political consciousness movements in the United States. However, although Lorde employed tropes of Africa, she resisted the temptation to distance herself from American culture. For this Barbadian and Grenadian second generationer, Africa became an imagined stage for recuperating black and gender subject-positions during the Black Arts and Feminist Movements. Using African mythological figures, Lorde engaged racial, sexual, and cultural communities outside the Caribbean, African America, and the black diaspora. This chapter examines two of Lorde's writings: *The Black Unicorn* (1978), a collection of poetry, and *Zami* (1982), Lorde's "biomythography." It suggests that Lorde used tropes of Africa to validate a politically black and lesbian identity and to empower the political identities of others.

The final two chapters augment understandings of Caribbean American identity in the United States with their focus on second-generation immigrants of Latino parentage. With my analyses of Spanish Caribbean cultural productions, I hope to expand readings of black identity in the United States. The fourth and fifth chapters suggest that black identity is not just an issue for West Indian immigrants, who are often racialized as black. Understandings of black identity also inform the cultural representations of more ambiguously racialized immigrants, such as immigrants from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

The fourth chapter examines the 1967 autobiography *Down These Mean Streets*, by Piri Thomas, a Nuyorican writer. Piri Thomas's autobiography complicates Marshall's and Lorde's understandings of black identity by voicing the complex reality that their imaginings of blackness placed on Thomas's multiracial and masculine Caribbean self. The chapter posits that Piri Thomas's negotiation of black identity in *Down These Mean Streets* threatens the autobiographical self's identification as a Puerto Rican man. It illustrates how Thomas's account of his racial discovery as a black Puerto Rican reveals his fraught relationships with white America and African America, as well as with his native Hispanic community. Although Thomas attempts to embrace a black identity in his autobiography, he does so only to experience dislocation in the urban environment of New York and in the American South. His autobiography ultimately raises questions about the rigidity of racial constructs in post-1965 America.

The book culminates with an analysis of the merengue hip hop of *Proyecto Uno*, a group started by two Dominican second generationers in the late 1980s. The chapter illuminates the ways in which the negotiation of a black identity first presented by Thomas in *Down These Mean Streets* provided a language for subsequent Afro-Latino artists to more easily engage African American and Hispanic cultures. Further, this final chapter addresses the immigrant experience of the "new" second generation—that is, children of immigrants who came to the United States after 1965. While Belafonte, Marshall, Lorde, and Thomas were all children of first-generation immigrants who migrated to the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, the members of *Proyecto Uno* are part of the migration influx from the Caribbean islands after changes in U.S. immigration policy in 1965. By focusing on second-generation immigrant culture in the late

twentieth century, I explore new developments in the performance and enunciation of Caribbean American identity.

The final chapter examines the hip-hop music of *Proyecto Uno* through an analysis of its lyrics, style, and performance. Linking the cultural history of Spanish Caribbean immigration with the development of second-generation Latino angst in American cities, the chapter uses contemporary gender and cultural theory to suggest the importance of providing alternative readings to the group's urban male braggadocio and chauvinistic image. Pushing the boundaries of cultural studies, the chapter argues that the lyrical play of *Proyecto Uno's* songs reveals identity formations that illuminate negotiations of immigrant, island, and black diasporic cultures in the 1990s. It concludes that cultural practices of post-1965 immigrant children suggest new ways of understanding the interaction between Caribbean and African American cultures at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Because of their location within, outside, and between black cultural and ethnic communities, second-generation Caribbean Americans reveal multiple ways of exploring discourses of race and ethnicity in the United States. *Constructing Black Selves* is the first book to offer a sustained reading of second-generation Caribbean identity. It illustrates that cultural production reveals the ways in which people see themselves and want to be seen by others and, in doing so, provides an alternative lens for understanding the social formations of Caribbean cultures in the United States. Collectively, the subjects of the book—Harry Belafonte, Paule Marshall, Audre Lorde, Piri Thomas, and *Proyecto Uno*—raise the challenge of reconsidering the complexities of Caribbean American identity for second-generation immigrants and, by implication, for future Caribbean populations in the United States. Their stories have much to tell us about the ways in which second generationers of the twentieth century have used various devices and narratives for constructing black selves.