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Frances Abbott

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Date

Black Migration to Atlanta: Metropolitan Spatial Patterns and Popular Representation,  
1990-2012

By

Frances Abbott

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts

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Allen Tullos, Ph.D.  
Advisor

---

Michael Elliott, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Earl Lewis, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

Accepted:

---

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.  
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

---

Date

Black Migration to Atlanta: Metropolitan Spatial Patterns and Popular Representation,  
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By

Frances Abbott

B.A., Yale University, 1999

M.A., University of Mississippi, 2006

M.A., Emory University, 2010

Advisor: Allen E. Tullos, Ph.D.

An abstract of

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the  
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University

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## Abstract

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By Frances Abbott

How does recent black migration impact Atlanta's geographies of black life? Since 1990, the Atlanta metropolitan region has become a major destination for three groups of black migrants from disparate origins: native-born "return south" blacks from other U.S. regions, Afro-Caribbean immigrants, and sub-Saharan African immigrants. These migrants' ethnic diversity dismantles existing notions of "black" culture, politics, and place. *Black Migration to Atlanta* revises scholarship by demonstrating that we cannot understand the complexity of black lives in Atlanta without investigating the complex relationship between space, migration, and popular culture. Atlanta emerges not just as an urban core, but as a *region*—a multiplicity of metropolitan sites—imagined and contested through residential patterns, commercial geographies, and popular culture's attempts to accommodate cultural and geographic shifts brought by recent black migration.

In my first chapter, I provide a brief history of Atlanta's racialized geography as a framework for my research. Then, I articulate black migrant residential geographies and delineate common patterns of suburbanization, exurbanization, and urban depopulation across groups. I next explore immigrant participation in the production of ethnic and regional foodways. I argue that such participation illustrates the ways migrants transform culturally and racially coded spaces through popular presentations of black ethnic diversity and make intraracial contact. Finally, I examine narrative modes of imagining migration to Atlanta. Popular culture texts contain "migrant imaginaries"—narrative constructions that advance specific relationships between migrants and imagined metropolitan places. These multiple, conflicting imaginaries are central to understanding how popular culture presents and informs migration.

*Black Migration to Atlanta* relies on mapping, historical scholarship, census data, interviews with migrants, observational fieldwork, and close readings of popular culture. It draws attention to three migrants groups who thus far have garnered little academic or popular recognition because they do not fit easily into prevailing academic ideas about black urbanism, particularly in southern U.S. cities. Located within regional, national, and global networks of cultural production, these migrants broaden notions of ethnic and class diversity across a region long configured in terms of racial/spatial binary.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction and a Brief History of Atlanta's Black Geography**

Since 1990, the Atlanta metropolitan region has experienced unprecedented black in-migration. These gains represent both the larger trend of black internal migration to the U.S. South beginning in 1970 and Atlanta's particular place as a primary destination for large numbers of immigrants. My research explores the spatial and socio-cultural impact of three concurrent waves of black migration to Atlanta: "return south" migration by native-born blacks from other U.S. regions, Caribbean immigration, and sub-Saharan African immigration. Drawing from interdisciplinary sources, I construct multiple geographies of black migrant life in Atlanta to map relationships between migrants and particular places and spaces in the metropolitan region. This spatial approach reveals intersections, divergences, and moments of cultural contact between groups and with outside populations.

Geography is the organizing principle of this project which I most often approach through literal mapping. Richard White argues for the practices of mapping in historical work with implications for interdisciplinary approaches:

Visualization and spatial history are not about producing illustrations or maps to communicate things that you have discovered by other means. It is a means of doing research; it generates questions that might otherwise go unasked, it reveals

historical relations that might otherwise go unnoticed, and it undermines, or substantiates, stories upon which we build our own versions of the past.<sup>1</sup>

The creation of maps constituted a large but central segment of my research process and, as White described, the process was always revelatory. Using maps, I am able to identify important patterns of concentration and dispersal and the ways they change over time that would be difficult to discern across a large and varied data demographic data set.

In addition to spatial history, my project brings together four related bodies of scholarship: African American urban and suburban studies, migration studies, demography, and critical work in popular culture and literature. Atlanta's historic racial geographies are well documented by a group of scholars that includes Larry Keating, Ron Baylor, and Kevin Kruse. Their work forms my understanding of the expanding metropolitan area in historical context. They also articulate the layers of historical and racial resonance contained in particular places and spaces that migrants inhabit and transform through their presence. The value of their collective work is reflected in the brief history of Atlanta at the end of this section.

African American suburban studies provide particularly important frameworks for my project. Black populations are suburbanizing on a national level during the period of my study, and the Atlanta region experiences massive suburbanization and exurbanization across race and class categories. Andrew Wiese's work on national and

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<sup>1</sup> Richard White, "What is Spatial History?" *Spatial History Lab*, 1 February 2010. <http://www.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/pub.php?id=29> (Accessed 12 July 2012).

Atlanta-area black suburbanization gave me insight into how race and class are marked in suburban places, and how suburbs replicate the racial and related socioeconomic inequalities of urban space through new means. I view Atlanta's suburban sites from a metropolitan perspective to investigate their relationships to the center city, competing suburbs, and the region. His research also identifies particular suburban sites, such as south DeKalb County and south Fulton County that were early destinations for black suburban pioneers. By 1990, these places receive influxes of suburban migrants who engage with older populations of black suburbanites.

Migration studies across disciplines offers numerous models for understanding of how world migration functions, with attention to the ways in which migrants arrive and return in patterns of visitation and sometimes temporary relocation, the relationship between work opportunities and these patterns, and the importance of kinship networks in conveying information about place and opportunity that influences new migration. Within the field of African American migration, Farah Jasmine Griffin's "*Who Set You Flowin'?*" (1995) details the trajectory of African American migration narratives and provided a jumping off point for my approach to popular culture and migrant imaginaries.

Demographic studies by William Frey (2001) and William Falk, Larry Hunt, and Matthew Hunt (2004) argue that the movement termed "return south migration" statistically refers most often to primary migrants (individuals born in other regions who migrate south), often middle-class, arriving at southern urban and suburban destinations. These ideas contributed to my return south migrant group profile and informed the construction of my data set in Chapter Two. My project also relies on existing

scholarship about sub-Saharan and Afro-Caribbean migration to the U.S. in group profiling and recognizing deviations from national characteristics related to place.

Scholarship on interaction between native-born black populations and immigrants has focused on evidence of antipathy and competition. In her essay, “Beyond Social Distancing,” Regine O. Jackson gives a useful overview of this body of literature and argues that “social science research, in particular, has gone from representing black Americans as culturally, socially, and economically homogenous to presuming pervasive social division and conflict in intraracial relations.”<sup>2</sup> She argues that moments of unity and cooperation are often erased from the record in favor of these narratives of division. While my work does not presume that racial identity is always a unifying factor or has fixed meaning across various ethnic groups or individuals, Chapter Three suggests spaces of contact between immigrant and native-born populations.

Finally, scholarship on popular culture and literature provides many useful models for assessing the impact of popular imaginaries and their relationships to race, place, and space in Chapter Four. A specific body of research on the significance of “place” in rap and hip-hop indicate ways in which affiliation of place functions as a mode of constructing identities within national, regional, and local imaginaries.

I employ several methodological approaches in this study, the most pervasive of which is mapping (followed by historical research). In the case of the research for

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<sup>2</sup> Regine O. Jackson, “Beyond Social Distancing: Intermarriage and Ethnic Boundaries among Black Americans in Boston,” in *The Other African Americans: Contemporary African and Caribbean Immigrants in the United States*, ed. Yoku Shaw-Taylor and Steven A. Tuch (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2007): 219.

Chapter Two, this mapping required the collection and organization of a data using the International Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS). In order to explore relationships between migrants and place in popular culture, I read and viewed many narratives about Atlanta, including popular literature, music, television and film. I also did interviews with immigrants and observational fieldwork for Chapter Three which analyzes black ethnic foodways.

This project makes a number of important contributions to scholarship. In terms of data, the period between 1990 and 2010 is so recent that little has been written about the large-scale changes in urban and suburban residential patterns and migration. More specifically, Atlanta during this period is at the unique confluence of several important trends: black immigration, black migration from outside the region, massive urban expansion and suburban development, large metro area population growth across demographics, and the related size of media and commercial markets. My work articulates these forces and invites future collaboration with scholars studying these and other Atlanta metropolitan racial and ethnic groups.

Additionally, ethnic diversity is rarely considered within African American urban studies projects, where race functions as an assumed category with some attention to class and gender. It is important for scholars to acknowledge various forms of diversity within black urban populations, and ethnic variety in particular. In the social sciences, internal and international migration rarely appear together in one study, as they are presumed to have little in common. Moreover, southern cities are often overlooked in



black urban studies, and have not featured often as part of a discussion of black ethnic populations as scholars have chosen to focus those studies more often on the national level or in urban areas with longer histories of black immigration such as New York.

In addition to the important work of a few scholars such as Andrew Wiese, black suburban populations and spaces deserve much more attention, particularly as the black suburban population continues to boom in the twenty-first century. My project argues that suburban destination preference is a common feature of all three of the migrant groups I include. In addition, in Chapter 3, I reject the ethnoburb as a model for describing black immigrant residential patterns in the region in favor of multiethnic interracial clusters in suburbs. This challenge to the ethnoburb model provides an important intervention for scholars of race.

While history, demography, the social sciences, economics, and other disciplines have made consistent contributions to the study of migration, cultural studies has not produced as much scholarship on the subject. While historical scholarship has offered examples of the ways in which mass media particularly impact migration, I project argues for the inclusion of popular narratives in migration studies.

Lastly, my research presents new evidence of the innovative possibilities that arise when using a spatial approach, particular in reference to metropolitan geographies and migration.

At the end of this chapter, I begin with a brief history of race and space in Atlanta, designed to familiarize readers with some Atlanta's most celebrated and most contentious

spaces. In particular, my historical account highlights the growth and development of two historic black districts—Auburn Avenue and the West End—that feature prominently in all my chapters. It also articulates a history of racialized north/south division in the metropolitan area that informs my approach in the subsequent chapter.

In Chapter Two, I use maps of census data to examine black residential change in three kinds of metropolitan space: historically black urban areas with consistent black majorities, inner-ring suburbs, and outer-ring exurbs. My research reveals that the three migrant groups in my study and the total black population share three population trends: decreasing population at Atlanta’s urban core, dramatic increases in population in the five-county inner-ring suburbs, and growing populations in exurban areas.

Using local black ethnic foodways as a case study, Chapter 3 uses fieldwork research to define and map geographies of black immigrant restaurants and markets in the Atlanta metropolitan region. I argue that these “foodscapes” shape spatial formations where intraracial and interregional contact likely occurs between groups. Of these formations, one particular area near Stone Mountain—the intersection of Memorial Drive and Rockbridge Road—emerges as Atlanta’s largest black ethnic commercial and cultural suburban strip. In addition, I return to Auburn Avenue and nearby historically black neighborhoods to discover a specific geography of cultural contact between black ethnic groups and native-born blacks there.

Chapter Four extends my project’s practices of mapping through new methodologies—close readings of music, literature, television, and film. I argue that

popular depictions of black migration to Atlanta emphasize new relationships between black migrants and metropolitan places that contribute to a more nuanced understanding of migration and its trajectories of influence. My analysis claims three distinct place-based narratives of black migrant experience with the Atlanta metropolitan area I call “migrant imaginaries.” Through these imaginaries, migrant characters variously encounter Atlanta as 1) an “inner city” place replete with signifiers of black urban culture, 2) a suburbanized site of social mobility and conspicuous consumption, and 3) a metropolitan landscape that denies black immigrants space, rendering them muted, invisible, and perpetually transitory within the narratives.

### **A Brief History of Atlanta’s Black Geography**

Atlanta’s history begins with the 1836 Georgia General Assembly decision to build the Western and Atlantic railroad as a trade route to the Midwest. Prior to 1836, present-day Atlanta and its suburbs were originally Creek and Cherokee territory, ceded in negotiations with a corrupt U.S. government in 1821 and 1835 respectively. By 1842, several buildings and a railroad depot existed at the site (named “Terminus”) and by 1845, several terminus locations and settlement name-changes later, it was dubbed “Atlanta” and saw the first passengers arrive by train from Augusta to the east.

Antebellum Atlanta was not much more than a small settlement at a railroad hub. Its 1850 population of 2,572 included 511 black people—493 enslaved and 18 free—as

20 percent of the total population.<sup>3</sup> Like older southern slave cities such as Charleston and Savannah, black people were evenly distributed throughout the city in a pattern often described as a “back-yard residence pattern.” Following this pattern, enslaved persons lived near the white people they were forced to serve, and the businesses at which they were forced to work—“around the city’s periphery and in alleys, near jobs, and in rear servants’ residences”.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to the black populations of southern slave cities, black people in antebellum Atlanta did not constitute a majority of the population during this period, giving their low population density and small numbers a somewhat different spatial effect.<sup>5</sup> As Atlanta’s population grew to 9,554 by 1860, its black population remained at 20 percent.<sup>6</sup> But the Civil War would bring drastic change to the city’s racial/spatial configuration.

Atlanta began to feature more prominently on a national map due to its status as an important Confederate railroad and military supply hub during the Civil War. In 1864, a major Union invasion of Atlanta brought destruction that would erase much of its antebellum spatial configuration and alter its residential structures. In the aftermath of the Civil War, newly freed black migrants arrived in Atlanta from rural places, creating a substantial black presence and altering the pre-war racial configuration of the city. In the period between 1860 and 1880, Atlanta’s antebellum population more than tripled (from 9,554 in 1860 to 37,409 in 1880) and blacks more than doubled their pre-war portion of

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<sup>3</sup> National Park Service: Atlanta, African American Experience.  
<http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/atlanta/africanamerican.htm> (Accessed 12 July 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996): 6.

<sup>5</sup> Dana White, “The Black Sides of Atlanta: A Geography of Expansion and Containment, 1970-1870.” *Atlanta Historical Journal* 26 (1982): 208.

<sup>6</sup> Bayor, 7.

the population (from 20.3 percent in 1860 to 45.5 in 1870, to 43.6 percent in 1880).<sup>7</sup> Changes in the social order and the geography of residential Atlanta, along with an influx of black migrants, allowed for the formation of black urban clusters often organized by proximity to newly built black schools, college, and churches.<sup>8</sup> Settlements formed as neighborhoods surrounding a high density of churches, such as Jennings town to the west, Mechanicsville and Summerhill to the south, and Shermantown to the east.<sup>9</sup> This period also saw the founding of a number of black colleges which would solidify Atlanta's position as a center of black education: Atlanta University in 1865, the the Augusta Institute (later Morehouse College) in 1867, University in 1869, the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary (later Spelman College) in 1881, and Morris Brown College in 1885.

For the most part, Atlanta's blacks lived on land deemed "undesirable" by whites near industry, railroad lines, and low-lying flood areas. As Ronald Bayor notes, there were some exceptions, such as the westside area surrounding Atlanta University which was on high ground. Living on the periphery, blacks and many poor whites did not benefit from physical improvements and city services which occurred near the central business district where white-collar whites lived. The efforts of blacks and white radical Republicans on city council to improve streets and hire black police officers in black neighborhoods bore little fruit.<sup>10</sup> As Henry W. Grady, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, heralded Atlanta as the capital of the "New South" to potential investors, promoting industrial growth and racial harmony (based on black subordination), post-Reconstruction

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<sup>7</sup> White, 208-209; Bayor 7.

<sup>8</sup> Bayor, 6-7.

<sup>9</sup> White, 211.

<sup>10</sup> Bayor, 7-9.

racial geography solidified race and class disparities and formed the foundation of twentieth-century segregated spatial patterns in the city.

At the turn of the century, rural blacks and whites continued to migrate in droves to Atlanta, leading to the expansion of municipal boundaries through annexation and creating competition for limited space in the center city.<sup>11</sup> The rate of white in-migration during this period also began to overtake that of black in-migration, and while black migration remained strong, by 1910 black would only constitute a third of the population (down from about 40 percent in 1900).<sup>12</sup> Competing with poor whites for commercial and residential space and power in a city experiencing massive population boom, blacks were forced to negotiate socially and economically charged landscapes. In 1906, these growing tensions exploded during the Atlanta Race Riot.

Inspired by persistent white racism and competition, recent racial animosities incited by state politics, and newspaper accusations about assaults by black men on white women, white Atlantans attacked blacks indiscriminately in Atlanta's streets on September 22. Beginning with attacks on black barbershops in the Five Points area downtown and extending into Brownsville, a black neighborhood two miles south, the riot raged for four days. On September 24 and 25, civic leaders—responding to negative national publicity—called for an end to violence.<sup>13</sup> But the damage was done and the race riot would have a definitive and lasting impact Atlanta's racial geography.

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<sup>11</sup> White, 212.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams*. (New York: Verso, 1996): 21.

<sup>13</sup> Bayor, 12. For detailed treatments of the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906, see Rebecca Burns, *Rage in the Gate City: The Story of the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006); Davis Fort Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations*.

Prior to the Riot, two growing black sections had formed in Atlanta—one on the eastern fringe of downtown on Auburn Avenue and the other on the westside between downtown and Atlanta University on West Hunter Street.<sup>14</sup> Where some level of integration had existed on Decatur Street in the central business district in terms of black-owned businesses and integrated patronage, many blacks fled the threat of white violence downtown to these sections in the aftermath of the riot, reinforcing the city's segregated zones.

Auburn Avenue, often known as “Sweet Auburn,” rose to prominence when black entrepreneurs consolidated their financial power on what would be later called the “richest Negro Street in the world.”<sup>15</sup> By the 1930s, Sweet Auburn was the headquarters for black-owned banks, insurance companies, and by the mid-1930s, the nation's only black daily newspaper, the *Atlanta World*. Some of the largest churches in the city were there: Big Bethel AME and Ebenezer Baptist—the pulpit of Martin Luther Kings, Jr. and Sr. Between the 1920s and the late 1950s, Auburn Avenue was the social and commercial center of black Atlanta. Its entrepreneurs mediated relations with white political and civic organizers and provided funding for residential expansion to the Westside. In the 1960s, Auburn Avenue began to lose businesses to the Westside it had

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(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, And Violence In A New South City*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Richard J. Hopkins, “Status, Mobility, and the Dimensions of Change in a Southern City: Atlanta, 1870-1910,” in *Cities in American History*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson and Stanley Schultz (New York: Knopf, 1972): 227.

<sup>15</sup> Qtd in Rutheiser, 115.

helped build. In the 1960s, its once vibrant commercial corridor was bisected by the Downtown connector, which dealt Sweet Auburn a “killing blow.”<sup>16</sup>

Attention began to shift to the Westside in the 1920s, as it became the main destination for migrating blacks.<sup>17</sup> In this period, black realtor and developer Heman E. Perry bought some three hundred acres of land there where he built houses and offered financing to black homeowners. His Westside purchase would be a strike against segregated geographies which had previously been bounded by city limits and white residential areas. Perry’s acres of land expanded the boundaries of black Atlanta past the limits intended by white leaders.<sup>18</sup> By the 1940s, nearly 40 percent of the city’s black population lived in this section.<sup>19</sup>

White leaders became concerned about black encroachment into white space threatened by projects like Perry’s expansion. They sought out numerous routes, by building walls and highways and mandating slum clearance, to create fixed boundaries between white residential areas and Atlanta’s growing black population. Black residential overcrowding and housing shortage in the post-war period catalyzed the formation of the Atlanta Housing Council in 1947. This organization, populated by black entrepreneurs and builders in conversation with white civic leaders, released a report that proposed six “Negro Expansion Areas”—all contiguous to existing black residential areas.<sup>20</sup> This approach to black residential expansion appeared to offer whites the geographically

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Bayor, 58.

<sup>18</sup> Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1989), 20.

<sup>19</sup> Bayor, 58.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Wiese, “African-American Suburbanization and Regionalism in the Modern South,” in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, eds. Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 215-218.



deliberate boundaries they were concerned with, but it also allowed black builders control over the kinds of structures and communities that would be built.

As black residents fleeing overcrowded areas spilled into white neighborhoods and racial tensions flared, white civic leaders decided to proceed with the plan for “Negro expansion.” A coalition of builders and entrepreneurs formed to build black housing. To the south of the city they built the Highpoint Apartments, which were completed by 1950. Andrew Wiese argues that this development was particularly important because it “opened the door to modern housing for black Atlantans who wanted to live outside the urban core but who could not afford to buy a home.” On the Westside, the coalition built subdivisions full of new homes—a rarity for blacks in segregated southern cities. By the end of the 1950s, this group had produced 12,000 new homes for blacks, almost half of them single family homes.<sup>21</sup>

By the end of the 1950s, opportunities for planned black residential development dried up. The rapid suburbanization of whites in the post-war era posed challenges foreclosed the possibility of new directions for expansion. This movement of whites to the suburbs freed up housing in the urban core that blacks moved into—a process that Arnold Hirsch calls “second ghetto formation.”<sup>22</sup> Where planned “Negro expansion” had been the province of dispersed southern metropolitan areas, after 1960 Atlanta’s racial/spatial geography began to mirror that of cities across the U.S.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>22</sup> Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>23</sup> This is an idea taken from Andrew Wiese’s essay “African American Suburbanization and Regionalism in the Modern South,” which argues that different patterns of black residence existed in the South before the 1960s.

Urban renewal projects displaced black residents in the urban core without building new housing to which they could relocate. In the 1950s, slum clearance served the needs of commercial rebuilding; in the 1960s it cleared space for civic construction of stadiums, a civic center, and expressways. By the 1970s the city turned its attention to the process of rebuilding urban housing but would not succeed in building more than it had cleared.<sup>24</sup> These strategies of renewal, displacement, and annexation would characterize racial geographies through the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup>

During this period, white Atlanta political leaders redrew the city limits, annexing northern Buckhead and surrounding areas in order to maintain a controlling white voting majority through the 1952 Plan of Improvement. This increased Atlanta's size from 37 to 118 square miles.<sup>26</sup> In stem the tide of white flight from the city, white leaders would attempt to annex Sandy Spring in north Fulton County in the 1960s, but met with overwhelming resistance. Struggle and contrast between annexed areas of the white northern suburbs—such as Buckhead, Druid Hills, and West Paces Ferry—and the black center city created what Matthew Lassiter calls “suburban islands in an urbanized landscape.”<sup>27</sup> The north/south racial divide manifested acutely in city politics during this period and formed a divide that persists into the twenty-first century.

By the end of the 1960s, white resistance to school desegregation accelerated the rate of white flight and black residents became highly concentrated in the southern and

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<sup>24</sup> Bayor, 69.

<sup>25</sup> Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 247.

<sup>26</sup> Bayor, 85.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 44

western sections of Atlanta's urban core, constituting a population majority by 1970.<sup>28</sup> But black expansion persisted as blacks sought to escape from declining city conditions and by this time, "a mostly black region reaching the margins of Fulton County had supplanted the former patchwork on white and black communities."<sup>29</sup> During the 1970s, blacks continued to suburbanize in west, south, and southeast sides of the city, pushing over the city limits to create a new ring of predominantly black suburbs in southeast DeKalb County and south Fulton County by 1980.

In their choices for sites of relocation, black suburban homeowners were conscripted to particular urban and suburban geographies by practicing of racial redlining uncovered by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in 1988. Among other findings, this research revealed that affluent blacks were more likely to be refused loans than working-class whites.<sup>30</sup> In keeping with national trends for black suburbanization, black suburbs transitioned from middle-class to predominantly working class in the next decade, as early suburban pioneers fled these areas for newer suburbs. Black suburban growth occurred as intensely as white suburban growth, but in opposite directions. By 1990, only 39 percent of metropolitan blacks lived inside of the city of Atlanta.<sup>31</sup>

White residential growth in the northern suburbs catalyzed shifts in the economic geography of the region in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>32</sup> New commercial development occurred in this area, pulling economic power out of the urban core and farther away from black districts in the city and southern suburbs. At the beginning of the 1990s,

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<sup>28</sup> Kruse, 234.

<sup>29</sup> Wiese, "African American Suburbanization and Regionalism in the Modern South," 220.

<sup>30</sup> Wiese, "African American Suburbanization and Regionalism in the Modern South," 221

<sup>31</sup> Rutheiser, 86.

<sup>32</sup> Larry Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 88-112.

blacks started to move out into suburban counties like Cobb and Gwinnett, but their numbers were small and they faced high degrees of residential segregation. Scholars have credited return south migrants with dramatically tilting black suburbanization to the north—a claim which I will assess in Chapter Two.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Both Rutheiser and Wiese make this claim. Rutheiser, 86; Wiese, “African American Suburbanization and Regionalism in the Modern South,” 224.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Mapping Atlanta's Metropolitan Black Populations, 1990-2010**

My demographic research for this project pursues answers to a central set of research questions: what were the metropolitan spatial configurations of return south migrants, Caribbean-born black immigrant, and Sub-Saharan African-born immigrants to the Atlanta region between 1990 and 2010, how did they change over time, and how do they compare with one another and to the total black population? In the context of growing dialogue about black suburbanization, I examine black residential change in three kinds of metropolitan space: historically black urban areas with consistent black majorities, inner-ring suburbs, and outer-ring exurbs.

In Atlanta's case, central Fulton County and western DeKalb County contain its urban area (with historical black population majorities to the south, east, and west of the center city), and other areas of these counties are part of the five-county inner-ring suburbs, in addition to Clayton, Gwinnett, and Cobb Counties. Outer-ring exurban counties include and extend beyond Carroll, Douglas, Paulding, Bartow, Cherokee, Barrow, Walton, Rockdale, Newton, Henry, Spalding, Fayette, and Coweta. Given Atlanta's particular racial/spatial history of segregation, I remain attentive to the directions of population growth to see if they reinforced the twentieth-century north/south spatial division of white and black or if black populations had moved northward into areas that have continued to gain economic power and white population since the mid-twentieth century.

I found little research that helped me approach my questions at any level of detail. Some of this was due to timing. The 2010 census was recently released and I am unaware of other work on Atlanta's black population or national black populations that relies heavily on that data. Scholars of black migration also rarely discuss internal U.S. and international migration to the U.S. within an extended comparative framework. Several researchers, particularly William Frey and John Logan, have produced useful studies of return south migration or black immigration to the U.S. on a national level that rank Atlanta's growth against that of other metropolitan regions between 1990 and 2000. But even these studies did not focus on the particular black geographies of Atlanta specifically. To do that work, I constructed my own population data set.

In this chapter, I explore this data to map and compare the geographic directional growth of Atlanta's black populations from 1990 to 2010, while offering profile information for each group. My research reveals a number of key findings. All black groups in the study—total, return south, Caribbean-born, and African-born—show dramatic growth in this period. They also share three population trends: decreasing population at Atlanta's urban core, dramatic increases in population in the five-county inner-ring suburbs, and growing populations in exurban areas.

Rates of growth and patterns of concentration for each group highlight key differences between them. The total black population exurbanizes early but more slowly, and has the slowest rates of growth in the northern inner-ring suburbs with explosive growth in southern suburbs and higher numbers in historically black areas. Caribbean-born blacks are initially concentrated in eastern inner-ring suburbs but suburbanize and exurbanize northward and southward at the fastest rate. African-born blacks show the

highest levels of concentration in the northern suburbs and the smallest degree of exurbanization. Return south migrants show suburban and exurban growth in all directions while retaining sizable population in historically black and contiguous areas.

By 2000, all four groups share high populations in only one area: East-DeKalb County-Stone Mountain. But common areas of growth and loss emerge between 2000 and 2010 that suggest future geographies of expansion for ethnically diverse Atlanta blacks.

## **Data**

To research questions about black population distribution, I used aggregated census data for 1990, 2000, and 2010 from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.<sup>34</sup> The creation of this set required key decisions about how to identify members of the three migrant groups and select geographic areas that would be comparable over time. It is important to outline these choices before exploring my research findings, as they clarify how I framed my research and how this frame influenced my approach to the data.

One of the most fundamental criteria for my selection is race category. To be included within the study, census respondents had to self-identify in some part as black using the census measure “black alone or in combination” with another race. This identifier is important because it removes populations of migrants from African and

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<sup>34</sup> Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder, and Matthew Sobek., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0* [Machine-readable database] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010). Hereafter referred to as IPUMS in text. I collected and prepared my data with extensive help from Rob O’Reilly of Emory’s Electronic Data Center.

Caribbean nations (such as white South Africans) who do not self-identify as black and do not experience U.S. social, political, and economic power structures as black people. The “in combination” measure was crucial for including populations who identify multi-racially, even as they may be perceived as black in the U.S context. Examples of these groups are Jamaican-Chinese, who identify as both Asian and Black, or people from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean who identify as both Black and Hispanic in the census.

To measure black immigrant populations, the census offers two options, depending on the decennial census. The first of these is “ancestry”—an option available to respondents in the 1990 and 2000 but not the 2010 census. In addition to the absence of this data from the last census of the study, ancestry measure poses some significant issues in the context of my research questions. While ancestry is useful for incorporating second-generation immigrant groups (the children of immigrants), it offers respondents many options for ancestral self-identification—some are nation-based and some are regional or even continental. Immigrants from Jamaica, for instance, might identify their ancestry as “Jamaican,” “British West Indian,” or “West Indian.” In addition, relatively recent black immigrants are not the only census respondents who would mark “African” given the U.S.’s history of slavery and the ambiguities it creates for many U.S.-born black people about more specific geographies of origin. Ancestry data was helpful to me then in getting a sense of the ways that black people used the census to identify but produced numbers that would not accurately reflected the immigrant groups and their nations of origin in specific ways relevant to this study.

The second census option for identifying black immigrant populations is “place of birth.” Using this measure, there are categories provided for the respondent that correlate



with nations that I could select as a part of geographies of the “Caribbean” and “Sub-Saharan Africa.” This data allows me to calculate specific numbers of immigrants from particular receiving countries without some of the complications of the ancestry measure. The downside of using “place of birth” is that it does not include the children of black immigrants born after their arrival in the U.S., who might culturally and experientially be considered part of a group. Since I use “place of birth,” population estimates are then low for black immigrant groups and include only black people born in the Caribbean and in Sub-Saharan Africa. Because “place of birth” was also not a question on the 2010 decennial census, I pulled data from the 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.<sup>35</sup> This data estimates smaller populations (like those within this study) from a smaller sampling of respondents across a five-year period and so gives numbers measured somewhat differently from those in the 1990 and 2000 censuses.<sup>36</sup>

Building my data set for black immigrants required me to identify bounded geographies for both the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa. In the case of the Caribbean particularly, this proved a complicated process. There are many competing definitions of the Caribbean related to complex historical legacies of often multi-colonialism, immigration both within and from outside the region, differences in language, and island versus mainland status.<sup>37</sup> I elected to define the Caribbean in broad popular and

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<sup>35</sup> This data is referred throughout the study as 2010 data.

<sup>36</sup> I chose to use the 5-year sample because it presents data for populations of almost any size, whereas the 2008-2010 3-year estimates offers data for populations of 20,000+ and the 2010 1-Year estimates offer data for populations of 65,000+. Because I wanted to examine the ethnic groups and PUMA populations with relative small populations, I needed to use this measure.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 16-18. Popular definitions of the Caribbean might include the Bahamas and Bermuda as islands but would exclude Suriname, Guyana, and Belize. Academic and community organizational definitions would claim the reverse and both often excluded Spanish-speaking nations such as Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic.

academic terms by including all island nations in the Caribbean Sea as well as Caribbean nations on the northeastern coast of South America and Central America.<sup>38</sup> This includes Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, both nations with identifiable black populations. My geographic set also includes Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands as part of the Caribbean. Despite their designations as U.S. territories, their socio-cultural histories inform acts of migration from those places that share more in common with Caribbean immigrants to the U.S. than internal migrants from other U.S. regions. Aggregating this data using the racial category “black alone or in combination” would filter out respondents who identify partially or fully as “black” in the U.S. context. Defining Sub-Saharan Africa proved less contentious because scholars and social organizations work with a more universally accepted geography. My sample selects all African nations except the six in North Africa historically considered part of the Arab world.<sup>39</sup> I did include Sudan as well as other countries, such as Somalia, Djibouti, Comoros, and Mauritania with both African and Arab world ties and histories, and then relied on racial classification to sort black populations.<sup>40</sup>

Measuring return south migrants raises a different set of data questions. As with black immigrant populations, the census offers two different ways to measure return

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<sup>38</sup> In compiling my data sample, I defined the Caribbean using the following census designations for place of birth: Anguilla, Barbado, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize/British Honduras, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Curacao, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana/British Guiana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Netherland Antilles, Dutch St. Maarten, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos, French Guiana, St. Barthelemy, French St. Maarten, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Bonaire, Saba, St. Eustatius.

<sup>39</sup> These six excluded nations are Western Sahara, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt.

<sup>40</sup> In compiling my data sample, I defined Sub-Saharan Africa using the following census designations for place of birth: Cape Verde, Sudan, Benin, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Reunion, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Eritrea, Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, San Tome and Principe, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa (Union of), Swaziland.

south migrant populations, each with different advantages and disadvantages. I elected to use both in this study. The first of these is by a census measure that asks respondents to indicate in which state they lived five years ago. This question appears on the 1990 and 2000 censuses, and allows me to see how many black people moved from a non-southern U.S. state to the Atlanta region in each five-year period—1985-1990 and 1995-2000, respectively. This measure produces what might be considered relative frequencies of migration for a five-year period as opposed to comprehensive population counts for return south migrants for a decade. As such, the numbers taken as population counts are low and do not continuously incorporate migrants from a previous period who have moved to Atlanta and stayed in the way that population data for black immigrant groups does. Each sample only suggests a rate of migration per period and return south migrants who remain are counted as a part of the population of Georgia by this measure in the subsequent census. For 2010, this question was revised to ask respondents where they had lived only one year before. In order to compare these migration rates between 1990, 2000, and 2010, I take one-year averages from the 1990 and 2000 samples.

The second and more controversial means of measuring return south migration uses “place of birth” responses by state. The choice to examine this measure engages the debate about how we define return south migration. A substantial amount of work on the subject, such as Carol Stack’s *Call to Home*, examines the literal return of participants in the Great Migration to their rural places of origin, although these scholars acknowledge that this group accounts for a small and declining percentage of migrants to southern

states in the context of black population regional shifts since 1970.<sup>41</sup> Particularly in the case of migrants to urban areas, William Falk, Larry Hunt, and Matthew Hunt argue that the majority of migrants classified as part of the return south are in fact “primary migrants”—black people born outside of the South who are moving there for the first time.<sup>42</sup>

Given this finding, black populations born outside of the South share significant intersection with return south migrants and might offer useful insights into spatial distribution. While I elect to use the “place of birth” measure as a way of indicating return south migrant population (in comparison to rate in the five-year and one-year measures), I acknowledge that it brings its new issues. First, it excludes literal return south migrants (born in the South, moved to another U.S. region, then moved to Atlanta), although Falk, Hunt, and Hunt suggest that particularly by 1990 these numbers are low. Second, using the “place of birth” measure assumes a direct migration route, where the members of this population may have lived in several other southern and non-southern locations and may not have migrated to Atlanta between 1990 and 2010.

Using both of these modes of measuring return south migration required me to delineate U.S. regions. Since prior residence and place of birth data are collected at the state level, this process involved sorting the fifty U.S. states into four categories:

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<sup>41</sup> Carol B. Stack, *Call to Home: African Americans Reclaim the Rural South* (New York: Basic Books, 1996). See also John Cromartie and Carol B. Stack, “Reinterpretation of Return and Nonreturn Migration to the South, 1975-1980” *The Geographic Review* vol. 79 (1989): 297-310; Robert N. Brown and John Cromartie, “Black Homeplace Migration to the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta: Ambiguous Journeys, Uncertain Outcomes” *Southeastern Geographer* 6, no. 2 (2006), 189-214; Glenn V. Fuguitt, John A. Fulton, and Calvin L. Beale, *The Shifting Patterns of Black Migration from and into the South, 1965-1995* Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development Research Report No. 93 (1989).

<sup>42</sup> William W. Falk, Larry L. Hunt, and Matthew O. Hunt, “Return Migrations of African-Americans to the South: Reclaiming a Land of Promise, Going Home, or Both?” *Rural Sociology* 69, no. 4 (2004): 490-509.

Northeast, Midwest, West, and South. For this process, I used the census classifications for region.<sup>43</sup> While in some cases there may be little difference between a migrant from the mid-Atlantic “southern” city such as Baltimore and a Northeastern migrant from Philadelphia, employing census regions allows my data to remain consistent with the large body of demographic work on return south migration which takes a broad view of black population losses and gains between regions defined as such by the census.<sup>44</sup>

While identifying modes by which to measure migrant populations, I also had to contend with how to define the Atlanta region for the purposes of mapping. Because of changes to the 2010 census and my subsequent use of the 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year estimates, the Public Use Microdata Area was the smallest geographic unit available to me for comparison of space over time.<sup>45</sup> PUMAs are non-overlapping divisions of U.S. states into census areas that contain around 100,000 people. They do not cross county boundaries, so several PUMAs can exist within one county or several counties can constitute one PUMA, depending on population size. For the 2000 census, state governments drew new PUMA areas, so PUMAs are consistent between 2000 and 2010 but not consistent with 1990.

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<sup>43</sup> The census classifies U.S. regions in four groups. South: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia. Northeast: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont. Midwest: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin. West: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming.

<sup>44</sup> Scholars of southern history could also make legitimate arguments about the problematic construction of one “South” as unified region, and might negotiate the classification of certain states. For example, the inclusion of the entire states of Florida or Texas, or the exclusion of southern Ohio which has strong ties to the Appalachian region. I recognize that any attempt to delineate one “South” or other U.S. region of this size is inherently a problematic task. Because my work focuses on the Atlanta region, I largely avoid more involved contention with these issues.

<sup>45</sup> Hereafter I will refer to Public Use Microdata Areas as PUMAs.

In addition, my study pulls from geography designated in IPUMS as part of the Atlanta Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) which also encompasses more counties by 2000 than in 1990. These shifts make detailed geographic comparison more difficult and so I rely on the changing demography of Atlanta's five innermost counties—Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett—in order to work more effectively with 1990 data.

Finally, before turning to my data, I want to knowledge the complexities lost in the creation of a migration data set such as this. This process necessitates the oversimplification of journeys and geographies that reveal interesting intersections between these migrant groups. Significantly, a migrant's route from a place of birth to the Atlanta region is often non-linear. Caribbean immigrants have a long history of interisland and European migration related to economic opportunity and flight from oppressive governments—histories that may create distinctions between place of birth and nation of residence with which they culturally identify.<sup>46</sup> For similar reasons and in preparation for immigration to the U.S., many Sub-Saharan African immigrants also experience intra-African or rural to urban migration within their nation of origin.<sup>47</sup>

In addition, immigrants from both groups often enter the United States in another city before later moving to Atlanta. In some studies of black population trends, they might be included in the flow of return south migrants selecting Atlanta's economic opportunities and climate over those of northeastern cities. In this study, return south migrants are filtered out as U.S.-born to distinguish them from immigrant groups. But U.S.-born return south migrants can travel similar non-linear paths to Atlanta. Findings

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<sup>46</sup> Waters, 22-24.

<sup>47</sup> John A. Arthur, *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States* (Westport, Ct.: Praeger, 2000), 18-20.

based on my data are suggestive of larger residential trends that evince commonalities and divergences between black migrant groups at the expense of detailed personal journeys.

### **Atlanta's Total Black Population, 1990-2010**

In order to trace the growth of black migrant groups and their impact on diversity and geography, it is important to start by establishing context with an examination of the Atlanta MSA's total black population between 1990 and 2010. Although this project focuses on three specific black migrant groups, they remain statistical minority (but growing) portions of the Atlanta MSA's total black population throughout the period.

**Table 2.1: Atlanta Region's Total Black Population by Place of Birth, 1990-2010**

<i>Population</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>% Pop.</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>% Pop.</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>% Pop.</i>
Total	679,413	100.0	1,211,269	100.0	1,648,589	100.0
Born GA	455,437	67.0	682,765	56.4	843,973	51.2
Born Other South	125,010	18.4	243,460	20.1	333,715	20.2
Born NE, MW, W	78,621	11.6	201,949	16.7	325,622	19.8
Caribbean	7,249	1.1	34,264	2.8	66,780	4.1
Sub-Saharan African	7,544	1.1	34,210	2.8	57,130	3.5
Other Foreign-Born	5,552	0.8	14,261	1.2	21,369	1.3

Table 1 illustrates important changes in Atlanta's black demography. The largest portion of Atlanta's black population consists of people born in the state of Georgia. This is typical for U.S. metropolitan areas and even by 2010 they persist as a majority of the region's black residents. Whereas in 1990 they comprised two-thirds of the total black population, by 2010 this fraction has slipped to slightly more than half. This is strong evidence of Atlanta's diversification through migration. As Chapter 1 illustrates, the

Atlanta region has been a hub for black migration from other southern states since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and this trend continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a steady 20% of the black population born in the South but outside of Georgia. This static rate indicates that while migrants from other southern states remain an important flow of black people into Atlanta, their numbers experience incremental growth consistent with regional population growth as opposed to the surging rates of growth of other black migrant groups.

Black populations born in other U.S. regions constitute one such surge. In 1990, they are about 10% of Atlanta's population but grow to almost 20% by 2010. Foreign-born blacks, particularly from the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa, also gain ground, swelling from almost 3% in 1990 to almost 9% in 2010. When we add their numbers to those of blacks born in other U.S. regions, overall migrant growth becomes more evident: in 1990 these groups are a combined 15% of the population but by 2010 they comprise almost 30%. In this period, Atlanta's black population undergoes rapid ethnic and regional diversification, and return south migrants, Caribbean immigrants, and Sub-Saharan African immigrants are largely its source.

How has Atlanta's total black population distributed itself spatially and how does this distribution shift over time, particularly in comparison to black migrant populations? To answer this question, I used my data set to create maps that illustrate population distribution for each of the census years for each group.<sup>48</sup> These maps reflect a *collective* drive towards suburban destinations. Because of the statistical dominance of blacks born in the South evident in the data, maps of total black population most clearly reflect the

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<sup>48</sup> For assistance learning ArcGIS, I relied on Michael Page from Emory's Electronic Data Center.



specific geography of suburbanization for this group and as such offer a useful means of comparison with maps of black migrant population distribution.<sup>49</sup>

Starting in the 1970s and continuing to the 1980s, black Atlantans move in significant numbers to the inner-ring suburbs on the south and southeastern sides of Atlanta, particularly south Fulton County and south DeKalb County. As neighborhoods underwent radical demographic transformation due to black residential expansion and white suburban flight, a new arc of predominantly black suburbs emerged.<sup>50</sup>

By 1990, this ring of southern and southeastern suburbs, along with urban neighborhoods on Atlanta's west and southwest sides, contained the majority of the region's black population (Figure 2.1). The largest of these populations (147,744) lived on Atlanta's Westside neighborhoods—all historically black areas connected to earlier periods of black geography and expansion. A significant population also lived in Atlanta south of the center city, in a PUMA containing historically black neighborhoods such as Summerhill, Mechanicsville, and Peoplestown (82,565). But large populations also appear in identifiably suburban areas—west DeKalb County including a small portion of the city of Atlanta, Decatur, and Avondale Estates (107,221), south and southeast DeKalb County including Lithonia (79,845), and south Fulton County including East Point and College Park (74,228).

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<sup>49</sup> Academic and journalistic interpretations of Atlanta's black suburbanization often assume that migrant groups relocate immediately to the suburbs and constitute the primary source for black suburbanization in the region. Atlanta's stable black population has in fact been suburbanizing in large numbers as is evident in my data and maps.

<sup>50</sup> Wiese, 220-223.

## Total Black Population, 1990

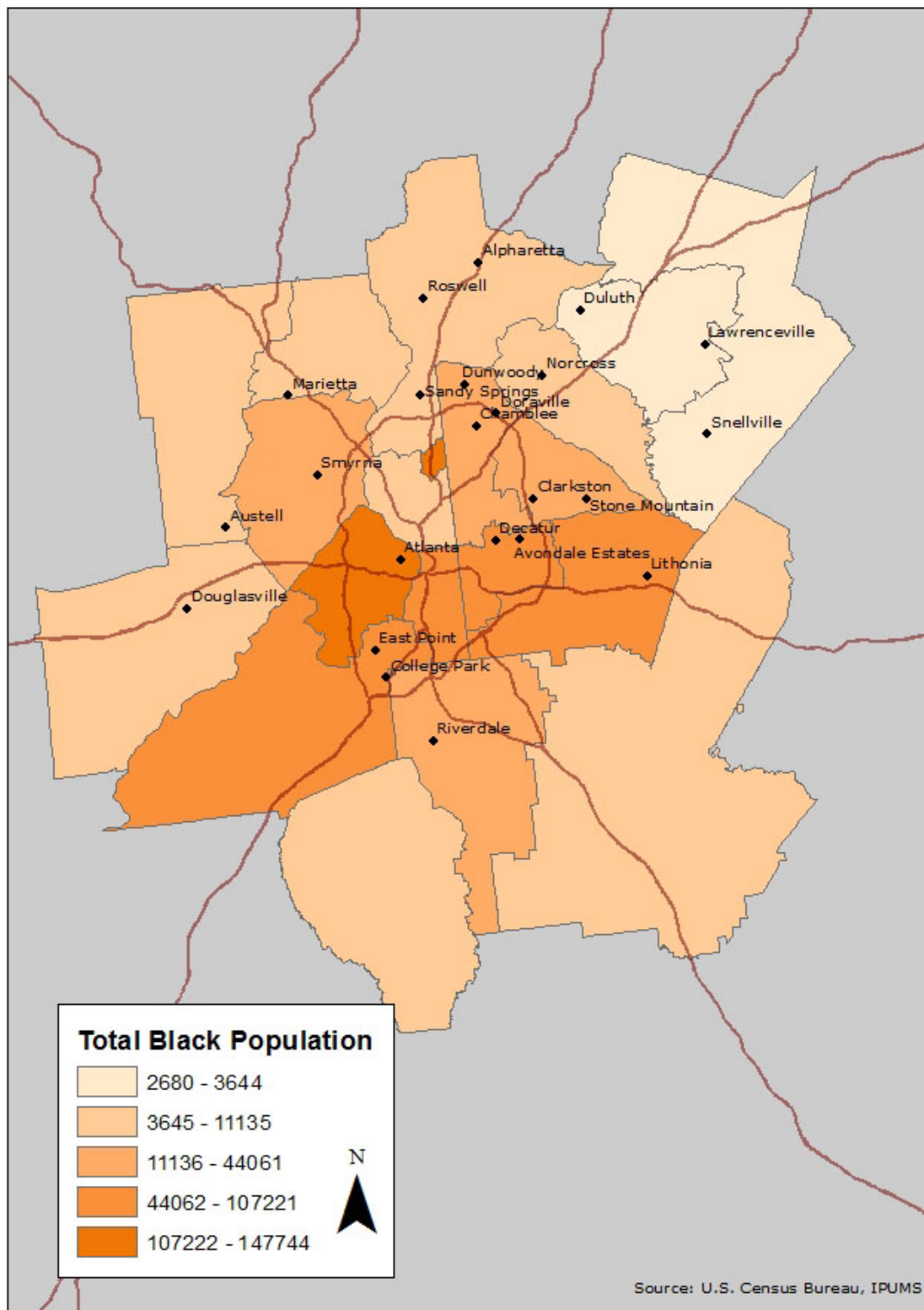


Figure 2.1: Total Black Population, Atlanta Metropolitan Region, 1990 ( IPUMS)

Together, these five urban and suburban inner-ring areas account for 72% of the region's black population. Suburbanizing blacks had also started to push to new areas proximate to the southern and southeastern suburbs. Figure 2.1 indicates smaller but significant black populations in previously white suburban areas: Clayton County to the south (44,061), south Cobb County to the north (30,929), northwest DeKalb County (22,233) and northeast DeKalb County (23,252).

Between 1990 and 2000, the Atlanta metro region contains seven of the top 10 counties with the fastest growing black populations in the nation: Gwinnett (first), Fayette (second), Douglas (third), Rockdale (fourth), Henry (sixth), Clayton (seventh), and Cobb (tenth). The 2000 total black population map shows both population growth in familiar high-black population PUMAs from 1990 and new suburban expansion (Figure 2.2).<sup>51</sup> While the PUMA containing Atlanta's west end retains the highest population (100,776), evidence of continued suburban growth appears in DeKalb and South Fulton Counties. The black suburbanized area of DeKalb County has grown northward to include suburban growth in the PUMA containing Stone Mountain (94,408), as well as western and southern DeKalb County tracts (91,433 and 93,206 respectively). Now combined into one PUMA, historically black neighborhoods south of the center city, East Point, and College Park indicate high black populations (83,808) and south Fulton County suggests significant black suburban population growth (81,355). Diverging from 1990 figures, these inner-ring and urban areas comprise only 45% of the region's black population, indicating a significant shift in suburbanization patterns towards black exurbanization.

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<sup>51</sup> Since PUMA lines were redrawn between 1990 and 2000, precise geographic areas are impossible to compare.

## Total Black Population, 2000

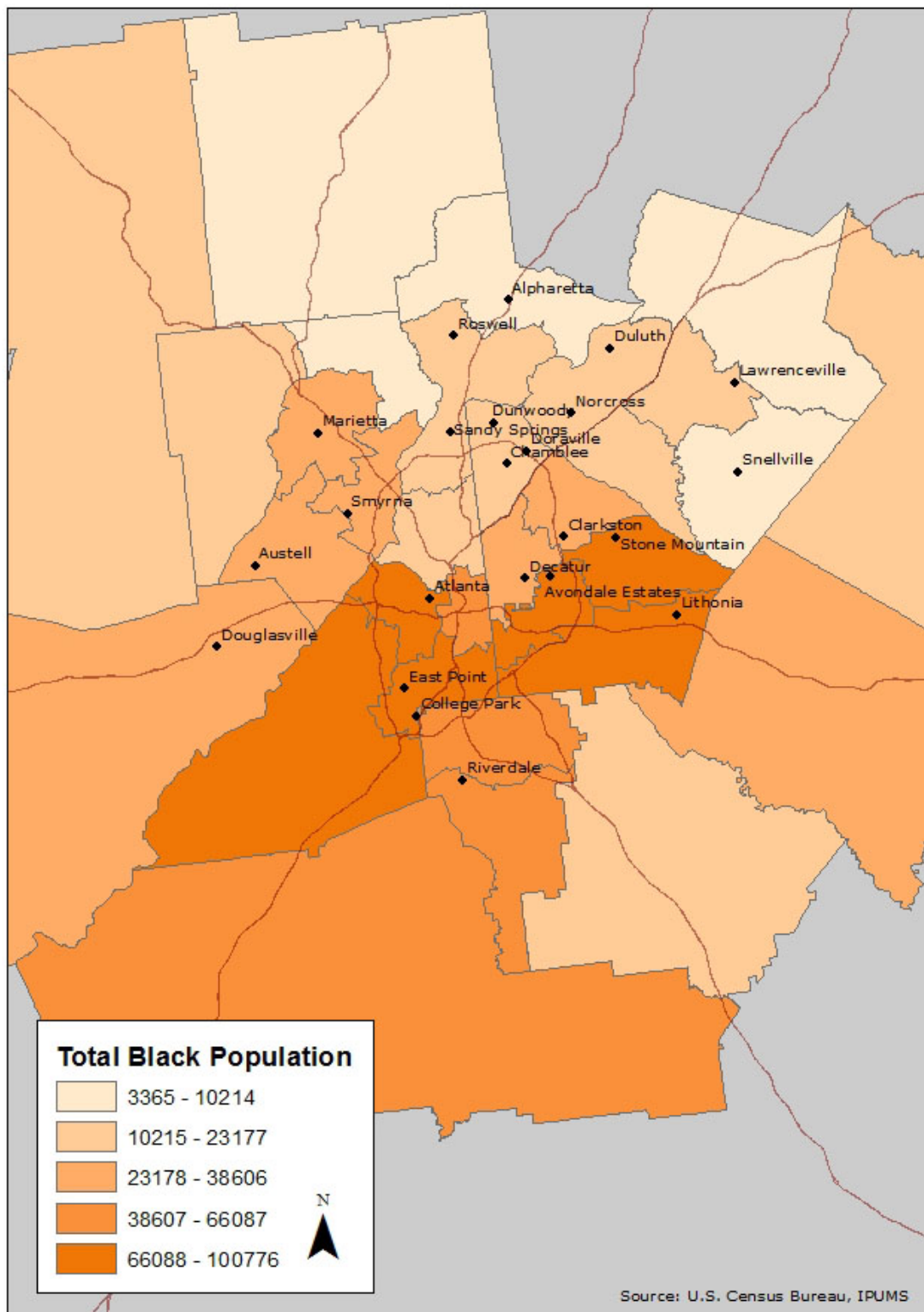


Figure 2.2: Total Black Population, Atlanta Metropolitan Region, 2000 (IPUMS)

Continuing growth evident at the 1990 census, Clayton County (now divided into two PUMAs) demonstrates a considerable black population gain in both the county's northern area (66,087) and its southern one (57,067), while southeast Cobb County also gains black population. Exurbs with significant black population growth during this period are difficult to measure specifically because they are collected in groups within one PUMA. The PUMA encompassing Coweta, Spalding, and Fayette counties to the south is home to 46,934. Although Coweta and Spalding Counties were not included in the 1990 Atlanta MSA, the relatively low population of the Douglas/Fayette PUMA (8,098) suggests substantial growth. The same is visible in the Douglas/Carroll PUMA to the southwest (32,480) and the Rockdale/Newton PUMA to the southeast (27,269).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> William H. Frey, "Census 2000 Shows Large Black Return to the South, Reinforcing the Region's 'White-Black' Demographic Profile," PSC Research Report No. 01-473, May 2001.

## Total Black Population, 2010

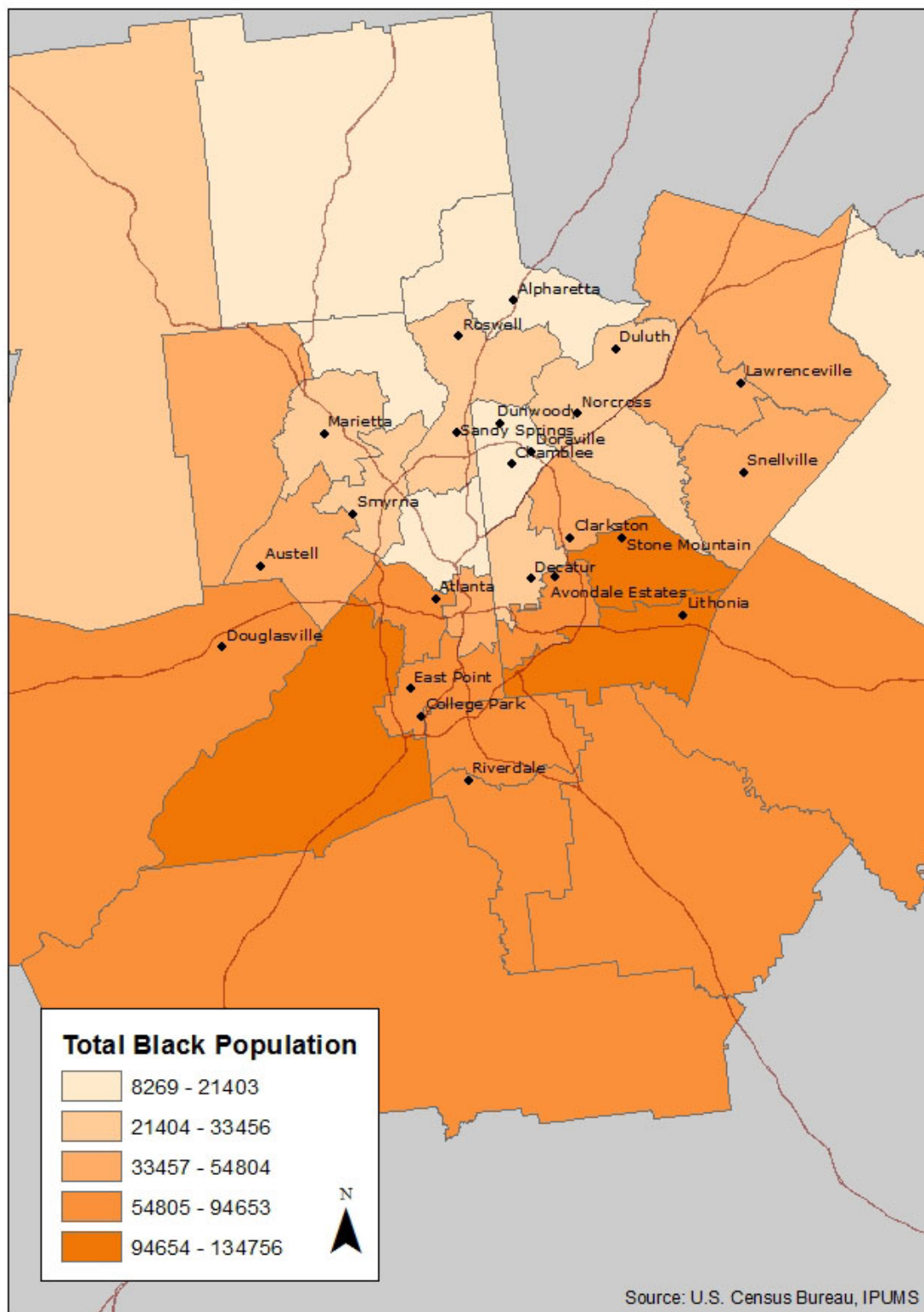


Figure 2.3: Total Black Population, Atlanta Metropolitan Region, 2010 (IPUMS)

2010 data reveals intensified suburban and exurban growth (Figure 2.3). While the largest concentrations of black population remain in 1990s suburban areas such as south Fulton County and south DeKalb County, the city of Atlanta's historically black neighborhoods no longer rank at the top of this list. The 2010 map illustrates rapid, large-scale black suburb and exurban growth into the southern area of the Atlanta region.

**Table 2.2: Fastest Growing Atlanta PUMAs by Black Population Gain, 2000-2010**

	<i>PUMA (stpuma#)</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>Pop. Gain</i>	<i>% Growth</i>
1	South Fulton County (1301107)	81,355	134,756	53,401	65.6
2	Henry County (1301700)	17,652	68,655	51,003	188.9
3	Rockdale/Newton Counties (1301600)	27,269	75,278	48,009	76.1
4	Southeast Gwinnett County (1301503)	9,195	48,692	39,497	429.6
5	South Clayton County (1301402)	57,067	94,653	37,586	65.9
6	Douglas/Carroll Counties (1301800)	32,480	69,918	37,438	115.3
7	Northeast Gwinnett County (1301502)	10,214	42,940	32,726	320.4
8	South DeKalb County (1301205)	93,206	121,345	28,139	30.2
9	Northwest Cobb County (1301305)	22,720	47,769	25,049	110.3
10	Paulding/Bartow Counties (1300700)	13,354	33,456	20,102	150.5
11	Central Gwinnett County (1301501)	20,510	39,105	18,595	90.7

Because we can compare identical geographic areas between 2000 and 2010, it is important to account not just for concentrations of population but rates of growth between census years for the same PUMAs. The 2010 map of population concentration and Table 2 demonstrate the intensification of black population movement to areas south of the city (South Fulton, Henry, Rockdale/Newton, South Clayton, Douglas/Carroll, South DeKalb), which seems to reinforce the idea that, despite massive suburbanization, the Atlanta region's black population continues to be contained in the southern metro region—the same pattern in large view that characterized the white flight period of the 1960s-1980s. But the data in Table 2 also reveals that the largest rates of growth for PUMA black population have occurred in northern exurban metro PUMAs: Southeast

Gwinnett County (429.55%) and Northeast Gwinnett County (320.40%). Other northern PUMAs suggest rapid rates of black exurban growth in that direction: Northwest Cobb, Central Gwinnett, and Paulding/Bartow.

These numbers reflect the suburbanization of the Atlanta region's total black population, which, as I have discussed, is by 2010 still approximately 70% southern-born and 50% Georgia-born. The suburbanization of Atlanta's regionally stable black population can be measured not just by overall gains in suburban PUMAs, but by an examination of PUMAs losing population in this period with an eye to historic strongholds of black population in the center city.

**Table 2.3: Atlanta PUMAs Losing Total Black Population, 2000-2010**

<i>PUMA (stpuma#)</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>Pop. Loss</i>	<i>% Loss</i>
1 Fulton County - East Point/College Park (1301105)	83,808	64,207	-19,601	-23.4
2 Fulton County – Atlanta, West End (1301106)	100,776	84,178	-16,598	-16.5
3 DeKalb County – Avondale Estates (1301204)	91,433	78,297	-13,154	-14.4
4 Fulton County – Atlanta, Center City (1301104)	59,040	49,860	-9180	-15.6
5 DeKalb County – Decatur (1301201)	32,092	26,440	-5,652	-17.6
6 North DeKalb County (1301202)	17,654	15,151	-2,503	-14.2

Between 2000 and 2010, all of the urban PUMAs with significant (and often historical) black populations experienced black population loss. This indicates that Atlanta's potentially most "static" black groups are leaving areas in which blacks lived throughout the twentieth century and moving to the suburbs. As Andrew Wiese argues, black suburbanization is not only an experience historically available to and capitalized upon



by the black middle class, as suburban and exurban areas offer a variety of housing opportunities appealing to people of different socio-economic backgrounds and the opportunity to abandon failing inner-city schools, crime, and blighted neighborhood spaces for new residential communities with different issues.<sup>53</sup> It is evident then that residents of Atlanta's center city, not all members of the same socio-economic class to begin with, have participated in the suburbanization of black Atlanta.<sup>54</sup>

A comparison of county black population data across the twenty-year period reveals further evidence of suburban and exurban population shifts.<sup>55</sup>

**Table 2.4: Atlanta Metro Area Total Black Population by County, 1990-2010**

<i>Geographic Area</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>% Growth 1990-2010</i>
Atlanta Metropolitan Region	679,413	1,211,269	1,648,589	142.7
Fulton County	322,514	365,279	398,049	23.4
DeKalb County	232,511	367,399	381,502	64.1
Cobb County	44,092	118,150	169,414	284.2
Clayton County	44,061	123,154	172,245	290.9
Gwinnett County	17,459	82,154	181,288	938.4
Henry County	9,135	17,652	68,655	651.6
Rockdale County	1,503	12,940	39,795	2547.7

Table 4 tells a number of noteworthy and divergent stories of Atlanta's black population change over time. Both Fulton County and the Atlanta MSA have experienced even

<sup>53</sup> Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4-9.

<sup>54</sup> The Fulton County-East Point/College Park PUMA is redrawn in 2000 to include neighborhoods south of the center city including Mechanicsville, Summerhill, Peoplestown, and Pittsburgh. Black populations in these neighborhoods have experienced a long history of displacement from this area forced by civic urban renewal plans and stadium and convention space construction. Prior to 1996, the construction of Centennial Olympic Stadium resulted in the leveling of a swath of low-income housing in these neighborhoods. This is the most recent chapter of a long history of black depopulation of these areas. For more on the history of black displacement from these areas in the twentieth century, see Keating, 88-112. For further reading about the racial/spatial impact of the 1996 Olympic Games on Atlanta's center city, see Rutheiser, 250-282.

<sup>55</sup> Because of the shifting geography of PUMAs, my data only supports 1990-2010 county comparison for the inner-ring counties. I retrieved data for Rockdale and Henry counties from the 1990, 2000, 2010 census based on total black population only.

incremental growth between census years. While a closer look at PUMAs indicates population shifts within Fulton County, its overall profile registers this movement as a small percentage increase. DeKalb County experiences the largest black population boom per county represented (approximately 135,000 people) between 1990 and 2000, which is likely the result of massive movement to south DeKalb County suburbs. But between 2000 and 2010, this growth has slowed to a trickle, with just 14,000 more black residents than in 2000. Both Cobb and Clayton Counties gain substantial, even incremental growth across the twenty-year period, but the most striking story of northern county suburban growth is Gwinnett. Although Gwinnett County's black population grows by about 65,000 people from 1990 to 2000, almost 100,000 black people relocated to Gwinnett County between 2000 and 2010, causing Gwinnett to outrank both Cobb and Clayton in total black population. Although black populations (and total county populations) for Henry and Rockdale Counties are lower by 2010 than the five inner-ring counties, their rates of growth indicate major demographic shifts. By 2010, Rockdale County's population was 47% black from 3% black in 1990. Henry County's black population grew from 16% in 1990 to 34% in 2010.<sup>56</sup>

Keeping these spatial sketches of the directions of total black population shifts as a comparative reference, I want to turn now to the three migrant groups that are the subject of my study. Starting with Caribbean-born black immigrants, I offer detailed population profile information and employ the same distribution mapping approach to illustrate convergences and divergences in spatial distribution across Atlanta's metropolitan region.

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<sup>56</sup> The total population of Rockdale County in 2010 was 85,215 and in 1990, 54,091. For Henry County, populations were 58,741 in 1990 and 203,922 in 2010. Source: U.S. Census.

### **Caribbean Born Black Immigrants to Atlanta, 1990-2010**

Caribbean immigrants to Atlanta participate in a large national wave of black Caribbean immigration to the U.S. starting in the mid-1960s with the passage of the Hart-Celler Act.<sup>57</sup> The Hart-Celler Act transformed American immigration law by removing restrictive racial quotas that privileged immigrants from European nations. This immigration reform allowed immigrants from the Caribbean to apply for visas under the large 120,000 Western Hemisphere annual quota. By 1976 this quota was reset at 20,000 immigrants per country and a visa preference system instituted that favored family reunification and occupation visas.<sup>58</sup> Caribbean immigration to the U.S. swelled in the aftermath of immigration reform, first bringing large numbers of Caribbean immigrants to northeastern cities like New York and Boston, and by the 1980s, to other metropolitan areas like Atlanta.

In 1980, Atlanta had only 920 Caribbean-born black immigrants. By 1990, its population was 7,249, ranking it significantly behind East Coast metro areas like New York (403,198), Miami (105,477), Boston (40,825), and Washington, D.C. (32,440). But by 2000 Atlanta's population had grown by 372.7%, ranking at Atlanta as the metro area

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<sup>57</sup> The U.S. experienced an earlier wave of black Caribbean immigration, primarily to New York City, in the 1920s. For further reading about this wave and its impact on urban space in a U.S. city, see Irma Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

<sup>58</sup> For information on the Hart-Celler Act and its national impact, see Philip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) and David M. Reimers, "An Unintended Reform: The 1965 Immigration Act and Third World Immigration to the United States," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 3, no. 1 (1983): 9-28.

with the 10<sup>th</sup> largest Caribbean born black population in the U.S.<sup>59</sup> This rapid immigration continues into the 2010s.

**Table 2.5: Atlanta's Caribbean Born Black Population by Place of Birth, 1990-2010**

(Places of Birth with a minimum of 1,000 immigrants by 2010)<sup>60</sup>

<i>Place of Birth</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>% Growth 1990-2010</i>
Total Caribbean Born	7,249	34,264	66,780	821.2
Jamaica	3,024	13,380	27,734	817.1
Haiti	274	5,921	11,682	3263.5
Guyana/British Guiana	456	2,759	5,879	1189.3
Trinidad/Tobago	689	3,041	5,842	747.9
U.S. Virgin Islands	1,131	3,765	5,472	383.8
Bahamas	123	762	1,678	1264.2
Barbados	436	658	1,455	233.7
Dominican Republic	14	295	1,251	8835.7

The earliest Caribbean born immigrants arrived in Atlanta in the 1980s, most often from Jamaica or U.S. Virgin Islands (a combined 57% of the 1990 population). The U.S. Virgin Islanders, as U.S. citizens, did not face the same immigration processes and obstacles negotiated by immigrants from other Caribbean nations. In the case of Jamaicans, early migrants were part of a large wave of Jamaican immigration to the U.S. in the 1980s in which 213,805 people (or 9% of Jamaica's total population of 2.5 million at the time) arrived.<sup>61</sup> Jamaicans and Haitians are by 2000 the largest groups within Atlanta's Caribbean born black population, with Jamaicans exhibiting steady growth

<sup>59</sup> John R. Logan, "Who Are the Other African Americans? Contemporary African and Caribbean Immigrants in the United States," in *The Other African Americans: Contemporary African and Caribbean Immigrants in the United States*, ed. Yoku Shaw-Taylor and Steven A. Tuch (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2007), 53.

<sup>60</sup> Other countries with immigrant populations that are less than 1,000 by 2010: Bermuda, Grenada, St. Lucia, Puerto Rico, Aruba, Antigua-Barbado, Netherland Antilles, Belize/British Honduras, British Virgin Islands, St. Kitts-Nevis, Cuba, St. Vincent, and Dominica.

<sup>61</sup> Waters, 36.

since the 1980s and Haitians more rapid growth since 1990. Jamaicans and Haitians are also the two most populous groups of black Caribbean immigrants nationally.<sup>62</sup>

As self-selecting migrants, Caribbean-born blacks have, on national average, more years of education, higher median household incomes, lower rates of unemployment, and lower percentages living below poverty than U.S.-born blacks. Sub-Saharan African born blacks have higher levels of education and lower rates of unemployment than Caribbean-born blacks, but also lower median household incomes and a higher percentage living below poverty.<sup>63</sup>

Caribbean-born black immigrants come to the U.S. and to Atlanta for several primary reasons. First, they are attracted to opportunities for educational and economic advancement available in the U.S. but not in their countries of origin. In some cases, Caribbean-born black immigrants come to escape political terror and instability (as in the case of Haitians in the 1990s) or socio-cultural oppression (like homophobic violence experienced by LGBTQ men and women from an array of Caribbean nations). But the most universal reason for migrating is family reunification, which also explains immigrants' affinities for particular U.S. places. Caribbean immigrants, like many other immigrant groups, often follow chain migration patterns, in which immigrants relocate to places where they have family or know other people from their country of origin.<sup>64</sup> This reunification accounts for the rapid growth of Caribbean national groups in a particular metro area or part of a metro area.

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<sup>62</sup> Logan, 54.

<sup>63</sup> Logan, 54-56.

<sup>64</sup> Chain migration can also refer to the pattern in which immigrants from a particular region or town in their nation of origin relocate to a particular neighborhood or city. While this is sometimes the case in Atlanta, a number of Caribbean immigrants come from larger urban centers in the Caribbean and do not follow these patterns.

Caribbean-born black immigrants to Atlanta value Atlanta's offerings in terms of these priorities. They most often migrate to Atlanta in order to reunite with family and loved ones, and this influences their initial choice of residence within the region. Kinship networks also play a pivotal role in securing housing and employment and shaping immigrants' early perceptions of place. For immigrants, Atlanta's economic growth, between 1990 and 2000, created job prospects in a variety of sectors. Atlanta's high concentration of colleges and universities make it an attractive site of relocation for those immigrants seeking education opportunities as well. Caribbean immigrants value the lower cost of living (as compared to northeastern cities like New York) which affords them the option to invest in relatively cheap property and get more space. Particular for immigrants relocating from within the United States, Atlanta's warmer climate was an additional factor that gave it an edge over other choices. Finally, because Atlanta's center city is relatively small and its surrounding metro region large, a plethora of suburban space is available to immigrants, many of whom are seeking a fully suburbanized version of the "American Dream" (another factor that distinguishes Atlanta from northeastern U.S. cities). By mapping changing metropolitan spatial patterns of this group and comparing findings to other black populations, I explore the ways in which these suburban dreams manifest themselves as geographic realities.

## Caribbean Born Black Population, 1990

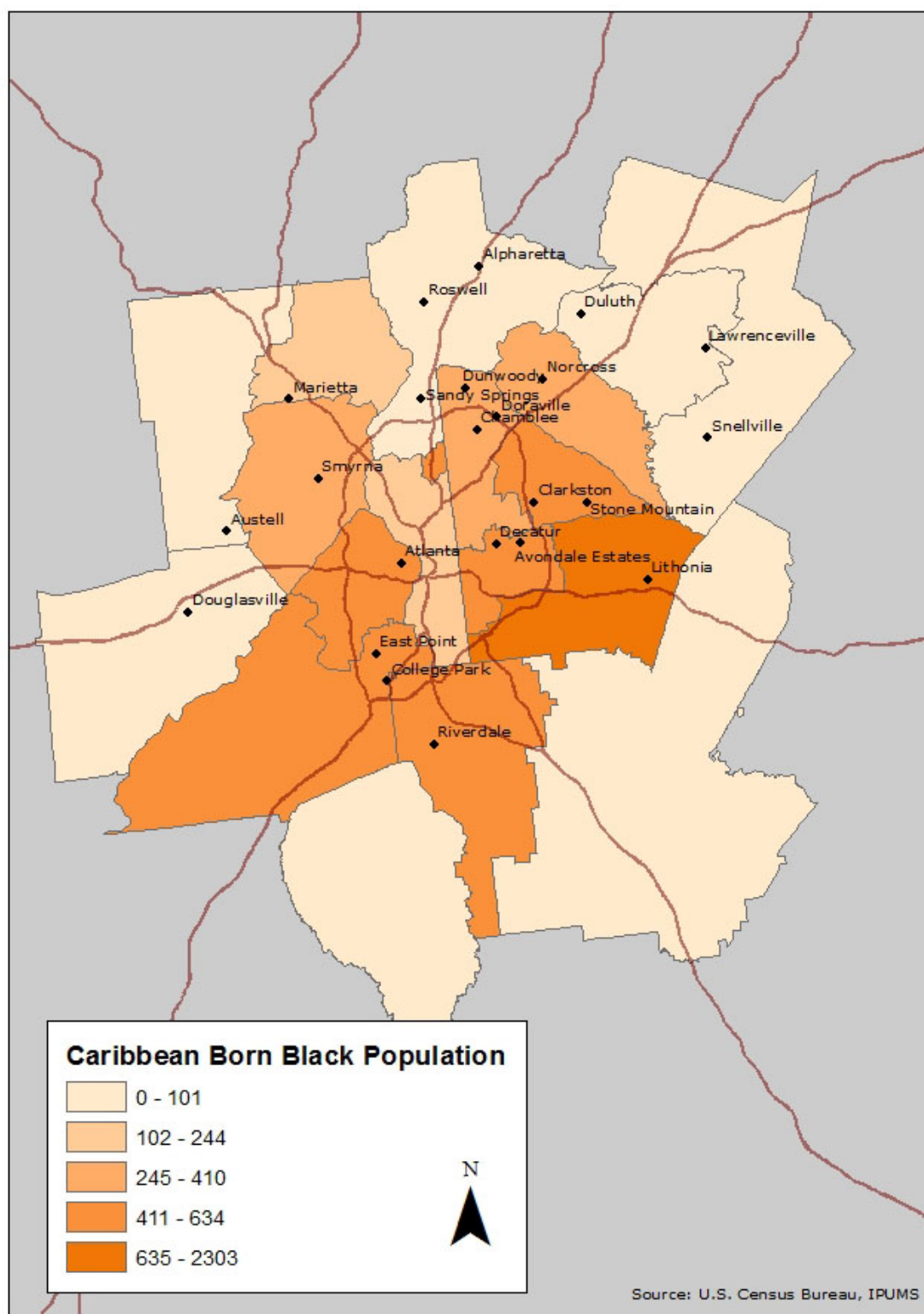


Figure 2.4: Caribbean Born Black Population, Atlanta Metropolitan Region, 1990 (IPUMS)

At the time of the 1990 census, Atlanta's Caribbean born black population is small, creating some optical illusions in a relative map of population distribution (Figure 2.4). This population was in fact fairly concentrated—one third of the total group population lived in the South DeKalb County PUMA containing Lithonia (2,303). Smaller but significant numbers lived in two adjoining PUMAs: the DeKalb County PUMA including Decatur and Avondale Estates (634) and the eastern DeKalb PUMA including Clarkston and Stone Mountain (610). Other clusters of immigrants appear in Atlanta's historically black PUMAs around the West End/Westside (540), in South Fulton County including East Point and College Park (577), and in Clayton County (564).

At first glance, Caribbean-born black immigrants in 1990 share a strikingly similar geography to the total black population. Their areas of higher distribution are generally similar with the exception of their low numbers in Atlanta's center city PUMA and their absence from outer-ring and exurban locations. They are primarily residents of areas with large black populations. But they are not as evenly distributed across these areas as the total black population. High numbers in eastern DeKalb County, Clayton County, and South Fulton County suggest an overall higher level of suburbanization relative to the size of the population.



## Caribbean Born Black Population, 2000

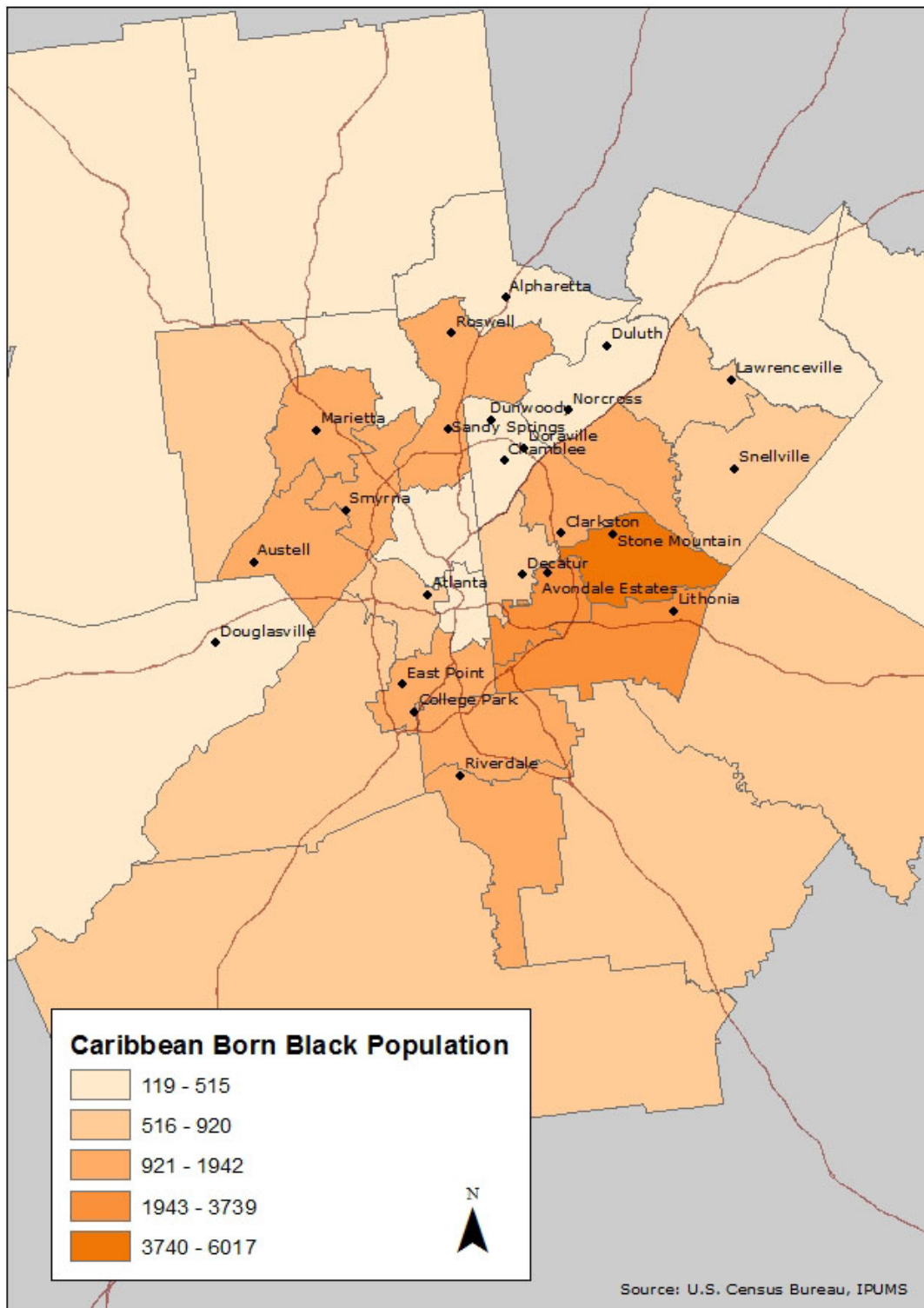


Figure 2.5: Caribbean Born Black Population, Atlanta Metropolitan Region, 2000 (IPUMS)

Perhaps the most dramatic change between the 1990 map and the 2000 map is the diminished number of immigrants in or near the center city. Where Atlanta's Westside and South Fulton County had a relatively high number of immigrants in 1990, that population is not as large relative to the total by 2000. This data suggests that newly arriving immigrants are not choosing to live near the center city and potentially that earlier immigrant residents there have chosen to move to other suburban locations.

The DeKalb County PUMA containing Stone Mountain remains a frontrunner with a population of 6,017. Surrounding DeKalb County PUMAs maintain smaller but substantial numbers: South DeKalb including Lithonia (3,739), DeKalb including Avondale Estates (2,255) and eastern DeKalb County including Clarkston (1,942). In total, these higher population areas of DeKalb County account for 40% of the total Caribbean-born black population for the region. Clayton County also maintains a consistent 7% of the population as from 1990.

In the northern suburbs, Caribbean-born black immigrants have expanded into some suburban PUMAs more quickly than the total black population. These include Cobb County PUMAs (with the exception of northeast Cobb), southern Gwinnett County, and North Fulton County containing Roswell and Sandy Springs. By 2000, 11% of the region's black Caribbean born immigrants live in Gwinnett County and 15% in Cobb, with only 14% in Fulton County (including suburban, historically white north Fulton County).

## Caribbean Born Black Population, 2010

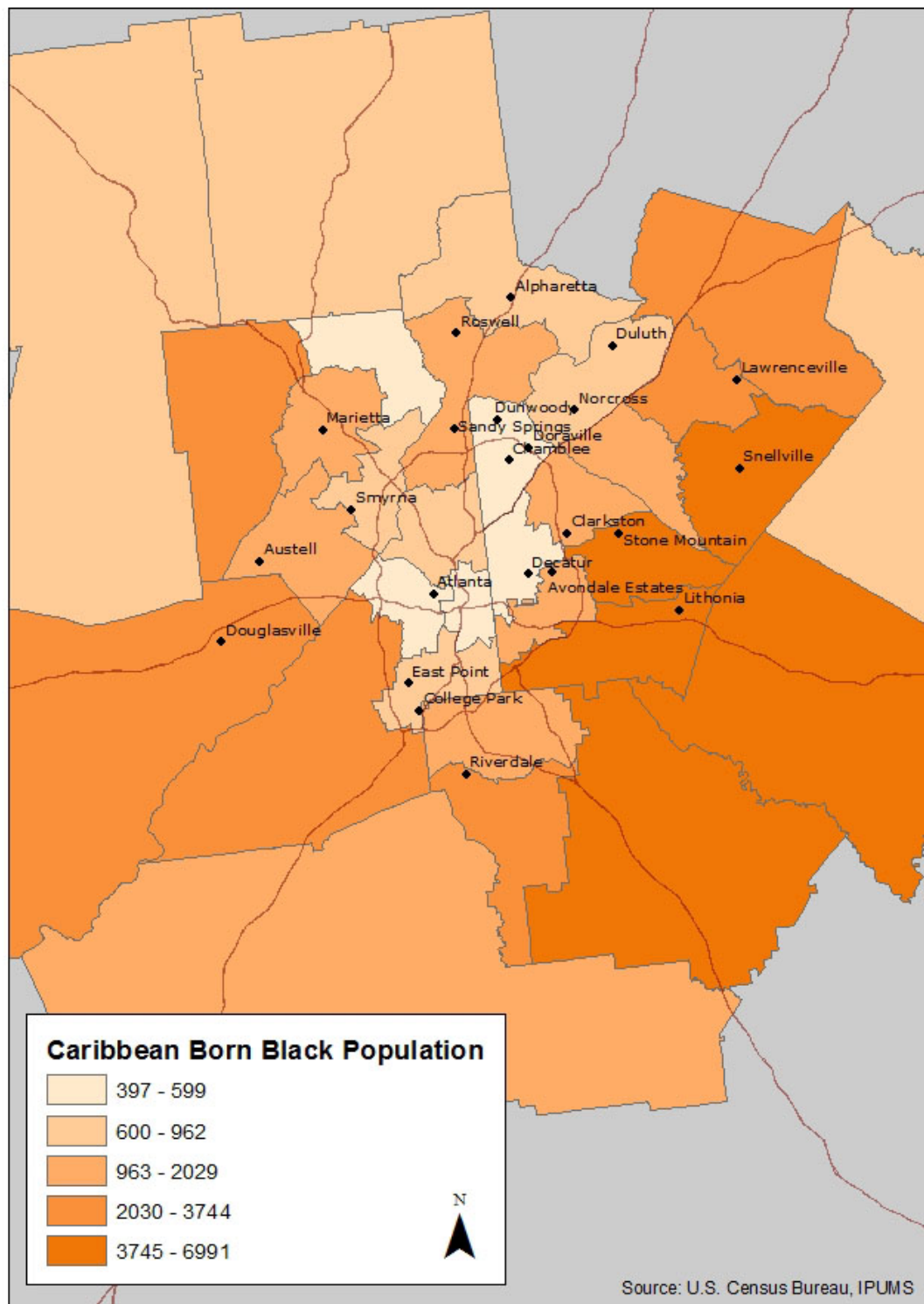


Figure 2.6: Caribbean Born Black Population, Atlanta Metropolitan Region, 2010 (IPUMS)

By 2010, this group is more dispersed and more exurbanized. This expansion takes place particularly in the eastern section of the Atlanta region and to some extent in the western. Whereas the population of the eastern DeKalb County PUMA including Stone Mountain was 6,017 in 2000, it has only grown slightly to 6,991 by 2010. For the first time, this group does not have concentration in a particular PUMA or even county area with substantial growth. Instead of intensifying growth in an existing area of concentration, immigrants have moved into new locations in large numbers as illustrated in Table 2.6.

**Table 2.6: Fastest Growing Atlanta PUMAs by Caribbean Born Black Population Gain, 2000-2010**

	<i>PUMA (stpuma#)</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>Pop. Gain</i>	<i>% Growth</i>
1	Rockdale/Newton Counties (1301600)	913	5,737	4,824	528.4
2	Southeast Gwinnett County (1301503)	870	4,689	3,819	439.0
3	Henry County (1301700)	593	4,318	3,725	628.2
4	Northeast Gwinnett County (1301502)	238	3,665	3,427	1439.9
5	South Clayton County (1301402)	1,332	3,744	2,412	181.1
6	Douglas/Carroll Counties (1301800)	357	2,612	2,255	631.7
7	Central Gwinnett County (1301501)	866	2,857	1,991	229.9
8	South Fulton County (1301107)	735	2,663	1,928	262.3
9	Northwest Cobb County (1301305)	878	2,577	1,699	193.5
10	South DeKalb County (1301205)	3739	5,218	1,479	39.6

The similarity of this list to its counterpart for the total black population (Table 2.2) is striking and suggests decreasing segregation from U.S. born blacks as these groups are suburbanizing to similar sites within the same time frame.<sup>65</sup> In Table 2.2, all ten of these PUMAs appear, if in a somewhat different order. Most notably, South Fulton County and South DeKalb County rank much higher on that list, while Northeast

<sup>65</sup> This claim is supported by John Logan's research using the Index of Dissimilarity which argues that Afro-Caribbean segregation from African Americans drops from 53.6 to 39.8 between 1990 and 2000. My research suggests that this trend continues into 2010. Logan, 58-60.

Gwinnett County and Southeast Gwinnett County rank lower. In Table 2.6, northern suburban PUMAs (Northeast and Southeast Gwinnett County) and exurban PUMAs (Rockdale/Newton Counties and Henry County) top the list, with smaller percent growth showing for more long-standing southern suburban sites (South Clayton County and South Fulton County). This data suggests that Caribbean-born blacks are suburbanizing more quickly to eastern Gwinnett County than the total black population and comparatively more slowly to South Fulton County and South DeKalb County. While both Caribbean born blacks and the total black population is exurbanizing to Rockdale/Newton Counties, Henry County, and Douglas/Carroll Counties, rates of growth for Caribbean-born immigrants are substantially higher.

How do these population gains reflect the movement and growth of black immigrants from particular nations of origin? Generally, the larger the population gain, the higher proportions from a larger number of nations of origin. Rockdale/Newton Counties gained 4,284 Caribbean-born black immigrants, including 2,960 Jamaicans, 689 Guyanese, 363 Haitians, 355 Trinidadian/Tobagonians, and 130 U.S. Virgin Islanders. South Gwinnett County shows gains of similar proportions. But ethnic diversity in gains is even more noticeable in the case of Henry County. Of 3,725, 1,429 were born in Jamaica, 1,174 in Haiti, 247 in Guyana, 195 in Trinidad/Tobago, 190 in Antigua, 121 in Barbados, and 96 in the Bahamas. In South Fulton County, which gained only 1,928 new Caribbean-born black immigrants, 1,087 were from Jamaica and 355 from the U.S. Virgin Islands.

**Table 2.7: Atlanta PUMAs Losing Caribbean Born Black Population, 2000-2010**

	<i>PUMA (stpuma#)</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>Pop. Loss</i>	<i>% Loss</i>
1	DeKalb County – Avondale Estates (1301204)	2,255	1,297	-958	-42.5
2	Southeast Cobb County (1301303)	1,522	923	-599	-39.4
3	Fulton County - East Point/College Park (1301105)	1,149	706	-443	-38.6
4	East DeKalb County – Clarkston (1301203)	1,942	1,601	-341	-17.6
5	Fulton County – Atlanta, West End (1301106)	920	599	-321	-34.9
6	DeKalb County – Decatur (1301201)	655	397	-258	-39.4

The data for losses (Table 2.7) also correlates strongly with total black population losing PUMAs (Table 2.3). Four PUMAs appear on both lists—Fulton County-East Point/College Park, Fulton County-Atlanta, West End, DeKalb County-Avondale Estates, and DeKalb County-Decatur. Collectively, these areas signal a movement out of Atlanta’s center city and historically black areas. Two PUMAs appear in Table 2.3 that do not appear here—Fulton County-Atlanta, Center City and North DeKalb County, because they have never had substantial populations of Caribbean-born black immigrants. The appearance of Southeast Cobb County and East DeKalb County-Clarkston in Table 2.7 suggest shifts within an already suburbanized population towards newly growing areas highlighted in Table 2.6.

Data about nation of birth suggests that population losses come from multiple groups simultaneously and is not the product of shifting geographies for a particular ethnic group. For example, DeKalb County-Avondale Estates losses nearly equal numbers of Haitians, Jamaicans, Trinidadian/Tobagonians, and U.S. Virgin Islanders. The same is true for losses in Southeast Cobb County. Data about loss at the “Caribbean-

born” level can in some cases obscure small divergences of flows between ethnic groups. For instance, South Fulton County loses its numbers from Jamaica, the U.S. Virgin Islands, St. Lucia, and Grenada but gains 141 Haitians.

In terms of population concentration, only 39% of Caribbean-born black immigrants live within the five southeastern PUMAs of largest population by 2010—East DeKalb County-Stone Mountain, Rockdale/Newton Counties, South DeKalb County, Henry County, and South Clayton County. Different Caribbean ethnic groups exhibit different spatial population tendencies towards concentration and dispersal.<sup>66</sup> Of the highly represented ethnic groups, Jamaicans and Guyanese evince the highest patterns of concentration, although they cover large geographic areas and do not encompass majority populations. For Guyanese immigrants, this concentration is contained in a swath of three contiguous PUMAs: East DeKalb County-Stone Mountain, South DeKalb County, and Rockdale/Newton Counties, which account for 48% of the Guyanese population of the region. Jamaicans form an even larger geography of what might be called area concentration in an arc of PUMAs on the southeastern side of the Atlanta region, similar to that of the larger Caribbean-born group. This arc includes Southeast Gwinnett County, East DeKalb County-Stone Mountain, South DeKalb County, Rockdale/Newton Counties, and Henry County, for a total of 48% of the total Jamaican population.

Other groups show even more tendency towards geographic diffusion.

Trinidadian/Tobagonians and U.S. Virgin Islanders show small degrees of concentration with broad dispersal across most PUMAs. For Trinidadian/Tobagonians, 22% live in the

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<sup>66</sup> I identify concentration when an ethnic group has a population of 40% in a group of adjoining PUMAs. Dispersal occurs when PUMAs with large numbers of an ethnic group’s immigrants are geographically disparate, or PUMAs with large numbers do not exist.

area formed by South DeKalb County and East DeKalb County-Stone Mountain. For U.S. Virgin Islanders, 10% live in East DeKalb County-Stone Mountain and 7% in South Clayton County with much smaller numbers elsewhere. Haitians are the most dispersed of the Caribbean-born ethnic populations and live in every PUMA. With a total population of 11,682 by 2010, their largest populations appear in geographically disparate PUMAs—1,451 (12%) in Northeast Gwinnett County, 1,215 (10%) in Henry County, 1,146 (10%) in South Clayton County, and 1,099 (9%) in Southwest Cobb County.

**Table 2.8: Atlanta Caribbean Born Black Population by County, 1990-2010**

<i>Geographic Area</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>% Growth 1990-2010</i>
Atlanta Region	7,249	34,264	66,780	821.2
DeKalb County	3,944	15,067	15,968	304.9
Fulton County	1,623	4,856	8,141	401.6
Clayton County	564	2,393	5,191	820.4
Cobb County	559	5,042	7,444	1231.7
Gwinnett County	459	3,648	13,214	2778.9

Although Table 2.8 does not illustrate the radical change in exurban growth for Caribbean-born black immigrants between 1990 and 2010, it offers a means for comparison with the total black population's distribution across Atlanta's five inner-ring counties (Table 2.4). All growth percentages are higher in Table 2.8, illustrating substantial growth for the population both in the region and in all five counties. DeKalb County for Caribbean-born black immigrants, as for the total black population, experiences precipitous growth by 2000 that has dropped off by 2010. Fulton and Clayton Counties experience similar incremental growth. But Cobb and Gwinnett Counties indicate the most marked difference from the total population in their extreme rates of



growth—for Cobb County between 1990 and 2000 and for Gwinnett County between 2000 and 2010. These findings, as well as insights from exurban data, illustrate that while Caribbean-born black immigrants are moving at faster rates to northern suburbs and southern exurb, they are maintaining an overall residential geography consistent with that of the total black population.

### **Sub-Saharan African Born Black Immigrants to Atlanta, 1990-2010**

In terms of generalized immigration history and attractions to the U.S. and Atlanta, Sub-Saharan African black immigrants share much in common with Caribbean-born black immigrants. The rapid increase of African immigrants to the U.S. since the 1960s was enabled by major changes in immigration law—the 1965 Immigration (Hart-Celler) Act, 1980 changes in laws related to refugees, the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which allowed undocumented immigrants to become permanent residents, and the 1990 Immigration Act, which increased admission on the basis of employment skills and citizenship in an under-represented sending nation.<sup>67</sup> Unlike Caribbean-born black immigrants, African-born blacks did not have substantial earlier waves of migration to the U.S.

By 1980, Atlanta had a Sub-Saharan African born black population of only 1,120 and by 1990, 7,544. This population was significantly smaller than those of other metro areas—Washington, D.C. (32,248), New York (31,532), and Los Angeles (16,826)—but grew 284.6% to 34,210 by 2000, making it the U.S. metro area with the third largest

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<sup>67</sup> Arthur, 7-10.

African-born population.<sup>68</sup> Population growth persisted into 2010 with both national and Atlanta regional population gains.

**Table 2.9: Atlanta Sub-Saharan African Born Black Population by Place of Birth, 1990-2010**

(Places of Birth with a minimum of 1,000 immigrants by 2010)<sup>69</sup>

<i>Place of Birth</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>% Growth 1990-2010</i>
Total Sub-Saharan African Born	7,544	34,210	57,130	657.3
Nigeria	3,633	9,029	14,008	285.6
Ethiopia	1,753	5,083	9,765	457.1
Ghana	353	2,766	5,294	1399.7
Liberia	426	2,122	4,705	1004.5
Kenya	120	1,665	3,156	2530.0
Cameroon	47	875	1,880	3900.0
Somalia	134	3,454	2,209	1548.5
Sierra Leone	98	1,103	1,129	1052.0

The earliest African-born black groups to arrive in Atlanta in the 1980s were Nigerians and Ethiopians, consistent with nation trends.<sup>70</sup> In 2010, these two groups maintain the largest ethnic populations in Atlanta although they are increasingly joined by immigrants from an array of nations primarily in West and East Africa—in largest numbers from Ghana, Liberia, and Kenya. Groups from Somalia and Sierra Leone experience drastic growth between 1990 and 2000 which drops off completely by 2010, or in the case of Somalia, registers a significant population loss. These surges in

<sup>68</sup> Logan, 51-54. While Afro-Caribbean immigrants to the U.S. live primarily on the East Coast, African immigrants are more dispersed living in significant portions in all U.S. regions. The number of Afro-Caribbean immigrants nationally is also more than twice the size of African immigrants, although their population numbers in Atlanta remain equivalent.

<sup>69</sup> Other countries with immigrant populations that are less than 1,000 by 2010: Guinea, Senegal, Cape Verde, Sudan, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, South Africa. By 2010, there are also substantial numbers classified as Western Africa, ns (2,796), Eastern Africa ns, n.e.c (803), and Africa ns/n.e.c. (6,573).

<sup>70</sup> Arthur, 41.

immigration between 1990 and 2000 can likely be accounted for by extreme political turmoil in both Somalia and Sierra Leone during the 1990s.<sup>71</sup>

In terms of socio-economic indicators, African-born black immigrants are on average more highly educated than U.S.-born or Caribbean born black groups and have lower rates of unemployment. Like Caribbean-born blacks, African-born blacks perform better than U.S.-born blacks with a smaller percentage living below poverty and higher median household income, but behind Caribbean-born immigrants.<sup>72</sup>

The reasons that African-born blacks migrate to the U.S. and to Atlanta are identical to those of Caribbean-born blacks: educational and employment opportunities, flight from political upheaval in their nation of origin, and family reunification. As with Caribbean-born blacks, family reunification is an incredibly important factor catalyzing migration and shaping opportunities and knowledge of relocation place. African-born black immigrants describe similar concepts of the “American Dream” possible in Atlanta: universities, relatively low cost of living, available suburban property, and warmer climate as compared to other U.S. destinations.

An important difference between Caribbean-born and African-born blacks’ reasons for migrating is the relative impact of political unrest. While Haitian immigrants come to the U.S. and Atlanta to escape this turmoil, that is largely not true of blacks from other Caribbean nations. In contrast, for African-born immigrants the late- twentieth and early twenty-first centuries encompass a period of tremendous political and civil instability in Africa more broadly and particularly in some nations sending immigrants to

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<sup>71</sup> Liberia also experiences war in this period that contributes to U.S. immigration.

<sup>72</sup> Logan, 54-56.

the U.S.—Rwanda, the Congo, Liberia, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Burundi, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Eritrea.<sup>73</sup> Because of this, political unrest is a factor more often cited by African-born immigrants, both refugee and non-refugee. A growing population of refugees from these nations began to arrive in Georgia in the 1990s and their spatial patterns of resettlement have a significant impact on the geography of the African-born black population.

In the late 1980s, non-profit government-sponsored agencies selected Clarkston in eastern DeKalb County for refugee resettlement. As a potential resettlement site, Clarkston offered many advantages. It is only thirteen miles from Atlanta, which, in a period of economic boom, offered a plethora of low-skilled jobs for newly arrived refugees. Public transportation, by bus or rail, made these jobs accessible to refugees without cars. Due to white flight in the 1980s, Clarkston also had a surplus of low-rent apartment complexes that would provide cheap housing and were within walking distance of places to shop for food and other supplies. The first refugee arrivals in the late 1980s and early 1990s were from Southeast Asia, followed by refugees from Bosnia, Kosovo and the former Soviet Union. By the mid-1990s, agencies had opened offices in Clarkston and began to resettle growing numbers of refugees from war-torn African countries including Liberia, Congo, Burundi, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea.<sup>74</sup>

While they are only a portion of the African-born black population of the Atlanta region, black refugees living in Clarkston and surrounding areas in eastern DeKalb County contribute to an area of African-born black immigrant concentration there. As

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<sup>73</sup> Arthur, 25.

<sup>74</sup> Warren St. John, *Outcasts United: A Refugee Team, an American Town* (New York, Spiegel and Grau, 2009), 35-36.

this area continued to receive African refugees in 2010, it persists as a zone of high population between 2000 and 2010 in my data and on related maps. While it is important to acknowledge that refugees are not the Atlanta region's only, majority, or earliest African-born black immigrants, it is necessary to highlight them here in order to place suburbanization in eastern DeKalb County in context and understand the different overall characteristics of the population there after 2000.

## Sub-Saharan African Born Black Population, 1990

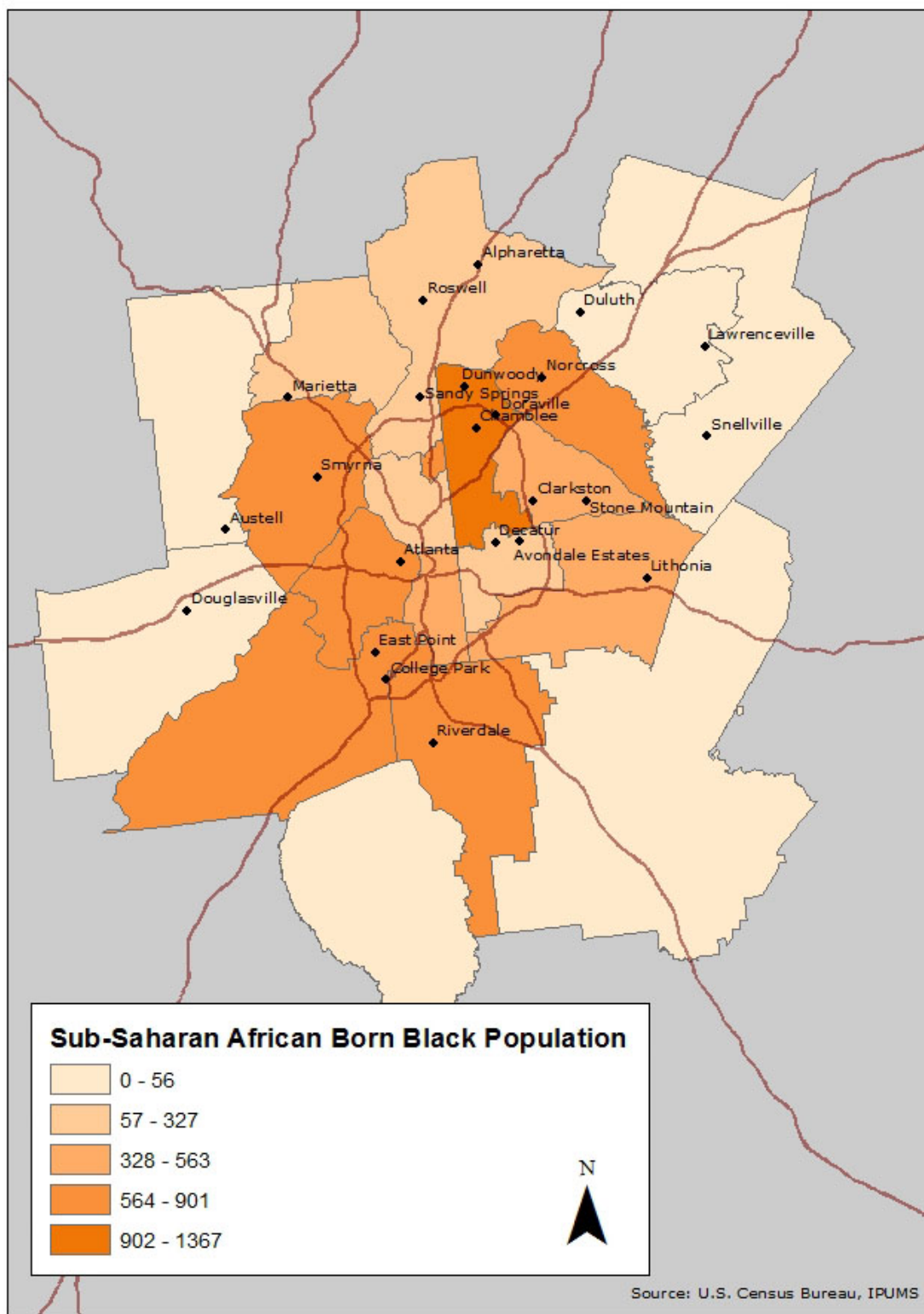


Figure 2.7: Sub-Saharan African Born Black Population, Atlanta Metropolitan Region, 1990(IPUMS)

In 1990 (before large-scale African refugee resettlement in Clarkston), African-born black immigrants reside in areas both familiar and unfamiliar from Caribbean-born and total black population data (Figure 2.7 compared with Figures 2.1 and 2.4). All of these groups had significant presence in Clayton County, South Fulton County, Fulton County's historically black Westside, and South DeKalb County—31% of the total black population lived in these four PUMAs, as well as 35% of the Sub-Saharan African born and 55% of the Caribbean-born black populations.<sup>75</sup> These areas of commonality indicate that a substantial number of African-born blacks lived in majority-black PUMAs in proximity to other black groups.

But by 1990, a greater percentage of African-born black immigrants lived in the northern suburban PUMAs that for previous decades had been zones of white flight. Sizable numbers of African-born black immigrants are evident in South Cobb County, North Fulton County, Northwest DeKalb County, and West Gwinnett County—by 1990, 41% of the total African-born black population. For Caribbean-born blacks and the total black population, these percents—16% and 11%, respectively, were much lower. Since the total black population was both more exurbanized and contained higher numbers in the Atlanta center city and Decatur PUMAs in 1990, its numbers were more broadly dispersed across the region. For this reason, the 8 PUMAs compared above comprise only 42% of the total black population, where they account for 71% of Caribbean-born blacks and 76% of African-born blacks. To a greater extent than Caribbean-born blacks, African-born blacks showed patterns of inner-ring suburbanization by 1990 that distinguished them from other black populations, revealing their overall higher levels of segregation from them.

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<sup>75</sup> South DeKalb County was also a zone of concentration for Caribbean-born blacks at 1990, accounting for this higher percentage.

## Sub-Saharan African Born Black Population, 2000

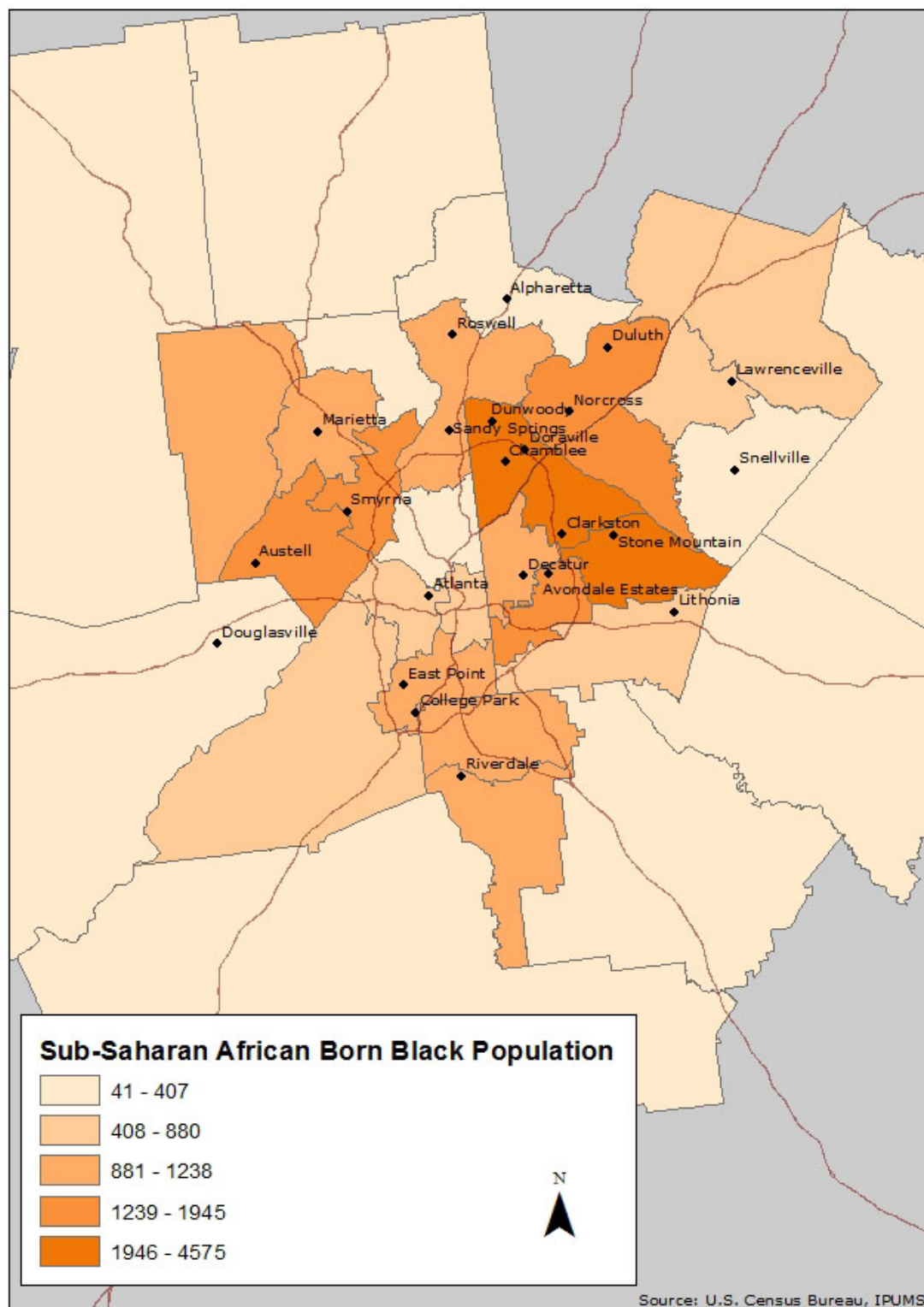


Figure 2.8: Sub-Saharan African Born Black Population, Atlanta Metropolitan Region, 2000(IPUMS)



This distinctive pattern of northern inner-ring suburbanization persists and intensifies in 2000 to encompass expanding areas of Cobb and Gwinnett Counties (Figure 2.8). At this time, 47% of African-born blacks live in the northern suburban inner-ring containing Cobb County, Gwinnett County, North Fulton County (two northernmost PUMAs) and North DeKalb County, in contrast to 20% of the total black population and 30% of Caribbean-born blacks (Figures 2.2 and 2.5). While Caribbean-born numbers have grown in Cobb County and Gwinnett County, they are in areas closer to the city of Atlanta, while African-born blacks have expanded to the farthest northwestern and northeastern sections of these counties, respectively.

Caribbean-born and African-born blacks share trends in 2000 that distinguish them from the total black population. They have lost population concentration in south Fulton County (including the East Point/College Park PUMA) between 1990 and 2000 and gained concentration in East DeKalb County-Clarkston. For African-born blacks, due to the addition of resettled refugees to the non-refugee population, the level of concentration in the second PUMA is much higher. The total black population also maintains distinctive higher percentage of residents in the Fulton-County-Atlanta, Center City PUMA as well as in DeKalb County, Decatur.

The 2000 maps for Caribbean-born and total populations demonstrate increased exurbanization since 1990, as I have previously discussed. For the total black population, this process is already evident in western, southern, and eastern areas by 1990 but increases concentration and area expansion by 2000. For Caribbean-born blacks, the 2000 map shows the first indications of exurban growth, primarily in areas south and southeast of the region. At the 2000 census, African-born blacks show no significant exurban

populations or population growth. Population growth consists of increased numbers within the 5 county-inner ring, and particularly in its northern and eastern suburbs, without geographic expansion to new PUMAs.

Despite important dissimilarities in Sub-Saharan African born black immigrants' patterns of metropolitan residence and suburbanization, areas of shared population concentration do emerge between the three groups. The East DeKalb County-Stone Mountain PUMA is an area of high concentration for all three, and from 1990, DeKalb County-Avondale Estates and both Clayton County PUMAs maintain considerable numbers as well.

## Sub-Saharan African Born Black Population, 2010

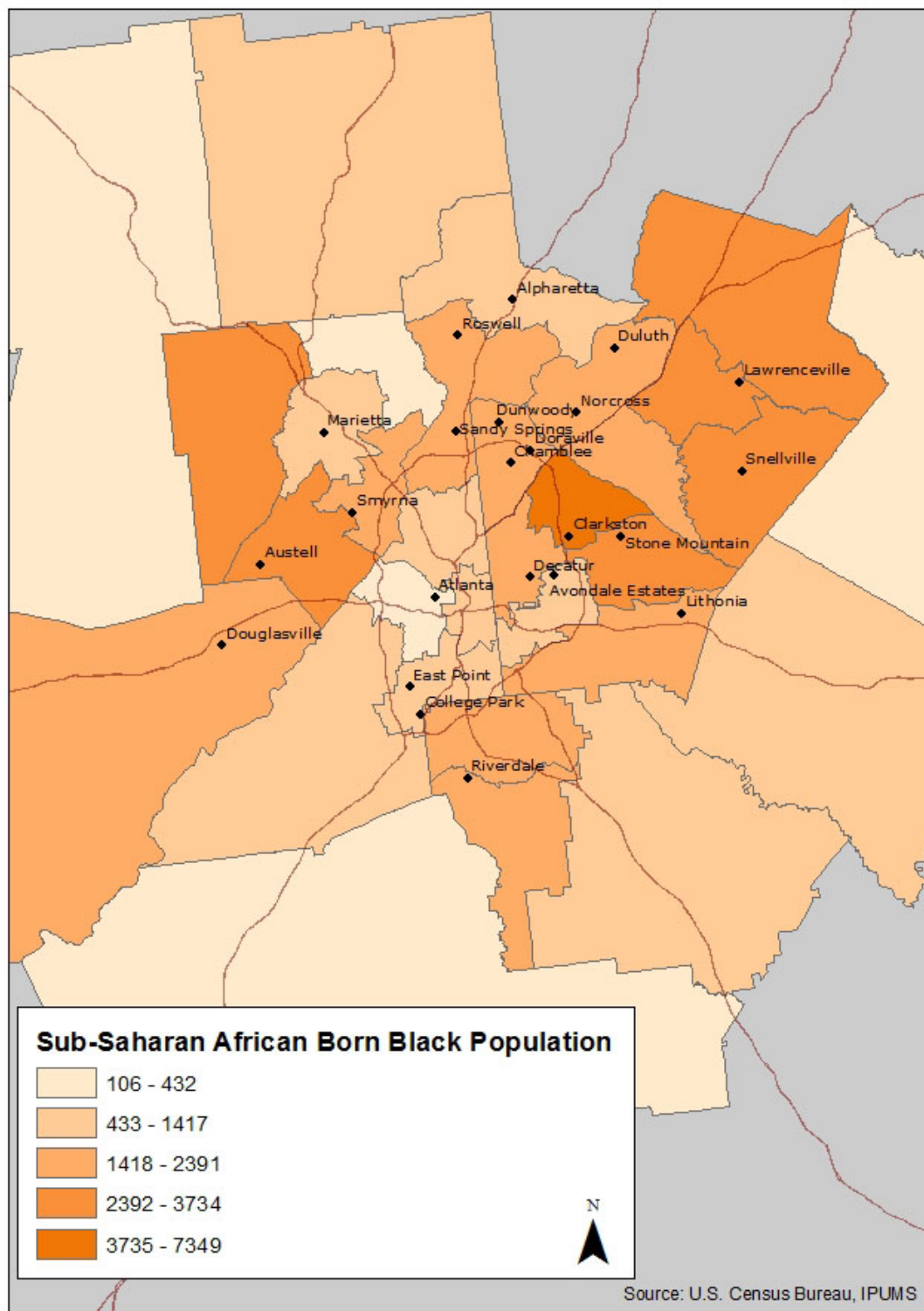


Figure 2.9: Sub-Saharan African Born Black Population, Atlanta Metropolitan Region, 2010(IPUMS)

Exurban growth appears by 2010, but on a smaller scale and with new additions to geography. For the first time, Cherokee County, an exurban site north of the northern suburbs, registers African-born populations, alongside Henry, Rockdale/Newton, and Douglas/Carroll PUMAs, but in relative smaller numbers than for the two other groups. Where the total black population has exurbanized southward to include the Coweta/Spalding/Fayette PUMA, Caribbean-born exurban residents in 2010 most often live in southeastern areas of the Atlanta region, and African-born numbers are overall small with highest growth rates in Henry and Douglas/Carroll Counties.

African-born black suburbanization to western Cobb County and eastern Gwinnett County in 2000 was perhaps a harbinger of broader black movement to these areas by 2010 across ethnic groups. These PUMAs now form new areas of concentration, replacing DeKalb County-Avondale Estates. In 2010, populations in these northern suburban areas have continued to increase and concentrate, while East DeKalb County-Stone Mountain and East DeKalb County-Clarkston have maintained large populations over the decade.

**Table 2.10: Fastest Growing Atlanta PUMAs by Sub-Saharan African Born Black Population Gain, 2000-2010**

	<i>PUMA (stpuma#)</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>Pop.</i>	<i>% Growth</i>
				<i>Gain</i>	
1	Northeast Gwinnett County (1301502)	533	3,734	3,201	600.6
2	Central Gwinnett County (1301501)	825	3,707	2,882	349.3
3	DeKalb County - Clarkston (1301203)	4,575	7,349	2,774	60.6
4	Southeast Gwinnett County (1301503)	306	2,820	2,514	821.6
5	Northwest Cobb County (1301305)	950	3,233	2,283	240.3
6	Douglas/Carroll Counties (1301800)	225	1,800	1,575	700.0
7	Henry County (1301700)	133	1,325	1,192	896.2
8	Fulton County – Roswell (1301102)	1,056	2,190	1,134	107.4
9	Southwest Cobb County – Austell (1301304)	1,945	3,010	1,065	54.8
10	South DeKalb County (1301205)	880	1,943	1,063	120.8

In addition to the absence of Rockdale/Newton Counties, Table 2.10 also reveals that South Clayton County and South Fulton County, in contrast to other groups, have not added significant African-born black population over the decade. Otherwise, the list of growing northern suburban and exurban counties begins to align with these lists for Caribbean-born and total black populations more than it did in earlier years.

In terms of ethnic patterns, African-born black immigrants tend to specifically suburbanize along African regional lines, organizing into East and West African groups only one of which dominates population gain in a particular PUMA. Northeast Gwinnett County gained 3,201 African-born blacks between 2000 and 2010—75% from West African nations including Nigeria, Ghana, and Liberia. Other Gwinnett County and Cobb County population gain was led by a similar West African majority, as was exurban growth to Henry and Douglas/Carroll Counties. East DeKalb County-Clarkston gained 2,774 black African immigrants, 76% of whom were born in East African nations like Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda. Similarly, Fulton County-Roswell gained large numbers of East Africans from Kenya and Ethiopia.

**Table 2.11: Atlanta PUMAs Losing Sub-Saharan African Born Black Population, 2000-2010**

<i>PUMA (stpuma#)</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>Pop. Loss</i>	<i>% Loss</i>
1 North DeKalb County (1301202)	3,496	2,391	-1,105	-31.6
2 DeKalb County – Avondale Estates (1301204)	1,619	826	-793	-49.0
3 Fulton County - East Point/College Park (1301105)	1,238	757	-481	-38.9
4 Fulton County – Atlanta, West End (1301106)	506	205	-301	-59.5
5 Fulton County – Atlanta, Center City (1301104)	759	687	-72	-9.5

PUMAs losing population by 2010 follow similar patterns to those of other black groups. The one exception is North DeKalb County which was once a residential hub for African-born blacks. Primary losses there are in East African population—Eritreans, Somalians, and Kenyans. Other PUMAs lose both West and East Africans in relatively equal numbers, reflecting a general pattern of increased suburbanization and urban black population loss common to all black populations in the region.

Like Caribbean-born ethnic groups, the largest African-born ethnic groups follow different patterns of concentration and dispersal in 2010. It is important to note that these trends do not correlate with African regional distinctions as they do with population growth—some East African groups are concentrated while other are not and the same is true for West Africans. When concentration occurs, it is generally across a contiguous group of PUMAs (as with black Jamaican immigrants) instead of highly concentrated in one particular PUMA. Somalians, who also have a small population relative to other African-born ethnic groups, have the highest concentration in the smallest geographic space, with 73% living in the East DeKalb County-Clarkston and East DeKalb County-Stone Mountain PUMAs. A larger population, Liberians are also fairly concentrated in a slightly larger area as 46% live in North Gwinnett County, Central Gwinnett County, and East DeKalb County-Clarkston. Ethiopian populations do not appear at all in some PUMAs, but appear in large numbers in a northeastern arc that contains Fulton County-Roswell, North DeKalb County, DeKalb County-Decatur, East DeKalb County-Clarkston, East DeKalb County-Stone Mountain, and Southeast Gwinnett County. 72% of the Ethiopian population lives in this area.

Other African-born ethnic populations show greater dispersal. The region's most populous group, Nigerian-born black immigrants, are present in every PUMA with equally large populations in a group of non-contiguous PUMAs—Central Gwinnett County, Northeast Gwinnett County, Southeast Gwinnett County, South Clayton County, Northwest Cobb County, Southeast Cobb County, and East DeKalb County-Stone Mountain. Several hundred Ghanaian immigrants live in each PUMA with highest numbers in Douglas/Carroll Counties and Central Gwinnett County—only 10% and 13% of the total Ghanaian population, respectively. Kenyans are also broadly dispersed, with their highest numbers in Northwest Cobb County which accounts for only 22% of the region's Kenyan population.

**Table 2.12: Atlanta Sub-Saharan African Born Black Population by County, 1990-2010**

<i>Geographic Area</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>% Growth 90-10</i>
Atlanta Metropolitan Region	7,544	34,210	57,130	657.3
Fulton County	2,501	4,906	7,033	181.2
DeKalb County	2,500	14,692	17,199	588.0
Cobb County	1,137	5,945	9,554	740.3
Clayton County	728	2,385	3,755	415.8
Gwinnett County	644	5,112	14,335	2125.9

Table 2.12 provides a useful means for comparison of African immigrant growth with that of Caribbean immigrants and the total black population in the five inner-ring counties. Although the percentage growth of African immigrant populations, like Caribbean ones, is substantial for all areas, familiar patterns of growth appear at familiar intervals. Fulton County's population grows but incrementally over the twenty-year period. The same is true for Clayton County, although on a smaller scale and so with a faster rate of growth. DeKalb County receives the largest increase in African immigrants

in the table between 1990 and 2000, but this growth slows to a comparative trickle between 2000 and 2010. Gwinnett County receives large numbers of African immigrants throughout, but sees a surge between 2000 and 2010, as DeKalb's rate of growth is falling. The one difference across groups is the relative growth of Cobb County, strong and incremental between 1990 and 2010 for total black population and African immigrants, but strong until 2000 and then reduced for Caribbean immigrants by 2010.

### **Return South Migrants to Atlanta, 1990-2010**

As I noted in my earlier discussion of methodology, scholars have not all worked with consistent definitions of return south migration, which has resulted in several different demographic measurements for its population.<sup>76</sup> To measure black population shifts between U.S. regions, most look at the movement of the overall black population, regardless of individual residence histories or places of birth, in terms of gains and losses over time. Other scholars use combinations of these methods: demographer William H. Frey looks at gaining and losing areas of black population alongside residence histories, while sociologists William Falk, Larry Hunt, and Matthew Hunt aggregate residence history data with place of birth data.<sup>77</sup> Researchers agree that return south migration (defined by population gains and losses) is first evident in the 1970 census or, using

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<sup>76</sup> Scholars can also not agree on a name for this migration stream. It has been called "return south migration," "reverse migration," and the "new great migration." Both "reverse migration" and "new great migration" suggest too strong a correlation between the populations and circumstances of the Great Migration and this more recent movement. While the two have important relationships, I prefer "return south migration" because it suggests general cultural and geographic momentum without depending so fully on correlations to the Great Migration or indicating backwards or regressive directions.

<sup>77</sup> William H. Frey, "The New Great Migration: Black Americans' Return to the South, 1965-2000," *Living Cities Census Survey*, Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, May 4, 2004; Falk, Hunt, and Hunt.



residential history data, in 1965-1970—a moment that marks the end of the Great Migration because more blacks are moving into the South than out of that region and other U.S. regions are losing black population.

Atlanta does not appear on Frey's top-ten list for largest black metropolitan areas population gains between 1965 and 1970, but it is second in 1975-1980, and first for 1985-1990. For 1995-2000, Atlanta again tops the list ahead other gaining metropolitan regions with a gain of almost three times the size of the next highest area, Dallas. Other ranking southern metropolitan areas for overall black population gain are Charlotte, Orlando, Norfolk-Virginia Beach, Raleigh-Durham, Washington-Baltimore, Memphis, and Columbia.<sup>78</sup>

Using region of residence five years ago, between 1995-2000, Atlanta has the second highest metropolitan area gains for migrants from the Northeast (only slight behind Washington-Baltimore), and first for migrants from the Midwest and West. Other southern metropolitan areas receiving large numbers of U.S.-born black migrants from outside the region during this period are Washington-Baltimore, Dallas, Miami, Norfolk-Virginia Beach, Orlando, and Memphis, although only Washington-Baltimore attracts sizable gains from all three non-southern U.S. regions.<sup>79</sup> By both net black population gain and migration in the five-year period, Atlanta outpaces all other southern metropolitan regions in terms of return south migration.

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<sup>78</sup> Frey, "The New Great Migration," 5.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Because of the high numbers of primary migrants in the return south population, I use both state of residence five years ago and place of birth as measurements.<sup>80</sup> Table 2.13 illustrates substantial differences garnered by these methods of calculation when we compare 5-year data from the 1990 and 2000 censuses. Because the 5-year measure gives numbers for only half of the decade and the place of birth measure may include migrants from other time periods, large disparities between estimates appears.

**Table 2.13: Regions of Origin for Atlanta Return South Migrants, Comparing 5-year Residence Change and Place of Birth, 1990-2000**

<i>Population Measure</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>% Change</i>
Total RSM, Residence 5-year (1985-1990, 1995-2000)	45,078	81,334	80.4
Total RSM, Place of Birth	78,621	201,949	156.9
Northeast, Residence 5-year (1985-1990, 1995-2000)	18,732	44,046	135.1
Northeast, Place of Birth	32,975	92,602	180.8
Midwest, Residence 5-year (1985-1990, 1995-2000)	21,448	29,550	37.8
Midwest, Place of Birth	37,875	82,949	119.0
West, Residence 5-year (1985-1990, 1995-2000)	8,233	20,148	144.7
West, Place of Birth	7,771	26,200	237.2

With only one exception, place of birth statistics give much higher population estimates across the total population and each regional breakdown and year than 5-year statistics. If non-primary return south migrants (born in the South, moved to other regions, and returned to Atlanta) were a large portion of this population, this would not be the case.<sup>81</sup> Place of birth numbers are substantially larger for several possible reasons. First, they measure the population over an entire decade so they might represent twice as large a population over twice-as-long a period of time. When the 5-year population is

<sup>80</sup> As I mentioned earlier, these populations were not only aggregated as U.S.-born, but had to have been born in the fifty U.S. states (as opposed to territories) to be included in the sample.

<sup>81</sup> The exception to this statement is the comparison of 5-year and place of birth residents from the West in 1990. When the 5-year numbers are higher than the place of birth numbers, it is possible that more non-primary return south migrants are part of the population.

more than half the place of birth population, this could suggest a higher rate of return later in the decade than in the first five years. The difference between 5-year and place of birth numbers for total RSM population at 1990 offer one example.

When the 5-year figure is less than half of the place of birth figure, as is the case in the total return south migrant populations in 2000, this may reflect the presence of migrants who returned to Atlanta prior to 1990, or migrated to Atlanta in the previous five years from another area of the South but were born outside the region. This disparity appears most strikingly between measures for return south migration from the Midwest in 2000. If 5-year estimates are close to place of birth estimates, as is the case for return south migrants from the West in 2000, this relative level of quality confirms that most return south migrants during the decade are primary migrants and that most moved at the end of the decade (or the Atlanta region lost large numbers of West-born blacks in this period). When the 5-year numbers are larger than the place of birth numbers (populations from the West in 1990), this indicates a large group of non-primary return south migrants.

By all measures, the return south migrant population grows substantially between 1990 and 2000. By regional breakdown, these statistics reveal that the majority of return south migrants come from the Northeast and Midwest with a smaller portion from the West. The migrants from the Northeast have the largest growth of population, while migrants from the West have the fastest rate of growth. By 2000, return south migrants measured by place of birth are 17.9% of the black U.S.-born population of Atlanta. At this same moment, they are 16.7% of the total black population, whereas Caribbean-born and Sub-Saharan African born blacks are 2.8% each.

In order to compare 1990 and 2010 with 2010, I used 1-year averages calculated from 5-year estimates.<sup>82</sup> These averages offer median rates per year of return south migrants in a particular census period.<sup>83</sup>

**Table 2.14: Regions of Origin for Return South Migrants, Comparing 1-year Averages and 1-year sample, 1990-2010**

<i>Population</i>	<i>1985-1990, 1 yr. av.</i>	<i>1995-2000, 1 yr. av.</i>	<i>2009-10</i>	<i>% Change 1990-2010</i>
Total RSM	9,015.6	16,266.8	33,180	268.0
Northeast	3,746.4	8,809.2	16,712	346.1
Midwest	4,289.6	5,910	11,081	158.3
West	1,646.6	4,029.6	5,387	227.2

Table 2.14 gives results consistent with those of the 1990/2000 comparison, suggesting that return south migration continues into Atlanta at increasing rates over the period. By 2010, more than three times as many return south migrants are arriving per year than in the period before 1990 with the largest average gains in migrants from the Northeast, followed by the Midwest. Although the population of migrants from the West remains smaller, its rate of growth remains high. Place of birth measures show similar gains in rate and population (Table 2.15).

**Table 2.15: Regions of Origin for Return South Migrants by Place of Birth, 1990-2010**

<i>Population</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>% Change 1990-2010</i>
Total RSM, Place of Birth	78,621	201,949	325,622	314.2
Northeast, Place of Birth	32,975	92,602	158,950	382.0
Midwest, Place of Birth	37,875	82,949	121,680	221.3
West, Place of Birth	7,771	26,200	44,992	479.0

<sup>82</sup> This, as I mentioned in the methodology section, is because the 2010 census only asked for state of residence one year ago.

<sup>83</sup> The potential disadvantage of comparing these averages with the 2010 1-year measure is that it assumes that 2009-2010 was itself an average year for return south migration in the 2005-2010 period. Because of the 2007-2012 global financial crisis and its impact on the U.S. housing market and rates of unemployment, it seems unlikely that 2009-2010 relocation would be more substantial than migration in 2005-2007. In general, it was surprising to me that rates of migration increase by 2010 in the context of economic downturn.

Within the regions, particular sending states dominate the return south migrant population by both measures. From the Northeast, most migrants move from and/or are born in New York, with substantial numbers from New Jersey and Pennsylvania as well. Illinois sends the largest number of migrants for the Midwest, followed by Michigan and Ohio. California is the dominant state from return south migration from the West. In context, these results reflect high concentrations of black population in the largest U.S. metropolitan areas and so they correspond to the states where the largest numbers of U.S.-born black people live.

Scholars explain national return south migration since 1970 as the result of three factors: “the South’s economic growth and modernization, its improved race relations, and the longstanding cultural and kinship ties it holds for black families.”<sup>84</sup> Economic opportunity is a common pull for all three black migrant groups who identify Atlanta as a site of employment opportunities in the context of a relatively low cost of living and affordable, most often suburban, housing. Part of what attracts black migrants to Atlanta, then, is the way in which it is both urban and non-urban simultaneously—urban in its high density of jobs and cultural institutions, and non-urban in its myriad options for suburban residence in proximity to jobs in both the center city and increasingly in the suburban inner-ring.<sup>85</sup>

The idea of kinship operates more often figuratively for return south migrants and more often literally for black immigrants. Particularly in light of the relative privileging

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<sup>84</sup> Frey, “The New Great Migration,” 1.

<sup>85</sup> For a detailed description of twentieth-century commercial development in the inner-ring suburbs, see Keating, 7-40.

of family reunification in U.S. visa-granting, kinship affords foreign-born blacks a route into the U.S. and often dictates their sites of relocation—they move to the places where their relatives already live. For some return south migrants, reunification with family is also a strong reason to choose a particular southern destination.<sup>86</sup> But for others, kinship has a more general cultural meaning and the move south gestures at their desire to newly explore U.S. black cultures and traditions historically associated with the region. Influences that shape return south migrants' perceptions of Atlanta are endlessly varied and not necessarily related to their personal social networks. Relatives, friends, colleagues, news media, and popular culture converge to form their impressions of place.<sup>87</sup>

Explaining return south migration to the rural South, Carol Stack argues that “individuals and families have responded to the destruction of American urban life by calling on the ties to home that have persisted through the generations.”<sup>88</sup> In her construction, the “home” is a southern place with familial associations and deep historic roots. But return south migrants are most often metropolitan-bound to destinations where they have little personal connection.<sup>89</sup> Particularly in Atlanta's case, return south migrants select this destination more often for reasons related to its contemporary image than for historic personal connections. By the 1990s, Atlanta is a high profile “black”

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<sup>86</sup> Reunification with family occurs across generations and within a broad array of relatives, which means that some primary migrants do reunite with family despite the fact that they are not southern-born.

<sup>87</sup> While this is also true for foreign-born blacks, I would argue that kinship networks play a more consistently central in this sense. This is particularly true for African-born immigrants who generally have the least amount of access to American popular culture and news media.

<sup>88</sup> Stack, 9.

<sup>89</sup> Of course, many U.S.-born blacks have family roots in southern urban areas as well as rural ones. Migrants move to metropolitan regions in search of particular

place—identifiable in media and cultural narratives as a hub of black economic, social, and cultural activity often described as “black mecca.”

Return south migrants are often well aware of the details of Atlanta’s higher black profile. They know Atlanta’s particular histories of black social and political involvement through the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the persistent elections of black mayors since the 1970s. They perceive Atlanta to have a stable and active black middle class that provides opportunities for civic, social, and religious engagement. They recognize Atlanta’s cluster of historically black colleges and universities and the role these institutions have played in providing education to black Atlantans and bringing cultural events to the region. By the 1990s, they are aware of Atlanta’s growing black celebrity population—largely comprised of musicians and athletes. These impressions of myriad cultural and social opportunities help form the basis of migrants’ attraction to the region.

Return south migrants come from a variety of socio-economic classes, although they have higher levels of education on average than both the black populations they leave behind and the stable black population of the region. Like all migrant groups, they are self-selecting which accounts to some extent for differences in the education and skills they bring. Their collectively higher socioeconomic status is consistent with interstate and inter-regional flows across the national job market. Atlanta’s particular return south migrant population may be even more educated than the national population. Between 1995 and 2000, Georgia had the largest net in-migration of black college

graduates in the nation, while blacks from all educational levels indicated population growth.<sup>90</sup>

Particularly given their popular reputation as a disproportionately suburbanized segment of Atlanta's black population, I was interested to see how return south migrants' spatial configurations over time measured against those of the three other groups in the study. I built population maps using the 1990 and 2000 5-year measure and the 2010 1-year measure. I supplement these with place of birth data in my discussion of findings. It is important to keep in mind that, in contrast to maps for other black groups, these maps do not reflect a population that grows over time. Instead, they offer snapshots of return south migrant destinations across three more bounded time periods.

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<sup>90</sup> Frey, 9; Falk, Hunt, and Hunt, 506.



## Return South Migrant Population, 1990

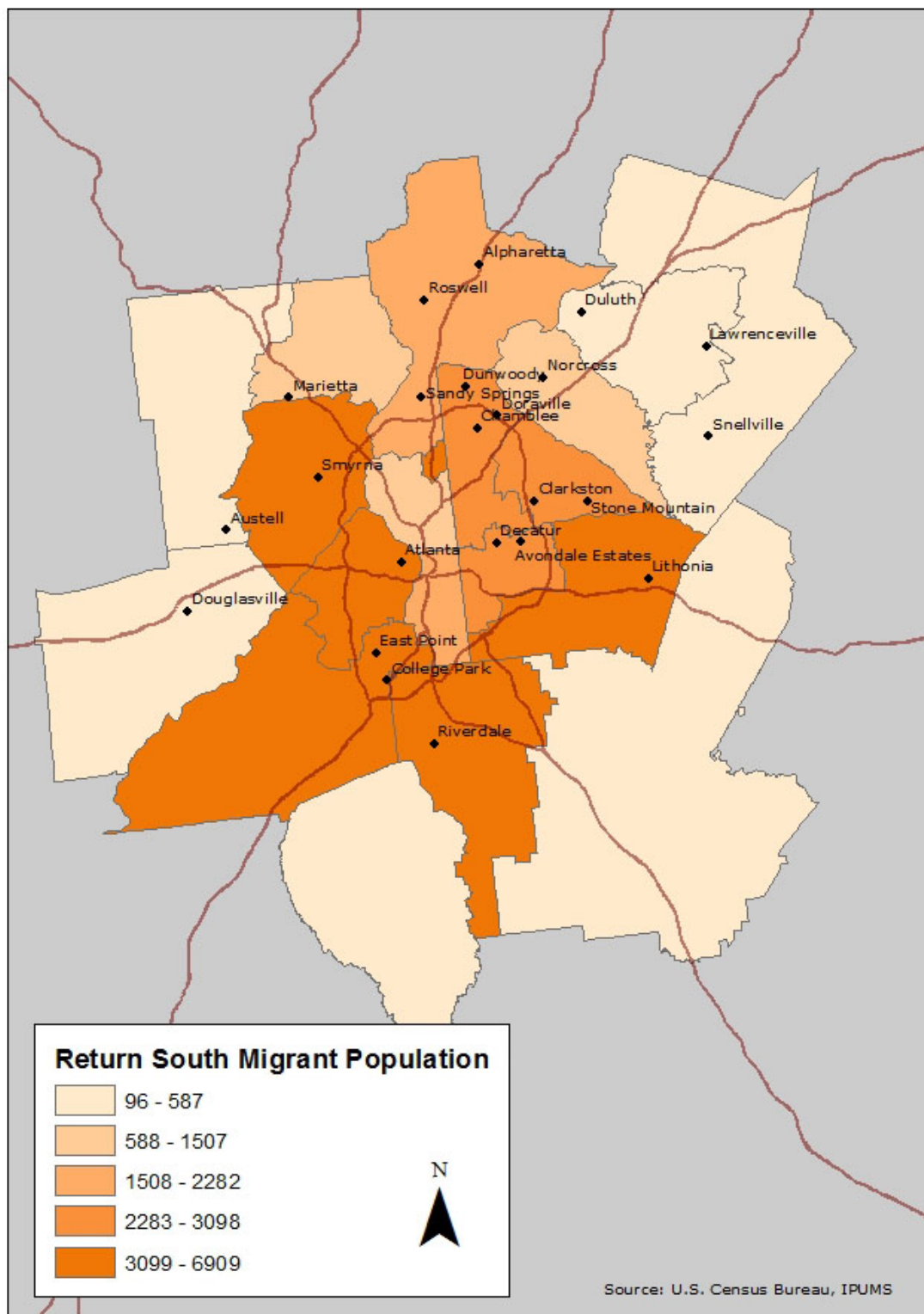


Figure 2.10: Return South Migrants 1985-1990, Atlanta Metropolitan Region, 1990 (IPUMS)

Between 1985 and 1990, return south migrants' destination patterns reveal a composite of spatial features that characterize the other three groups at 1990 (Figure 2.10). Like the total black population, they show areas of concentration in historically black PUMAs and the southern inner-ring suburbs, although they have a smaller degree of concentration south of the center city. South Fulton County, South DeKalb County, Atlanta's Westside, and Clayton County PUMAs receive the four of the five largest numbers of return south migrants between 1985 and 1990, accounting for 47% of the return south migrant population and 51% of the total black population.

Return south migrants are also relocating in high numbers immediately to the northern inner-ring suburbs like Sub-Saharan African black immigrants: South Cobb County, North Fulton County, Northwest DeKalb County, and West Gwinnett County. 25% of the population lives there by 1990 in comparison to 41% of African-born black population. Like Caribbean-born black migrants, return south migrants live throughout DeKalb County with greater concentrations to the south. And like both immigrant groups, return south migrants have not generally moved into exurban areas by 1990.

While the total black population is the most geographical dispersed because of its exurban growth in this period, return south migrants are the most dispersed population within the five-county inner ring, which suggests low levels of segregation from all black population groups.

## Return South Migrant Population, 2000

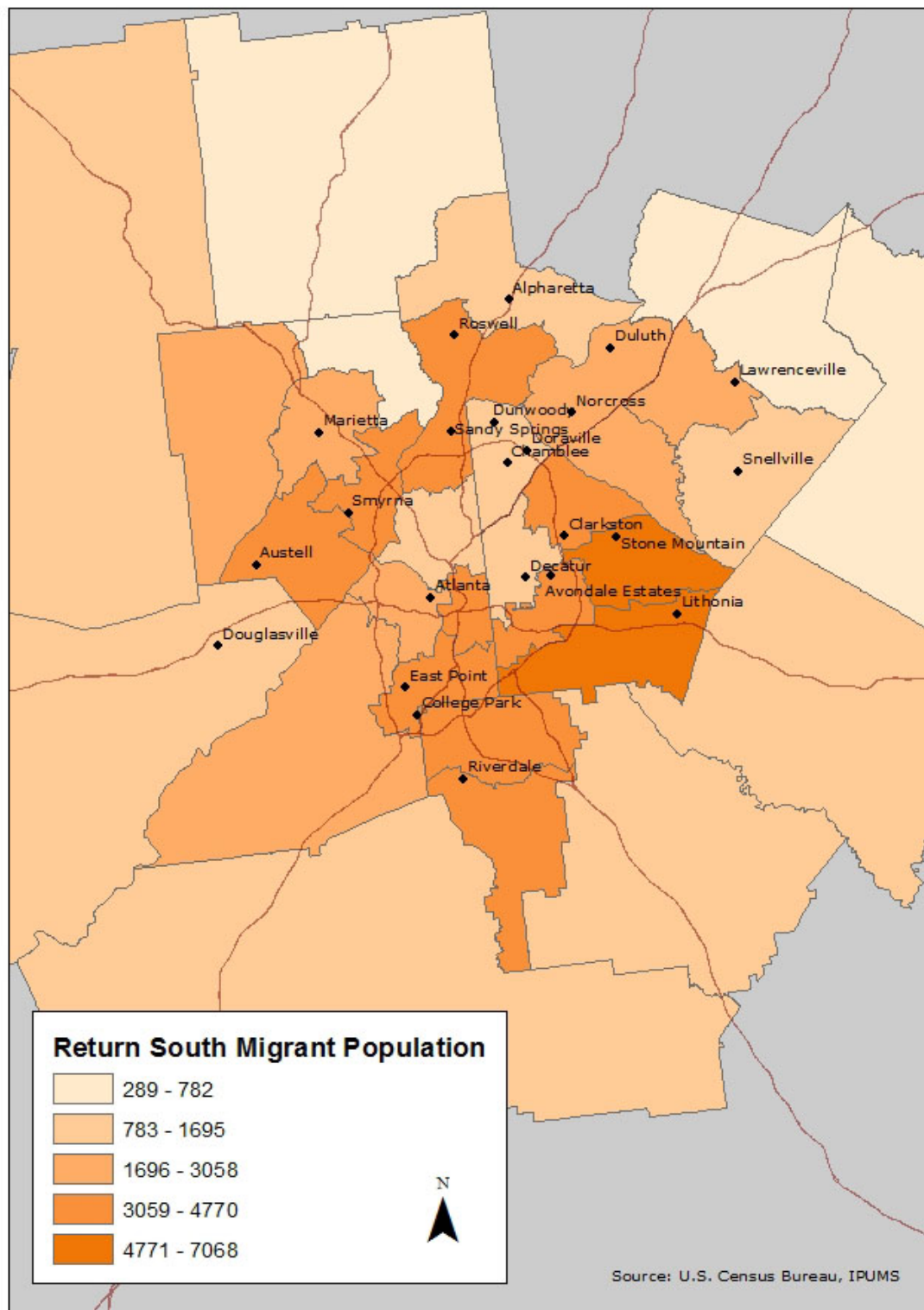


Figure 2.11: Return South Migrants 1995-2000, Atlanta Metropolitan Region, 2000 (IPUMS)

Return south migrants arriving between 1995 and 2000 are, by contrast, moving to the exurbs in small numbers. In 2000, 9% are exurban residents—as are 9% of Caribbean-born, 9% of African-born, and 13% of total blacks. Their exurban geography is almost as diverse as that of the total black population, much more dispersed than any of the groups, and much broader than the black immigrant exurban geographies. This group also shows consistent expansion to the northern suburbs within a larger area than their counterparts between 1985 and 1990. New areas are Central and Southeast Gwinnett County and Northwest Cobb PUMAs. This pattern is similar to the northern expansion pattern of Caribbean-born and African-born blacks at 2000 with some difference in concentration between PUMAs.

East DeKalb County-Stone Mountain is the PUMA receiving the largest number of return south migrants between 1995 and 2000 as it is for Caribbean-born blacks in 2000. 9% live in this PUMA, along with 18% of Caribbean-born blacks, 5% of African-born blacks, and as part of 8% of the total black population. If contiguous South DeKalb County—the PUMA with the second highest return south migrant population—is added, southeast DeKalb County receives 16% of migrants to the region during this period. By contrast, concentration in the other southern suburbs is not as evident as it was between 1985 and 1990. Only 13% live in South Fulton County, North Clayton County, and South Clayton County combined.

One clear divergence from black immigrant population groups is the proportionally larger number of return south migrants apparent in the Fulton County-Atlanta, Center City PUMA—5% of the total population (as well as the total black population). Only 2% of African-born and 1.5% of Caribbean-born blacks live there.

## Return South Migrant Population, 2010

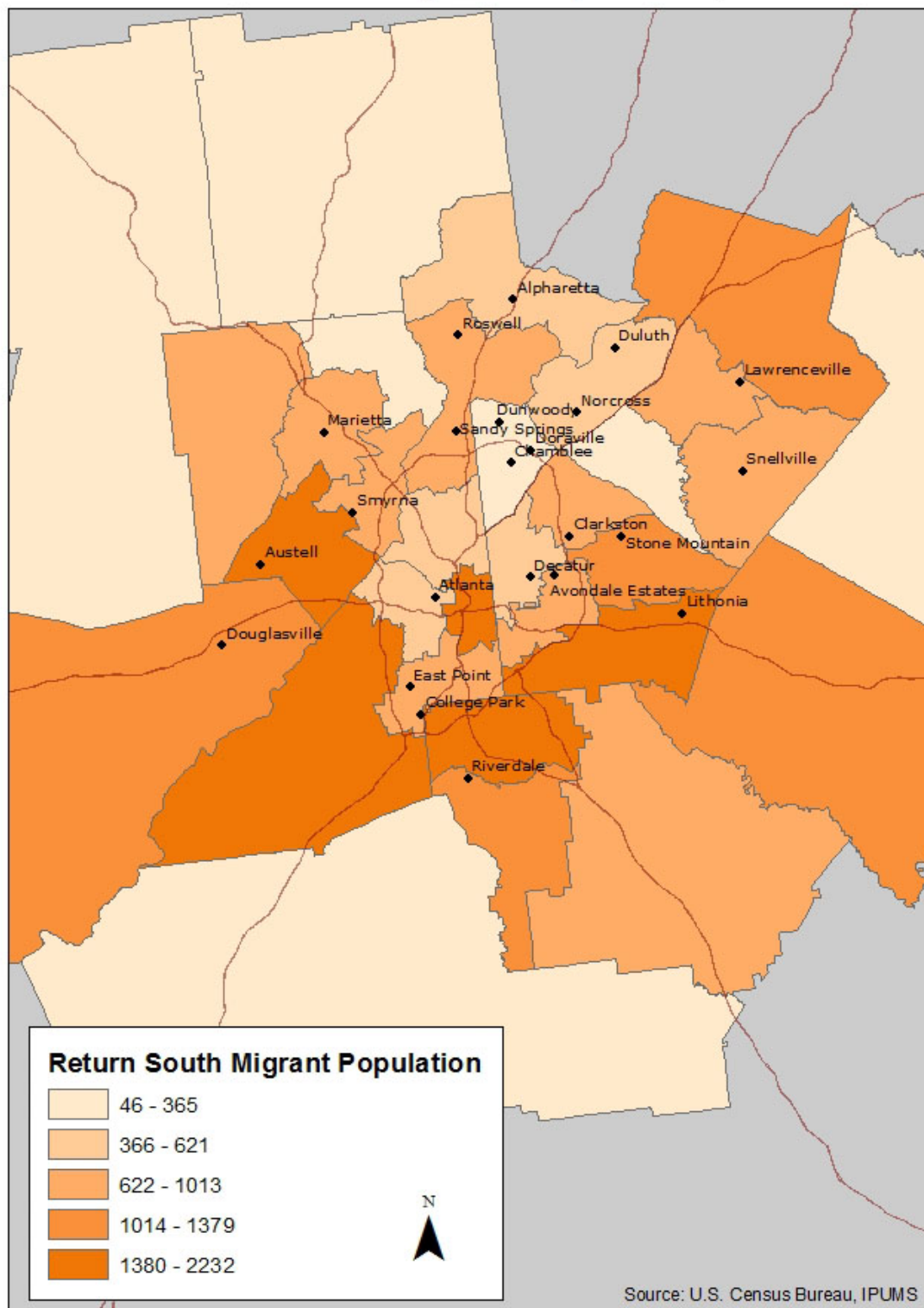


Figure 2.12: Return South Migrants 2009-2010, Atlanta Metropolitan Region, 2010 (IPUMS)

Although Figure 2.12 relies on the 1-year 2009-2010 estimate, it does illustrate that between 2009 and 2010 return south migrants moved to a more concentrated group of southern exurban areas in higher proportions than in 1995-2000. In this year, Fulton County-Atlanta, Center City was also a more attractive destination for them than it had been or has been throughout the twenty-year period for other groups.

**Table 2.16: Atlanta PUMAs with Largest Increase in Return South Migrant Population, 2000-2010**

<i>PUMA (stpuma#)</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>Pop Gain</i>	<i>% Growth</i>
<i>By 1-year average</i>				
1 Fulton County – Atlanta, Center City (1301104)	807.2	2,370	1,562.8	193.6
2 Henry County (1301700)	208.8	1,684	1,475.2	706.5
3 Rockdale/Newton Counties (1301600)	325.6	1,726	1,400.4	430.1
4 Northeast Gwinnett County (1301502)	156.4	1,372	1,215.6	777.2
5 Douglas/Carroll Counties (1301800)	226.2	1,419	1,192.8	527.3
6 South Fulton County (1301107)	416.4	1,535	1,118.6	268.6
<i>By Place of Birth</i>				
1 South Fulton County (1301107)	9,322	23,626	14,304	153.4
2 Rockdale/Newton Counties (1301600)	2,758	14,901	12,143	440.3
3 Henry County (1301700)	2,158	14,183	12,025	557.2
4 Southeast Gwinnett County (1301503)	2,094	12,888	10,794	515.5
5 Douglas/Carroll Counties (1301800)	3,415	13,877	10,462	306.3
6 Northeast Gwinnett County (1301502)	1,852	12,030	10,178	549.6

Table 2.16 measures both a changing frequency of migration through 1-year average and shifts in total population by place of birth. By both measures, a familiar set of southern exurbs are gaining population and are more likely migrant destinations by 2010—Douglas/Carroll Counties, Henry County, and Rockdale/Newton Counties. As it does for all other population groups, Northeast Gwinnett County also appears as a site of increase and gain. The rise in return south migrant relocation to Fulton County-Atlanta, Center City in 2009-2010 presents the only deviation from analogous lists.

**Table 2.17: Atlanta PUMAs Losing Return South Migrants by Place of Birth, 2000-2010<sup>91</sup>**

<i>PUMA (stpuma#)</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>Pop. Loss</i>	<i>% Loss</i>
1 DeKalb County – Avondale Estates (1301204)	11,210	8,823	-2,387	-21.3
2 Fulton County - East Point/College Park (1301105)	9,685	8,042	-1,643	-17.0
3 East DeKalb County – Clarkston (1301203)	8,452	7,392	-1,060	-12.5
4 Paulding/Bartow Counties (1300700)	1,543	647	-896	-58.1
5 Fulton County – Atlanta, West End (1301106)	7,232	6,800	-432	-6.0

Return south migrants are also losing population in familiar PUMAs with historic black concentration that include some of the earliest sites of black suburbanization. Fulton County, East/Point College Park contains East Point and College Park, which gained black populations in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as black neighborhoods south of the center city that have existed since the end of the nineteenth century. Fulton County-Atlanta, West End, contains the West End (where blacks have lived since Reconstruction) as well as western neighborhoods contested through the desegregation period and developed as “Negro Expansion Areas.” DeKalb County-Avondale Estates, a black suburban destination in the 1970s and 1980s, loses the largest numbers. Across migrant groups and the stable black population, these three PUMAs are losing population.

<sup>91</sup> Numbers for loss in 1-year sample were too small (losses of approximately 100 or gains of only a few people per year) to include in this table. Numbers for rate change are so small that they are not useful data for this purpose. It is significant to note that only one PUMA, Southwest Gwinnett County (1301504) had a rate loss of -158.4 in this time period.

**Table 2.18: Atlanta Return South Migrants by County, 1990-2010**

<i>Geographic Area</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>% Growth 1990-2010</i>
<i>By 1-year average<sup>92</sup></i>				
Total	9,015.6	16,266.8	33,180	268.0
DeKalb County	3,144	4,861.8	6,514	107.2
Fulton County	3,065	3,591.4	8,059	162.9
Cobb County	1,257.8	2,700.2	4,676	271.8
Clayton County	930.2	1,697.6	3,359	261.1
Gwinnett County	438	1,957	4,735	981.1
<i>By Place of Birth</i>				
Total	78,621	201,949	325,622	314.2
DeKalb County	29,064	65,553	66,202	127.8
Fulton County	29,022	45,631	64,443	122.1
Cobb County	8,983	31,477	46,549	418.2
Clayton County	7,251	23,640	33,068	356.1
Gwinnett County	3,204	20,867	50,075	1462.9

County comparison allows us to see change in the return south migrant population across the twenty-year period. As has been the case for all other groups, Table 2.18 illustrates the population growth in the inner-ring suburbs. Where Gwinnett County has the smallest return south migrant population in the inner ring in 1990, by 2010 it ranks third in terms of population and first in terms of rate of growth. Cobb and Clayton Counties also demonstrate large population gains and high rates of growth. If the return south migrant population settled overwhelmingly in Fulton and DeKalb Counties in 1990, they relocated just as often to the three suburban counties (Cobb, Gwinnett, and Clayton) by 2010. DeKalb County is the destination for the largest number of return south migrants by a significant margin in 2010, but this growth has slowed considerably by 2012 as it has for black immigrants and the total black population.

<sup>92</sup> This table uses 1-year averages from the 5-year sample for 1990 (1985-1990) and 2000 (1995-2000) in order to compare them to data from 2010 (2009-2010).



## Conclusion and Directions for Future Work

Between 1990 and 2010, Atlanta's black population undergoes dramatic processes of suburbanization, exurbanization, and urban depopulation (Table 2.19). These trends do not correlate to one particular self-selecting group of black migrants; instead they describe the geographic expansion of all black ethnic and regional groups to varying degrees. Of these groups, African-born black immigrants show the most divergence in trends as they have suburbanized more quickly and exurbanized more slowly than other groups. Black migrant groups also continue to grow at faster rates than the stable black population and migrants from other part of the South, suggesting that they will become an increasingly large portion of the Atlanta region's black population.

**Table 2.19: Atlanta's Black Population Percentages by Type of Metropolitan Residence, 2000-2010**<sup>93</sup>

	<i>City</i> <i>2000</i>	<i>City</i> <i>2010</i>	<i>Suburb</i> <i>2000</i>	<i>Suburb</i> <i>2010</i>	<i>Exurb</i> <i>2000</i>	<i>Exurb</i> <i>2010</i>
Total	31%	16%	56%	63%	13%	21%
Caribbean-born	17%	6%	73%	69%	10%	25%
African-born	16%	8%	81%	83%	3%	9%
Return South	21%	13%	72%	68%	7%	19%

Demographers examining these groups collectively in the next decades should play close attention to several geographic patterns evident by 2010 (Table 2.20). First, the East DeKalb County-Stone Mountain PUMA has high concentrations of total black population, as well as Caribbean and African-born blacks and return south migrants. As

<sup>93</sup> In this section, I define the areas in the following ways: Exurbs are PUMAs beyond the five-county inner ring, City areas are 6 PUMAs inside the Atlanta Perimeter I-285 (four in Fulton, two in DeKalb for 2000 and 2010), and Suburbs are all PUMAs in the inner-ring counties not classified as City. I also measure return south migrants by place of birth. The Atlanta MSA is measured differently in 1990, so I was not able to include that data.

these groups move increasingly to exurban areas, it will be interesting to see whether this PUMA retains black population across and how movement will impact its high level of black ethnic diversity. Second, data between 2000 and 2010 indicates some moments of collective population change. Four PUMAs experience large population gains across all four groups: Henry County, Southeast Gwinnett County, Northeast Gwinnett County, and Douglas/Carroll Counties. Three experience large population loss across the four groups: Fulton County-East Point/College Park, Fulton County-Atlanta, West End, and DeKalb County, Avondale Estates. It will be important to examine these particular areas to see if these collective trends persist and to measure future gains and losses in the context of ethnic diversity.

**Table 2.20: PUMAs with the Largest Total Black Populations by Place of Birth, 2010**

	<i>PUMA (stpuma#)</i>	<i>Total Bl</i>	<i>CBB</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>SSA</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>RSM</i>	<i>%</i>
1	South Fulton County (1301107)	134,756	2,663	2.0	1,417	1.0	23,626	17.5
2	South DeKalb County (1301205)	121,345	5,218	4.3	1,943	1.6	20,468	16.9
3	East DeKalb County – Stone Mountain (1301203)	100,579	6,991	7.0	3,200	3.2	22,051	21.9
4	South Clayton County (1301402)	94,653	3,744	4.0	1,647	1.7	18,676	19.7
5	Fulton County – West End (1301106)	84,178	599	0.7	205	0.2	6,800	8.1
6	North Clayton County (1301401)	77,592	1,447	1.9	2,108	2.7	14,392	18.5
7	Rockdale/Newton Counties (1301600)	75,278	5,737	7.6	638	0.8	14,901	19.8
8	Douglas/Carroll Counties (1301800)	69,918	2,612	3.7	1,800	2.6	13,877	19.8
9	Henry County (1301700)	68,655	4,318	6.3	1,325	1.9	14,183	20.7
10	Fulton County - East Point/College Park (1301105)	64,207	706	1.1	757	1.2	8,042	12.5
11	Southwest Cobb County –	54,804	1,922	3.5	3,010	5.5	13,184	24.1

	Austell (1301304)							
12	Southeast Gwinnett County (1301503)	48,692	4,689	9.6	2,820	5.8	12,888	26.5
13	Northeast Gwinnett County (1301502)	42,940	3,665	8.5	3,734	8.7	12,030	28.0

Finally, by 2010, PUMAs with the largest black populations show multiple patterns of black ethnic diversity related to geography (Table 20). In historically black urban PUMAs, there is a black majority and the percentage of black migrants is low (10-15%).<sup>94</sup> In southern inner-ring suburban PUMAs, there is also a black majority but the populations of migrants is higher (20-25%). In PUMAs with more recent black population growth—exurbs and northern inner-ring suburbs—there is not a black majority (in fact there can be large numbers of people from other non-white races) but the number of black migrants is much higher (30-40%). As all of these spaces undergo population change, it will be important to measure the rates of segregation of black groups from one another and from non-black groups by considering these geographies in historical context.

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<sup>94</sup> “Black migrants” encompasses the three groups in this study.

### Chapter 3

#### **Black Ethnic Foodscapes and Geographies of Intra-racial Contact**

Early in my research on Atlanta's historically black neighborhoods, I discovered a famous music venue in the Auburn Avenue district. Opened in 1937 as the "Top Hat Club" and locally known as "Club Beautiful," the space hosted celebrity blues and jazz performers of the day like Bessie Smith and Dizzy Gillespie. In 1949, Carrie "Mama" Cunningham purchased the venue, remodeling and reopening it as the "Royal Peacock," which included a hotel and restaurant to cater to the segregation-era needs of black performers and other celebrities. Under her ownership, from 1949 to 1973, the club functioned as an incubator for black music, hosting a roster of famous artists including Ray Charles, Little Richard, Gladys Knight, Aretha Franklin, and B.B. King. The Royal Peacock was a spatial and cultural touchstone in mid-twentieth century black Atlanta.

When Cunningham died in 1973, the club closed its doors. In the years that followed, the venue changed hands several times, operating as a theater, meeting space, and rock club, amidst the urban decay sweeping Auburn Avenue. In this period, Auburn Avenue was designated as a national historic landmark and saw the construction of the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change and the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site, but none of these developments attracted visitors to Auburn Avenue's businesses. In the early 1990s, the club was refashioned as a hip-hop venue,

hosting contests which would help bring Atlanta rappers connected with the development of crunk music to fame. More plans to “revitalize” Sweet Auburn came and went.<sup>95</sup>

When I visited the site of the Royal Peacock in 2010, I was surprised to discover that it was newly re-opened—complete with its familiar name and 1950s-inspired decorations—as a hip-hop, reggae, and world music venue. I uncovered a 2008 NPR interview about black immigrants in Atlanta, in which a local DJ cited the Royal Peacock as a premier club for Caribbean and Ethiopian immigrants with a strong following from native-born black populations as well.<sup>96</sup> I also discovered that the Auburn Avenue district had been home for twenty-three years to the annual festival, Atlanta Caribbean Carnival, which draws ethnically diverse black audiences together to celebrate Caribbean cultures within a historically black space. The recent histories of the Royal Peacock and Atlanta Caribbean Carnival suggest that, as Atlanta’s black population diversifies, black ethnic producers and consumers of culture find their way to Auburn Avenue and help redefine its status as a site of black collectivity in multicultural terms.

Evidence of new diversity on Auburn Avenue inspires my research questions for this chapter: How does growing black ethnic diversity in Atlanta inform new geographies of black culture? Where do black ethnically affiliated businesses and cultural organizations appear in Atlanta’s racialized metropolitan landscape and what kinds of spatial formations do they produce? Scholars of black immigration would claim that the

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<sup>95</sup> Information for this account of the history of the Royal Peacock summarized from two sources: Candice Dyer, “Remembering the Heyday of the Royal Peacock,” *Georgia Music Magazine* 15 (Winter 2009) which was reposted as a blog at <http://anticsincandyland.wordpress.com/2010/05/11/the-royal-peacock-dont-you-wish-you-were-there-back-then-at-atlantas-club-beautiful/> (Accessed July 10, 2012); Edward A. Hatfield, “Auburn Avenue (Sweet Auburn),” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, June 2, 2006. <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2507&hl=y> (Accessed July 10, 2012).

<sup>96</sup> Farai Chideya (host), “A Closer Look: Atlanta’s Immigrant Community,” National Public Radio, *New and Notes*, April 15, 2008: <http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=89655320> (Accessed July 10, 2012).

case of the Royal Peacock is a highly unlikely cultural interaction because of antagonisms between native-born blacks and black immigrants.<sup>97</sup> Describing the literature, Regine O. Jackson writes:

The tendency in reporting on African and Caribbean black Americans toward erasing moments of cooperation and amity in favor of sensationalist rhetoric about conflict and cultural differences is remarkable. . . .The literature ignores the way immigrant blacks and native blacks affirm and negotiate cultural differences in their neighborhoods, their workplaces, and even in their own families.<sup>98</sup>

While antagonisms may exist and spaces such as the Royal Peacock may not be common, this bias in the literature informs my attention to the presence of intraracial sites of native and foreign-born cultural and social contact. The collision of these groups in particular spaces and places, I argue, suggests the likelihood of such contact.

Using local black ethnic foodways as a case study, I map black immigrant restaurants and markets in the Atlanta metropolitan region active between 2008 and 2011 as “foodscapes” to assess their geographic distribution and its implications for the existence of ethnoburbs. My survey of restaurants and markets shows a high degree of intraregional and interregional cohesion between black ethnic groups, manifested in the ways that establishments are marketed and located. I assess and ultimately reject the ethnoburb as a model for black ethnic suburban formations, arguing that it obscures the important influence of region and race on geography. Instead, I find that a multitude of spatial formations emerge from a map of foodways, each characterized by different degrees of ethnic and regional diversity and commercial clustering. Of these, one particular area near Stone Mountain—the intersection of Memorial Drive and Rockbridge

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<sup>97</sup> For a critical overview of this work, see Jackson, 217-253.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 219

Road—emerges as Atlanta’s largest black ethnic commercial and cultural suburban strip. Foodways clustering appears primarily in suburban areas, but I return to Auburn Avenue and nearby historically black neighborhoods to discover a specific geography of cultural contact between black ethnic groups and native-born blacks there.

### **Terminologies of Race, Ethnicity, and Region**

It is important to start by clarifying the terminology I will use in this chapter to describe population groups. Race as a category includes every person of any ethnic or national origin that experiences U.S. racialized socio-economic and cultural systems as “black.”<sup>99</sup> Race is an important category in this chapter because it performs a unifying function in my discussion of intraracial spaces that bring black ethnic groups in to contact with one another and with native-born blacks. I use the phrase “black ethnic” as a way to collectively identify Caribbean and African immigrant populations and distinguish them from black people born in the U.S.<sup>100</sup> This may imply that U.S.-born blacks have no ethnic identity, which is obviously not the case. I justify the use of “black ethnic” as a category because of the project’s emphasis on recent ethnic diversification brought about by black immigration. In this context, black immigrants are labeled as “ethnic” because they are a new ethnic “other” in Atlanta. Emphasizing this distinction, I use the phrase “native-born” to describe black people born in the U.S. including return south migrants (where native-born is not a synonym for stable black population).

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<sup>99</sup>Race here is then physical and based on conformity to phenotypes. Although they are treated as “black” in a U.S. context, black immigrants have different ideas of and histories surrounding the concept of race. For a detailed view on the differences between race for Caribbean-born blacks and U.S.-born blacks, see Waters, 24-34.

<sup>100</sup> I mean to define immigrants broadly to include all immigrant generations.

Ethnicity plays a particularly tricky role in this research because of its relationship to culture. For immigrants in my study, individual ethnicity may be defined by nation of birth (for example, Nigerian) or affiliation with ethnic groups that cross national boundaries and share history, language, and culture (Igbo). Ethnicity may also come from religious identity (for example, Muslims from Ethiopia), or it may be informed by a history of inter-regional migration (a Trinidadian with Guyanese roots). As with race, individuals often have layered ethnic identities that consist of more than one of these affiliations. In my study, ethnic groups are most often measured by national origins. This working definition of ethnicity obscures important distinctions but is necessary because I am working at the group level with a large number of groups who follow some collective patterns of spatial formation.

In addition, I discuss groups organized not by nation but *region* of origin.<sup>101</sup> These regions are most often the Caribbean, West African, East Africa, or Africa (although it may be difficult to argue that Africa is a region).<sup>102</sup> These broader groupings do reflect a degree of shared history, similar reasons for migrating, and some cultural intersections but they are distinctly broader than ethnicity. As we will see in my foodways data, regional groupings work in this context because they are common signifiers that black ethnic restaurateurs and market owners use to name their businesses, describe their multi-ethnic cuisines, and attract consumers from common regional backgrounds.

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<sup>101</sup> Even region of origin has layers for some immigrants who can identify, for example, as both Caribbean and West Indian.

<sup>102</sup> It has been important for me up to this point to avoid using the word “region” in reference to black immigrant groupings so as not to confuse them with return south migrants.



## **Choosing Foodways**

Black immigrants are producers and consumers of a broad array of ethnically identifiable commercial and cultural organizations in Atlanta. These include music and entertainment clubs, local radio and television programming, ethnic organizations, churches, and myriad businesses that cater to other black immigrants, such as insurance agencies. In the daily lives of black immigrants, they are just as important as foodways institutions and can do as much work to promote politics of cultural solidarities. But from the standpoint of Atlanta geography and available research avenues, most of these groups posed problems.

For example, because local radio and television programming does not come from black immigrant-identified stations, it may have a geographically relevant consumer base, but not unique spaces of production. Churches and businesses proved difficult to research in comprehensive numbers because they may or may not be invested in advertising themselves ethnically. Black ethnic organizations in Atlanta are responsible for event sponsorship and cultural and practical resources for immigrants, but do less work from a fixed home office (if they have one) that might correlate with population data. Entertainment venues pose the most complex set of geographic difficulties. Although a solid number of them operate consistently out of a static space, many are also popular downtown clubs that have host one music night per week geared towards reggaeton, soca, or other black ethnic music genres. These weekly events often come and go from a club's calendar, making it difficult to determine which clubs could be counted as part of a landscape of black ethnic entertainment at any given moment. A number of the black

ethnic entertainment clubs with fixed locations also function as restaurants and so they are incorporated into this study.

I chose to focus my study on foodways institutions—restaurants and markets—for several reasons. First, they are by far the most numerous type of black ethnic organization in the metropolitan area, making them a more accurate data set for geographic measurement. Second, they are both commercial and cultural enterprises. These dual qualities allow me insight into their strategies for recruiting particular kinds of clientele evident in their choices of location. Unlike the selection of an isolated office space (or mailing address) for ethnic organizations less concerned with proximity to consumers, black restaurateurs and market owners select sites where they think they are likely to do business. These sites generally appear in places where their cultural products have purchase—either because they contain concentrations of black ethnic consumers culturally connected to their food products or because they are high-traffic areas for outsiders who want to experience a particular kind of black ethnic food. In the case of ethnoburbs, both of these audiences may exist in a single space. As such, black restaurants and markets allow me to identify geographies of production while hypothesizing geographies of consumption.

Finally, foodways institutions have long been a measure used to identify ethnic spaces and their relationships to populations. In her study of Mexican restaurants in Los

Angeles, Sylvia Ferrero articulates the concept of “foodscapes” and its utility as a new geography.<sup>103</sup> She writes,

In the case of ethnic food, a notion of *foodscapes* highlights the trajectories of specific ethnic food items across the globe... For instance, a notion of foodscape shows how movements of ethnic food are deeply interrelated with ethnoscapes... It detects movements of ethnic groups and the immigration flow of such ethnic groups. Hence, it discloses the establishment of new ethnic communities that increase and broaden their social networks and their links between the homeland and the hosting nations.<sup>104</sup>

By tracing foodscapes, Ferrero argues that we uncover the role that food plays in creating new social spaces and subverting existing power dynamics within transnational consumer societies. In the case of Atlanta’s black ethnic food, intersecting foodscapes in specific areas of the metropolitan region reveal concentrations of cultural activity and zones of contact between populations. My project examines these intersections by mapping the spatial distribution of black ethnic restaurants and markets and contextualizing it using demographic data to articulate particular spatial formations.

### **Identifying and Classifying Sites**

To collect restaurants and markets for my mapping project, I relied on three sets of resources. The first of these was a large group of interviews I did with black immigrants, in which I asked them questions about where they ate, shopped, and spent leisure time. The interviews did not provide a comprehensive list but rather a starting

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<sup>103</sup> Sylvia Ferrero, “*Comida Sin Par*. Consumption of Mexican Food in Los Angeles: ‘Foodscapes’ in a Transnational Consumer Society,” in *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, eds. Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2002), 194-219.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 197.

point and some verified details about a restaurant or market's ethnic affiliations and clientele. With this collection, I turned to the internet to find addresses and look for additional sites.

Restaurants in particular are fairly well documented online in large metropolitan areas, because so many sites, such as yelp.com, urbanspoon.com, and local newspapers like *Creative Loafing* (clatl.com), produce online reviews. They tend to classify restaurants using categories like “African” and “Caribbean” and give addresses. They also offer user-generated content in the form of annotations and comments, which contains some information about ownership and of course lots of participation in the never-ending authenticity debates about food. In a few instances, I could also see restaurants owners interacting with commenters about their dining experiences. A small number of restaurants have their own websites and still others appear on lists compiled by ethnic organizations. For markets, I also used ethnic organization indexes as well as patch.com websites for various sections of the Atlanta region.<sup>105</sup>

I then had a much larger pool of sites including some that did not fit the criteria for the study. Through a combination of internet research and site visits, I set out to verify details about ownership, ethnic affiliation, location, and observe consumers.<sup>106</sup> My first selection criterion was that a restaurant or market had to be black ethnic-owned and/or operated, so I removed two white-owned South African restaurants in Midtown and Buckhead from the list. In addition, I removed some large chain restaurants, like Bahama Breeze, which appeared in a general “Caribbean” search. Bahama Breeze is a

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<sup>105</sup> Patch.com sites are organized around a narrower definition of the local—by neighborhood or small city—to offer information about events, classifieds, and businesses.

<sup>106</sup> I visited approximately 100 of the 205 sites on the list in person. In some other cases, I drove by them to verify their existence or called them and asked some basic questions.

national chain with many locations in the Atlanta area. While some franchises might maintain Caribbean ownership, there are not necessarily Caribbean owners who participate in the menu selection, cooking, or promotion of Bahama Breeze restaurants. Other more local chains, such as Golden Krust Bakery, are black Caribbean-owned and staffed and so they were included.

Determining a specific ethnic affiliation for each site sometimes proved more difficult, as I will illustrate later. For a restaurant or market to remain in the sample it had to be identifiably black ethnic either through an ethnic or regional affiliation. I determined this status by some combination of talking to the owner or staff, examining marketing materials, and/or surveying the products they sold. In many cases, I was only able to determine a regional affiliation, and not an ethnic one.

The second criterion was that these businesses had to have been open at some point in the period of time between 2008 and 2011. I wanted the sample to reflect data that would be relevant to a comparison with 2010 population data. I started my search and interviews in 2008 and continued adding new businesses through 2011. In this timeframe, some of the businesses that I had identified early on closed, but they remained in the sample. If a business relocated, then it was entered into the data set at its most recent address.

The third criterion for selection was geography. Businesses had to be located within the Atlanta metropolitan region, defined broadly.<sup>107</sup> In order to embrace a full metropolitan approach, I regularly searched for sites using the names of suburban and

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<sup>107</sup> Any site that I found within the Atlanta MSA 20-county region was included in the set.

exurban towns surrounding Atlanta. In terms of geography, my data may be somewhat shifted towards the five-county inner ring for several reasons. First, most of my interviews were with residents of that area, and so respondents were more likely to frequent and be aware of businesses proximate to them. Also, internet sources, particularly ethnic organizational indexes, are often conceived in relation to cities, and so sites in exurban areas generally did not have as strong an internet presence. But exurban residential growth is also a more recent development, so it is possible that black ethnic foodways institutions have not developed in substantial numbers by 2011.<sup>108</sup>

This research process resulted in the identification of 205 sites: 141 restaurants and 64 markets. Because of the difficulty in determining ethnic affiliations for some sites, I used regional identity to group them into five categories: Caribbean, African/Caribbean, West African, East African, and pan-Caribbean/Soul. I added a group of International markets that interviewees frequented as a sixth category, although they are not black ethnically owned or operated. These markets sell food products related to African and Caribbean cuisines alongside other food items from around the world. I included them to illustrate the degree of competition that exists for small, independently owned black ethnic markets from a growing number of large, multi-ethnic markets in the Atlanta region. They are also included in the set because they are prominent sites of consumption—and sometimes employment—for black ethnic groups.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> This would be a factor for Caribbean restaurants and markets more than African ones because Caribbeans have exurbanized in higher numbers.

<sup>109</sup> In the case of Your DeKalb Farmers Market, a number of black immigrants work on staff. For more information about YDFM, see Tore C. Olson, “Your Dekalb Farmers Market: Food and Ethnicity in Atlanta,” *Southern Cultures* 13, no. 4 (Winter 2007), 45-58.

Caribbean, West African, and East African are all categories defined by regional identities that were relatively easy to discern.<sup>110</sup> I found clear distinctions between West and East African restaurants and markets in terms of the ways they were marketed and the food products they sold. These businesses were also often more explicit about their ethnic affiliation from which I could infer their status in a regional grouping.

The presence of the remaining categories—African/Caribbean and pan-Caribbean/Soul—signals shifts from ethnic and regional identity to racialized identity in organizing principles for black ethnic foodways. They are evidence that some black ethnic business owners are adopting a culturally hybrid approach to their products in order to attract a broader following of customers. African/Caribbean sites are most often markets that advertise themselves explicitly as both African *and* Caribbean in order to attract shoppers from all black ethnic backgrounds and regional categories.<sup>111</sup> Pan-Caribbean/Soul sites are always restaurants that pair a U.S. black cuisine (Soul food) with a black ethnic cuisine (Caribbean food) through a menu of fusion dishes. Pan-Caribbean/Soul sites especially capitalize on rhetoric of African diaspora to explain and justify these pairings. Despite their differences in approaches, products, and audiences, both African/Caribbean and pan-Caribbean/Soul sites are intentionally designed and advertised as spaces of intraracial cultural contact.

A total view of this regional classification system reveals interesting trends.

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<sup>110</sup> In terms of specific countries of origin, I use them here consistently with the definitions in Chapter 2.

<sup>111</sup> It is important to remember that African and Caribbean intersections also mark intraracial cultural contact because immigrants are so often divided from non-immigrants.

**Table 3.1: Atlanta's Caribbean and African Restaurants and Markets by Category and Type, 2008-2011**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Restaurants</i>	<i>Markets</i>
Total Metropolitan Area	205	141	64
African/Caribbean	34	2	32
Caribbean	115	94	21
East African	26	25	1
West African	17	13	4
Pan-Caribbean/Soul	7	7	n/a
International	6	n/a	6

Table 3.1 illustrates the statistical dominance of Caribbean sites. They comprise more than half of the total and more often restaurants than markets. Certain categories also yield greater results by establishment type. African/Caribbean sites, as I have mentioned, are mostly markets and pan-Caribbean/Soul sites are always restaurants. East African sites are, with one exception, restaurants. Only in the case of West African sites do these results reveal relatively even distribution by type.

Broken down by ethnic classification to the extent that I was able to identify that information, the sites also reveal differences in proportions (Table 3.2). Within the regional category Caribbean, Jamaicans have an overwhelming numbers, while Ethiopian establishments lead the East African list. For West African establishments, ethnic affiliation is somewhat more diverse including Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, and Senegal. But the large number of restaurants and markets that remain classified by region evince a trend of resistance to claiming narrower ethnic affiliation in favor of regional or intercontinental ones. This, I discovered is simultaneously a business strategy and cultural strategy that brings a larger group of customers into a shared social space.



**Table 3.2: Atlanta’s Caribbean and African Restaurants and Markets by Identified Ethnic Affiliation, 2008-2011**<sup>112</sup>

<i>Identified Ethnic Affiliation</i>	<i>Number</i>
Bahamian	1
Eritrean	3
Ethiopian	21
Ghanaian	1
Haitian	14
Jamaican	72
Liberian	2
Nigerian	7
Senegalese	1
Somalian	1
Trinidadian/Tobagonian	5
West African	9
Caribbean	25
African/Caribbean	32

Before turning to the map, I want to describe some apparent conventions in naming for African and Caribbean foodways institutions. Naming conventions are an especially important part of foodways advertising because they give consumers first impressions of the particular kind of cultural contact they will make at a given establishment. These conventions function, both inside and outside of black ethnic populations, as important signifiers of food products and the historic and cultural traditions to which they belong. The decision to name an establishment using particular identifiable language signals the owners’ acknowledgement of this valuable kind of marketing.

Within the Caribbean and African/Caribbean sites, a total of thirty-five have the word “tropical” as part of their name. Thirty of these are markets—a number which

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<sup>112</sup> A few of these institutions can be affiliated with more than one ethnic group. When that is the case, the institution is counted under each ethnic group.

suggests that the tropical market is an accepted convention for signifying Caribbean regional affiliation. Still other names contain words related to the foreign, exotic mythology of the Caribbean, such as Island (five sites), Palm Tree (one), and Banana Tree (one).

Many black ethnic foodways establishments take a more straightforward approach to naming as marketing by incorporating regional and ethnic identifiers into their names. 41 sites have “Caribbean” in their title, both restaurants and markets. This is sometimes the case when the restaurant serves non-hybridized ethnic food, as the case with Bistro Creole Caribbean Restaurant in Lawrenceville which is Haitian. Two markets also use the signifier “West Indian” and one of these uses it in combination with the word “Caribbean.”

I found three establishments that use both “African” and “Caribbean” in their names: Caribbean African Food Mart in Stone Mountain, G-Rock African Caribbean Restaurant in Marietta, and MPC African Caribbean Markets in Stockbridge. The stand alone use of “African” (without West or East) is used by some establishments, but in practice connotes West African regional identity. There are also ten sites that use the word “international” as a descriptor, although only two of these are international markets in the broad multiethnic way I define them elsewhere. The idea of an “international market” is a naming convention common across immigrant foodways establishments that may or may not connote a true diversity of food products.

Restaurants are more likely to use ethnic affiliation in naming. Almost half of the Ethiopian restaurants in the sample use “Ethiopian” in their title (twelve) while this is

also true for eighteen Jamaican restaurants, two Haitian, and one Eritrean. A still smaller number of restaurants use words signifying ethnic or regional cuisine, such as “jerk” (eight Jamaican) and “roti” (three Trinidadian/Tobagonian). Because establishments employ such different approaches to regional and ethnic naming, it can be difficult to determine based on name alone what kinds of food products can be found there. The signifiers they use may also be more or less legible to a given consumer depending on her own ethnic and regional background.

When mapped, these sites show different patterns of spatial configuration based on classification (Figure 3.1).<sup>113</sup> Caribbean sites, highest numerical group, are dispersed throughout the Atlanta region, but show some higher concentration in the eastern suburbs, mirroring the residential spatial patterns of the Caribbean-born black population. Both West African and African/Caribbean sites have smaller numbers but very wide patterns of dispersal, with general concentration in the northern section of the region as opposed to the southern. This is also generally consistent with demographic data for African-born black immigrants. International markets form a ring around Atlanta’s I-285 perimeter. Their proximity to the interstate system suggests that they are intentionally located for Atlanta regional consumer traffic and play less of a role in the residential areas in which black immigrants more immediately live.

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<sup>113</sup> I created this map using Google Fusion Tables so that it would be interactive for the viewer. The map contains much more information than is presented in these screenshots. Due to the constraints of submitting this dissertation in print format, I am not able to incorporate the original map with all of its features. To see the interactive map, visit: <https://www.google.com/fusiontables/DataSource?snapid=S577627tCff> then go to the Visualize tab and select Map.

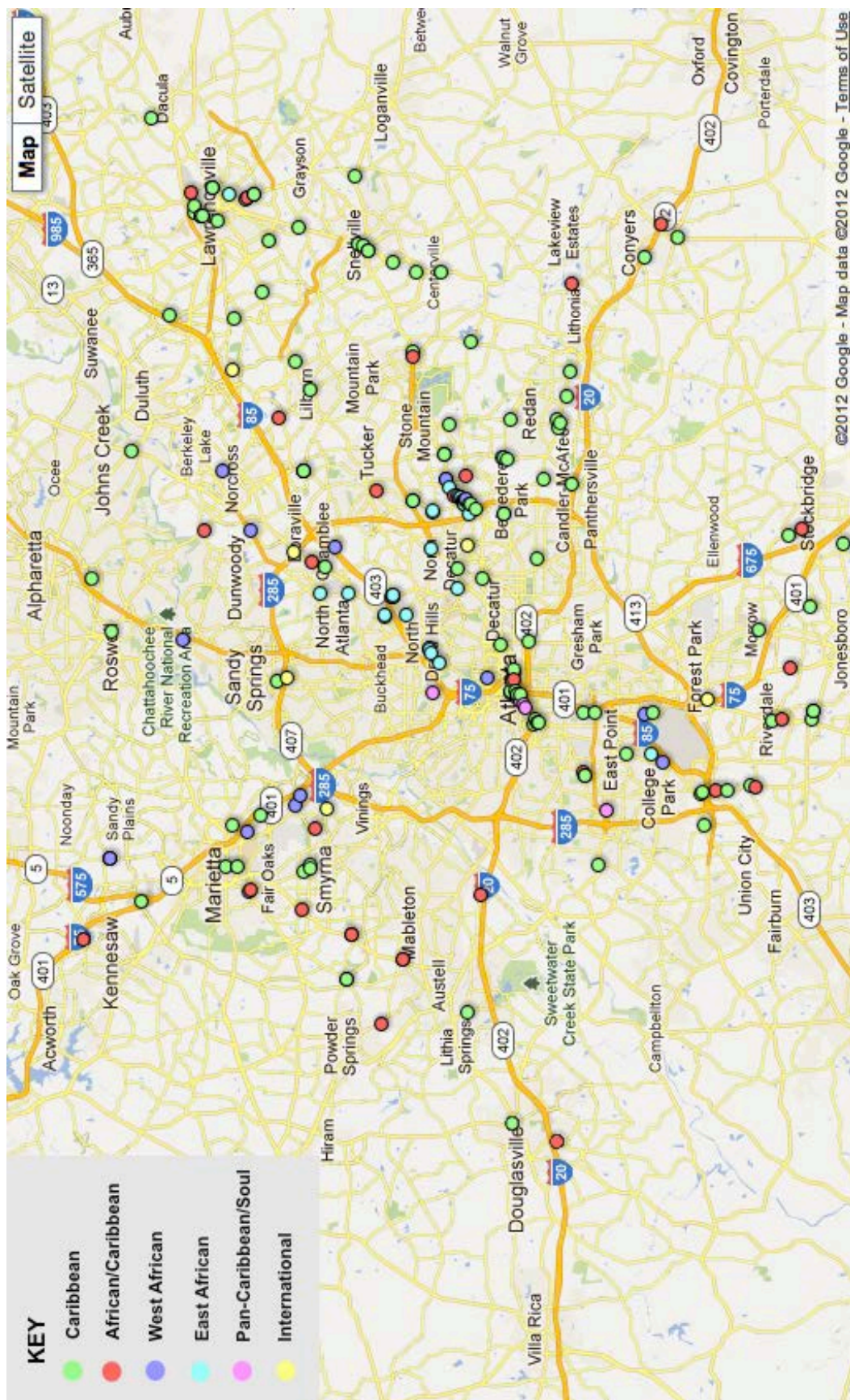


Figure 3.1: Atlanta Region Caribbean and African Restaurants and Markets, 2008-2011 (Map data ©2012 Google)

East African and pan-Caribbean/Soul establishments show the highest degrees of concentration, evident in cluster of sites within a more bounded geography. For East Africans, this clustering occurs in the northeast quadrant inside of the perimeter and includes north Atlanta and northeastern DeKalb county. Other clusters that appear on the map contain a multitude of establishments across categories, as I discuss later in this chapter.

### **Restaurants**

The map of restaurants indicates higher degrees of clustering in general and higher concentration within the five-county inner ring than does the map of markets (Figures 3.2 and 3.3). This contrast can be explained by the different consumer bases of the two. Foodways scholars argue that ethnic food has a dual life—oriented both towards the consumer “other” and its own ethnic consumer group. In this study, this dual life manifests in black ethnic food created for outsider consumption and black ethnic food created for black ethnic people.<sup>114</sup> Problems with the binary of self and other traditionally employed in ethnic food studies arise when it is applied to black ethnic groups with complicated and situational layerings of regional and ethnic identity.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30 (1998): 3-24.

<sup>115</sup> Ferrero, 199.



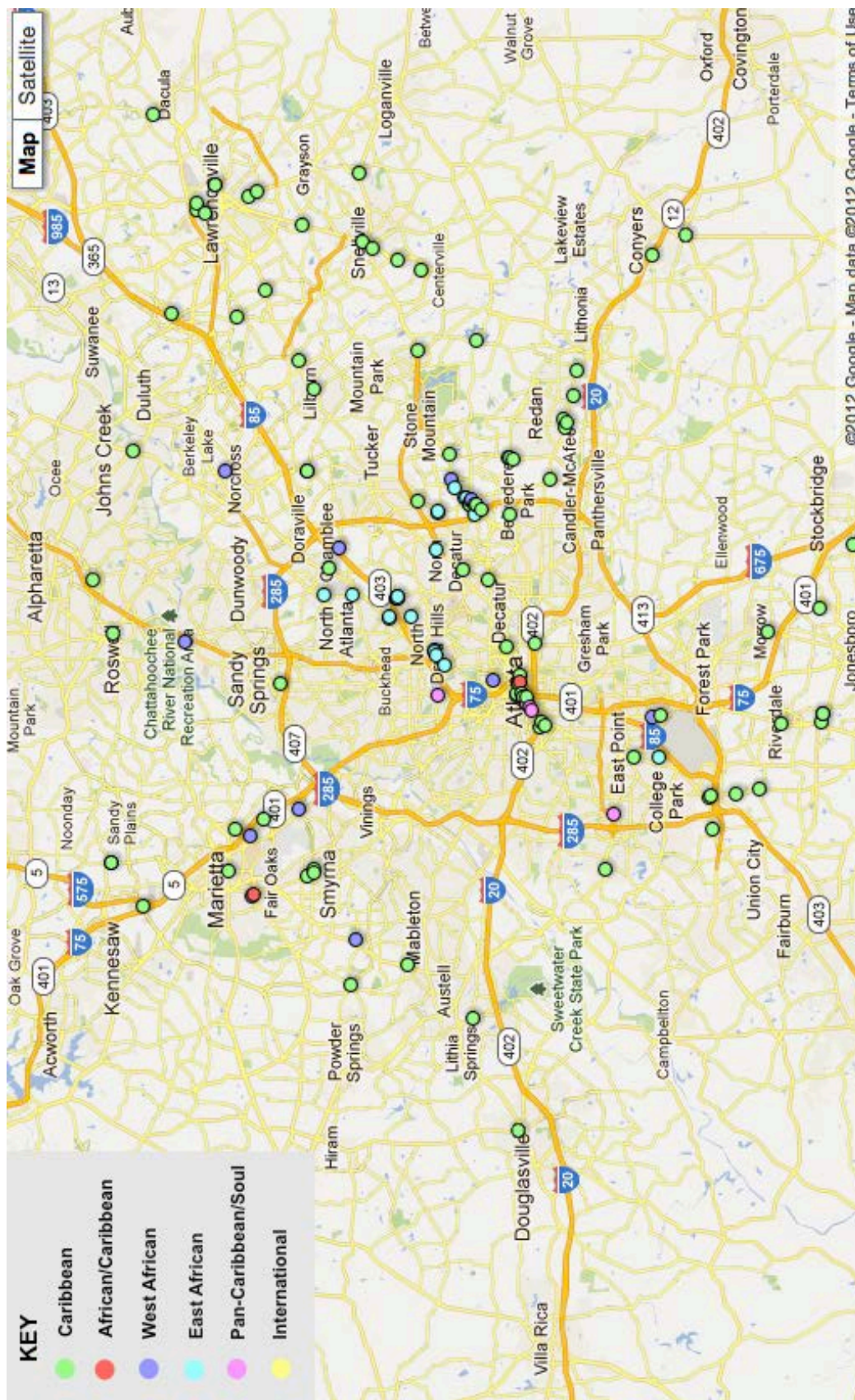


Figure 3.2: Atlanta Region Caribbean and African Restaurants, 2008-2011 (Map data ©2012 Google)

For example, a Somalian patron at a Jamaican restaurant might be perceived as an ethnic other or cultural tourist, whereas a Haitian patron, also ethnically different, might be perceived as regionally familiar in a Caribbean regional context. Because black immigrants to Atlanta looking to form social communities often do so across ethnic and even regional lines, ideas of self and other become contingent on the ways that a black immigrant identifies within an individualized social context. The dual life of black ethnic foods is more apparent in a survey of restaurants than markets, because restaurants engage more often with patrons who are cultural tourists. In contrast, markets cater largely to ethnic and regional in-group populations.

The dual orientations of restaurants impact their geographic distribution. Restaurants more oriented to “other” consumers tend to appear in areas with low immigrant population and high overall population—closer to the center city in the Atlanta region. These restaurants use different strategies of translation designed to meet the expectations of customers as cultural tourists. Many of the restaurants I visited decorated their walls with maps that showed outsider customers *where* they were dining, in a cultural and geographic sense.<sup>116</sup> Menus engaged in multiple acts of translation—by offering a brief history of the country of ethnic food origin, translating relevant names into English, detailing the ingredients and preparation of particular dishes that would be familiar to black ethnic consumers from that region, or giving instructions about how to consume the food (particularly the case at Ethiopian restaurants). In order to attract outsider costumers, restaurants closer to the center city more often had websites that performed similar acts of translation. When restaurants were situated closer to suburban

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<sup>116</sup> For more on the idea of ethnic restaurants as “traveling spaces,” see Ferrero’s summary of scholarship: Ferrero, 194-195.

black ethnic communities, they offered a less guided experience for the outsider consumer.

Further contextualization can explain the relative abundance of Jamaican and Ethiopian restaurants, particularly inside of the Atlanta perimeter. First, both Jamaicans and Ethiopians were among the first and largest groups to immigrate to Atlanta and to the U.S. more generally. They have some of the largest populations in the Atlanta metro area by 2010 and so their numbers in black ethnic cultural businesses should appear higher.

But in contrast to Haitians and Nigerians who also have large presences, Ethiopians and Jamaicans present cuisines that are legible categories of cuisine in the context of contemporary American foodways. Of all Caribbean and African national cuisines, outsider consumers are the most likely to be familiar with these two and to seek them out as dining experiences. Particularly Ethiopian immigrants on a national level have a strong tradition of restaurant ownership in large metropolitan areas, which accounts for their legibility to outsiders and their large numbers in Atlanta. Ethiopian and Jamaican restaurant owners generally have the most experience catering to American outsider consumers and the most persistent success maintaining businesses that rely on them as a customer base.



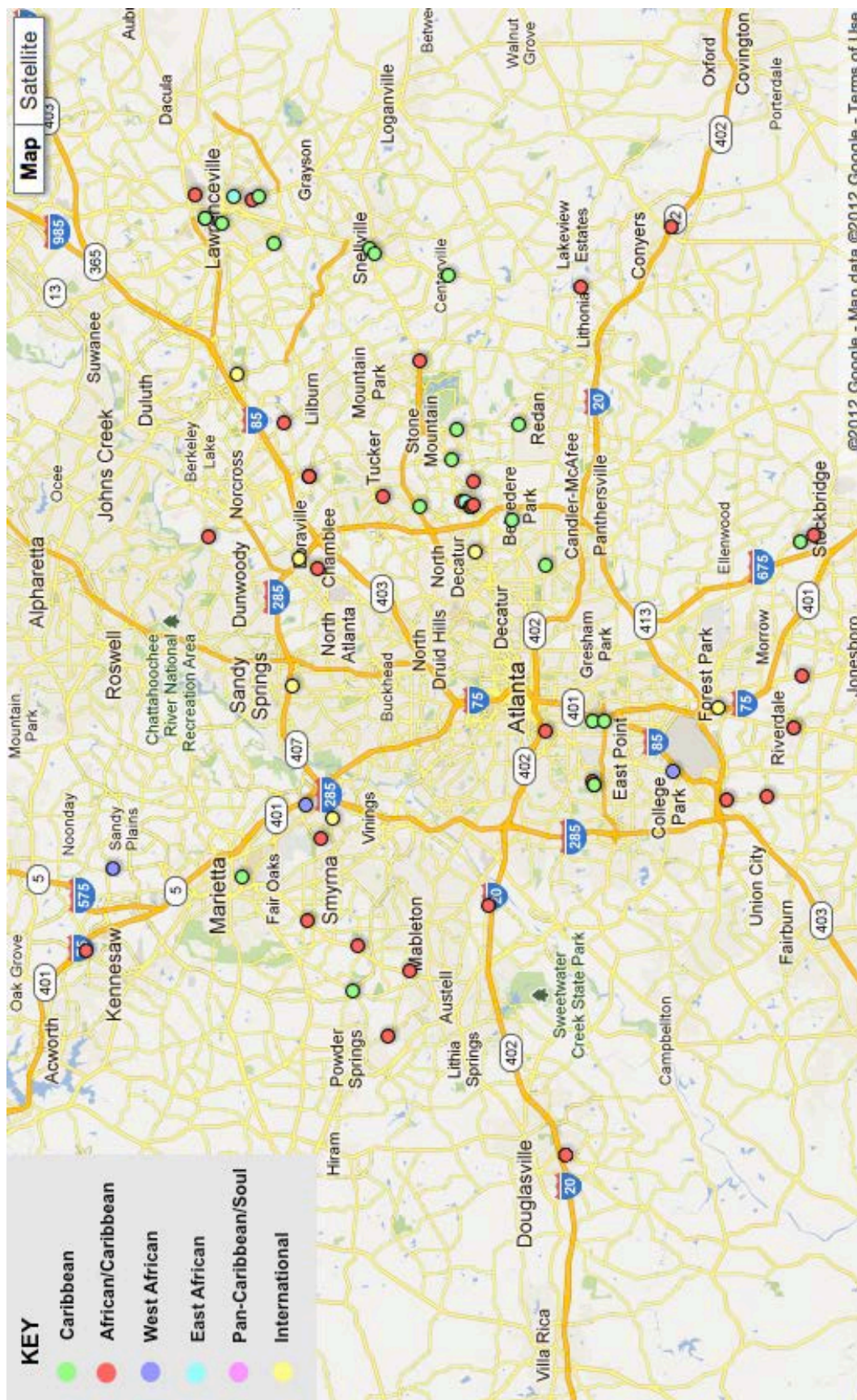


Figure 3.3: Atlanta Region Caribbean and African Markets, 2008-2011 (Map data ©2012 Google)

## Markets

The map of markets reflects their greater orientation towards the ethnic in-group consumer (Figure 3.3). Because markets more often cater to the needs of ethnic and regional insiders, they are less likely to exist near the center city and very closely mirror patterns of black ethnic suburbanization (see Figure 2.9). It is also important to note that markets sell more than food, although traditional food ingredients are their primary commodity. Customers at black ethnic markets can also purchase music, movies, phone cards, cosmetics, health and wellness items, clothing, and a variety of other products not available through other Atlanta retail venues. Like restaurateurs, black ethnic market owners engage transnational networks to bridge geographic distances between their homelands and their host nations and bring familiar products to their customers. Outsider consumers are generally more interested in the exotic experience of restaurant dining than they are cooking African and Caribbean cuisines in their home kitchens, so markets orient themselves to the black immigrants that provide the vast majority of their customer base.

As I suggested earlier in reference to the data set, perhaps the most striking feature of the market map is the profusion of African/Caribbean markets which follow a pattern of broad dispersal across the Atlanta region. I was initially suspicious that, given the diversity of African and Caribbean cuisines, these markets could cater well to multiple groups at once. But many of the markets that I visited proved as intentional in the stocking of black pan-immigrant products as they had been in their advertising.

Because they are organized and advertised to meet the needs of black immigrants collectively, these markets constitute zones of socio-cultural contact and visibility for

black ethnic groups. This contact extends past the mere occupation of shared space in the market or the browsing of multiethnic products. Like restaurants closer to black ethnic residential areas, these markets are social spaces where return customers who are familiar with market employees and one another engage in discussion of products, share local news, and exchange resources about their transitions to the U.S. and to Atlanta. In areas with smaller populations of black immigrants, these markets can provide important hubs for social interaction. In areas with larger black immigrant populations, they contribute to the cross pollination of black ethnic cultures along intraracial lines.

### **Spatial Formations**

Figure 3.1 illustrates clusters of black ethnic foodways institutions from multiple categories in specific parts of the Atlanta region. These clusters are primarily suburban. I argue in Chapter 1 that black immigrant populations consistently expand their residential geographies in suburban and exurban directions between 1990 and 2010. Data about black ethnic businesses supplements this work, suggesting a somewhat different, more condensed geography of commercial and cultural activity in 2010.

How might these areas of concentration be classified? The study of ethnic spatial groupings has historically centered on the identification of ethnic enclaves and ghettos in urban centers. In these models, ethnically homogenous immigrant groups form insular residential, cultural, and commercial districts within cities. Because they are insular, they are peripheral to mainstream U.S. societies, and so immigrants are able to resist large-scale cultural assimilation in exchange for remaining politically and social disengaged.

Ethnic enclave and ethnic ghetto models are most often used to describe immigration during the first half of the twentieth century.

But given the mass suburbanization of U.S. immigrant populations, these models no longer reflect the spatial formations of contemporary immigrant life. In her 2009 book, *Ethnoburb: The New Ethnic Community in Urban America*, sociologist Wei Li uses the case study of Chinese residents of Los Angeles County's San Gabriel Valley to argue for a new model of ethnic spatial formation—the ethnoburb. She defines this model as follows:

Ethnoburbs are suburban ethnic clusters of residential and business districts within large metropolitan areas. They are multiracial/multiethnic, multicultural, multilingual, and often multinational communities, in which one ethnic minority group has a significant concentration but does not necessarily comprise the majority. Ethnoburbs are likely to be created through some form of deliberate efforts of that group. Ethnoburbs replicate some features of the ethnic enclave and some features of a suburb without a specific minority identity. Thus ethnoburbs offer an alternative type of ethnic settlement in contemporary urban America and coexist along with traditional ethnic ghettos and inner-city enclaves.<sup>117</sup>

According to Li, ethnoburbs differ from ethnic enclaves and ghettos in several important ways. First, they are suburban and not urban. Second, they are not insulated from other populations and economies so they demonstrate ethnic groups' resistance to cultural assimilation and acclimation to socio-political and economic conditions in the U.S. simultaneously. Last, ethnoburbs are produced by global, national, and local forces that characterize the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: changes in economic

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<sup>117</sup> Wei Li, *Ethnoburb: The New Ethnic Community in Urban America* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 29.

restructuring, immigration and trade policies, local demography and politics, and transnational networks.<sup>118</sup>

Atlanta's most visible ethnic suburban clustering occurs along the Buford Highway corridor, an industrial highway that connects northeast DeKalb County with southwest Gwinnett County and is home to large and ethnically diverse populations of Asian and Latino immigrants and their businesses.<sup>119</sup> Black immigrants do not have much commercial presence on Buford Highway, with the exception of a few Ethiopian restaurants in its far southwestern section. Susan Walcott argues that Buford Highway is a different kind of spatial formation—"a suburban retail and residential ribbon" but not an ethnoburb—because of its extreme multiethnic character.<sup>120</sup>

Black ethnic groups are not as populous and have not clustered to the same degrees as either Latino or Asian immigrants in the Atlanta region, and they follow spatial patterns related to their regions of origin and often to race, giving them an equally multiethnic character in areas of concentration. Only one regional group in my study might conform to Li's model: East Africans (Figure 3.4). This group is dominated in terms of both population and businesses by Ethiopians who have the controlling ethnic stake in the East African population. Businesses are clustered in a fairly broad but bounded area: Northeast DeKalb County, where 51% of the metropolitan population of Ethiopians live.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Li, 1.

<sup>119</sup> Susan M. Walcott, "Overlapping Ethnicities and Negotiated Space: Atlanta's Buford Highway," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 20 (2002): 51-75. Walcott does not define Buford Highway as an ethnoburb.

<sup>120</sup> Walcott, 56.

<sup>121</sup> Northeast DeKalb County is measured here as two PUMAs: North DeKalb County and East DeKalb County-Clarkston.



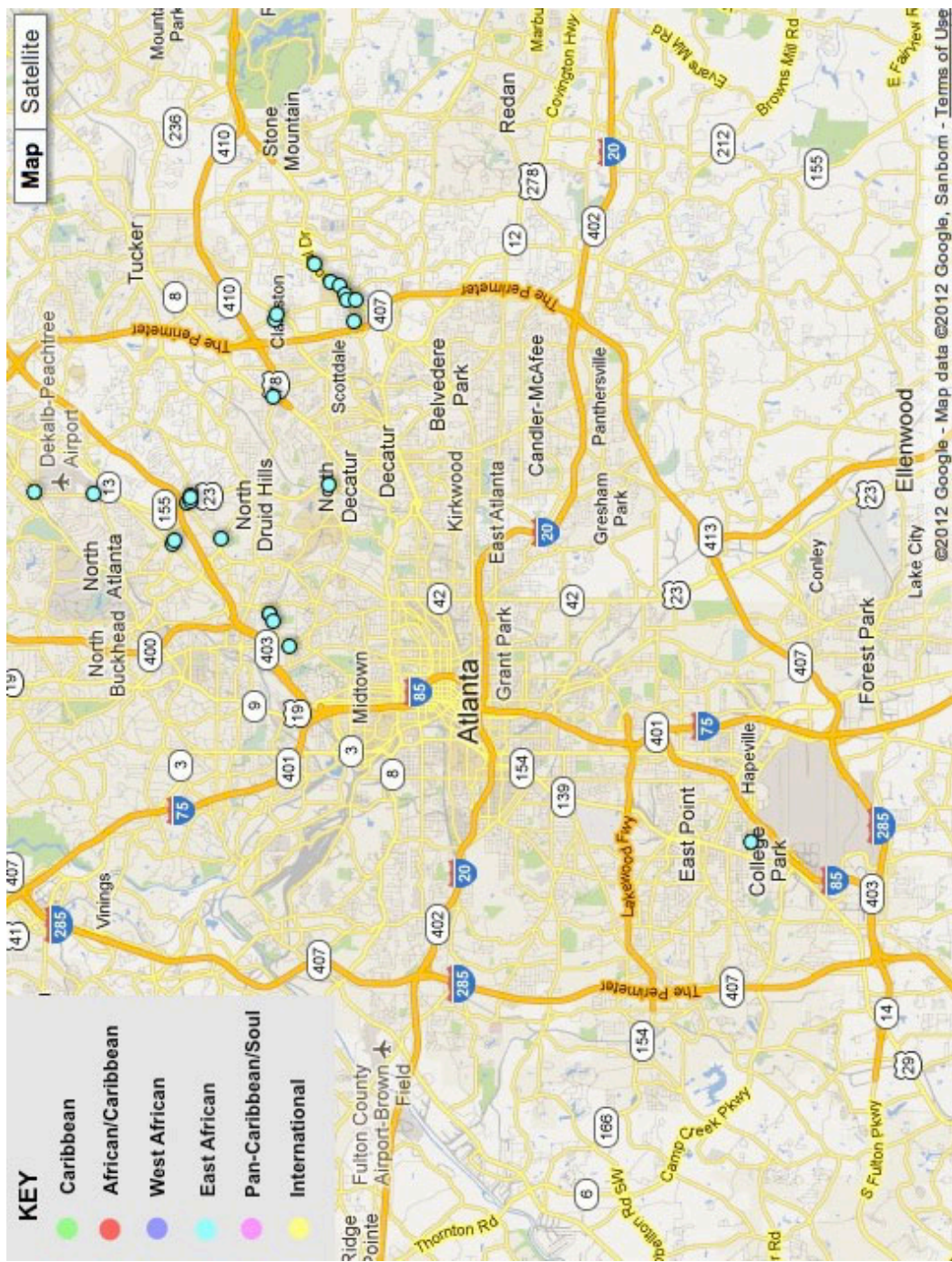


Figure 3.4: East African Restaurants and Markets, 2008-2011 (Map data ©2012 Google)

But even with the possibility of an Ethiopian or East African ethnoburb, there are problems. First, Ethiopian restaurants and markets are clustered only in a vague geographic sense compared to their relatively small numbers. Twenty-five Ethiopian restaurants spread out across the northern half of DeKalb County are arguably not a cluster. Second, the population concentration of Ethiopians happens in heavily populated areas, where they are only 1.7% of the overall population—not a “significant concentration.”<sup>122</sup>

As the case of Ethiopian begins to demonstrate, there are some significant challenges to imposing Li’s ethnoburb model on the black ethnic clusters in my study. First, Li’s work with Chinese immigrants in Los Angeles relies on a comparison of new suburban ethnic communities with older enclaves in Los Angeles. Atlanta in general does not have this longer history of immigration, and black immigrants to Atlanta certainly do not. Immigrants in my study do not have any prior history of urban clustering, as most have located directly in the suburbs. Second, Li identifies the concentrated group in any ethnoburb as “one ethnic minority.” Black immigrant suburbanization often follows directional patterns for members of multiple ethnic groups from a particular region, such as the Caribbean. As a result, extracting a particular ethnic group into an ethnoburb obscures important multiethnic associations that form on the basis of region and race.

I argue that, instead of ethnoburbs, groups of establishments in this study form multiple black multiethnic commercial and cultural clusters in parts of the Atlanta region.

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<sup>122</sup> This may depend on how we define concentration. It is in fact significant in the context of the Ethiopian population and much less significant in the context of the overall population.



These clusters have differing degrees of ethnic diversity and commercial concentration, as well as population concentration and contextual demography.

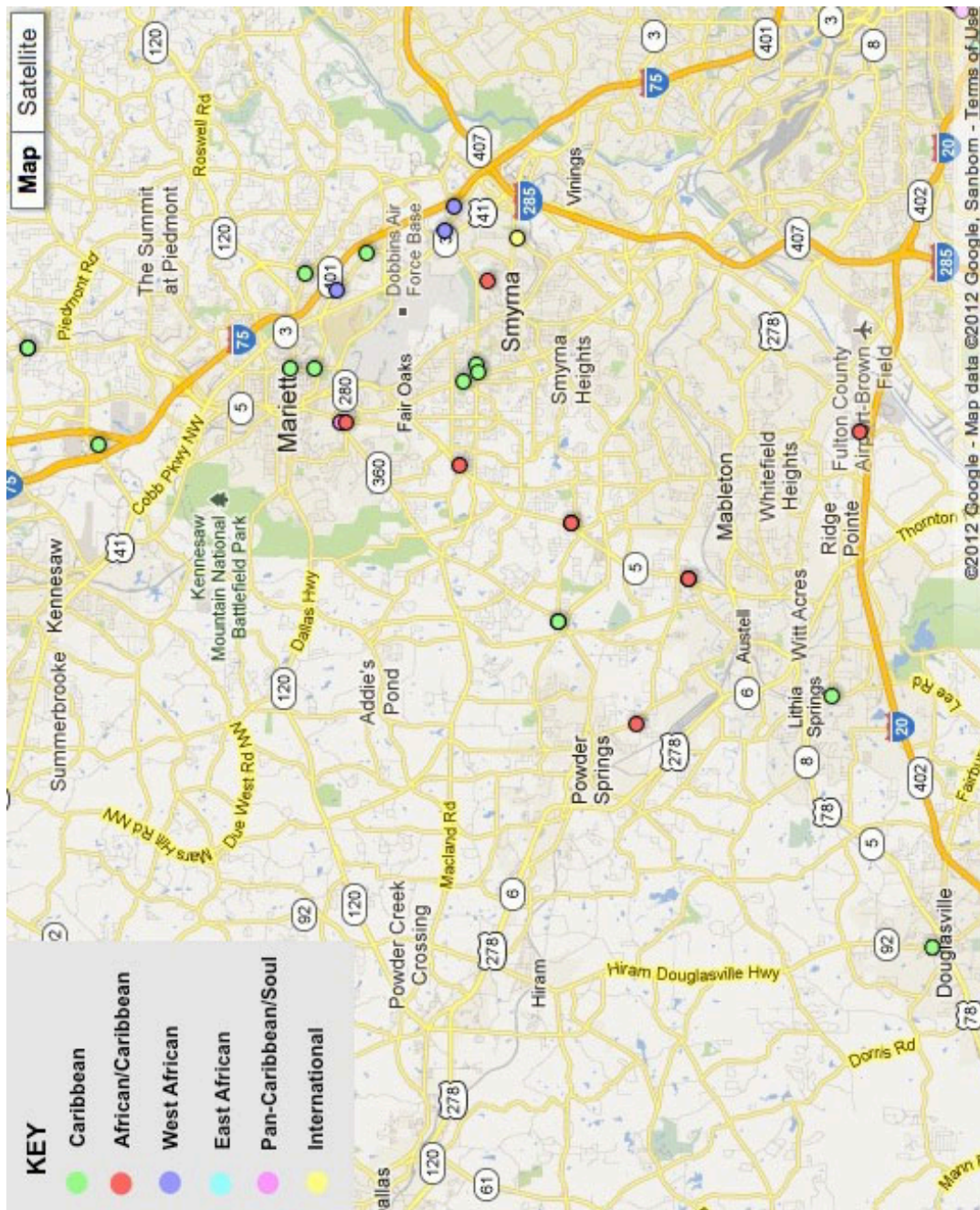


Figure 3.5: Cobb County Caribbean and African Restaurants, 2008-2011 (Map data ©2012 Google)



For example, Cobb County has a relatively high number of black ethnic restaurants grouped primarily in three areas: Windy Hill Road near I-75, Austell Road which runs southward towards I-20, and outer Marietta (Figure 3.5). While sites on Austell Road are primarily African/Caribbean markets that sell to consumers from across Cobb County (particularly around Austell), Windy Hill and Marietta businesses are a diverse array of Caribbean and West African restaurants and markets. In this area, Haitian restaurants are the most numerous, followed by Jamaican and Trinidadian restaurants. Windy Hill is also home to two restaurants and one market that self-advertise as “West African” and a pan-Caribbean/Soul restaurant called Natty’s Jamaican and Soul Food.

This section of Cobb County has 2,854 Caribbean-born black immigrants who are primarily Haitian, and 4,928 who are Sub-Saharan African born from Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana and Liberia.<sup>123</sup> The total population for this area is 37% black, suggesting some degree of intraracial contact is possible with native-born blacks but interracial contact is also likely.

By these measures, Cobb County’s intersecting foodscapes are high on a diversity scale but relatively dispersed in terms of clustering in a larger geographic area. Because of contextual demography, black ethnic businesses are more likely to be patronized by a group of ethnically diverse black patrons in addition to possible native-born blacks and people of other races.

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<sup>123</sup> This section of Cobb County measured as two PUMAs: Southeast Cobb County and Southwest Cobb County.

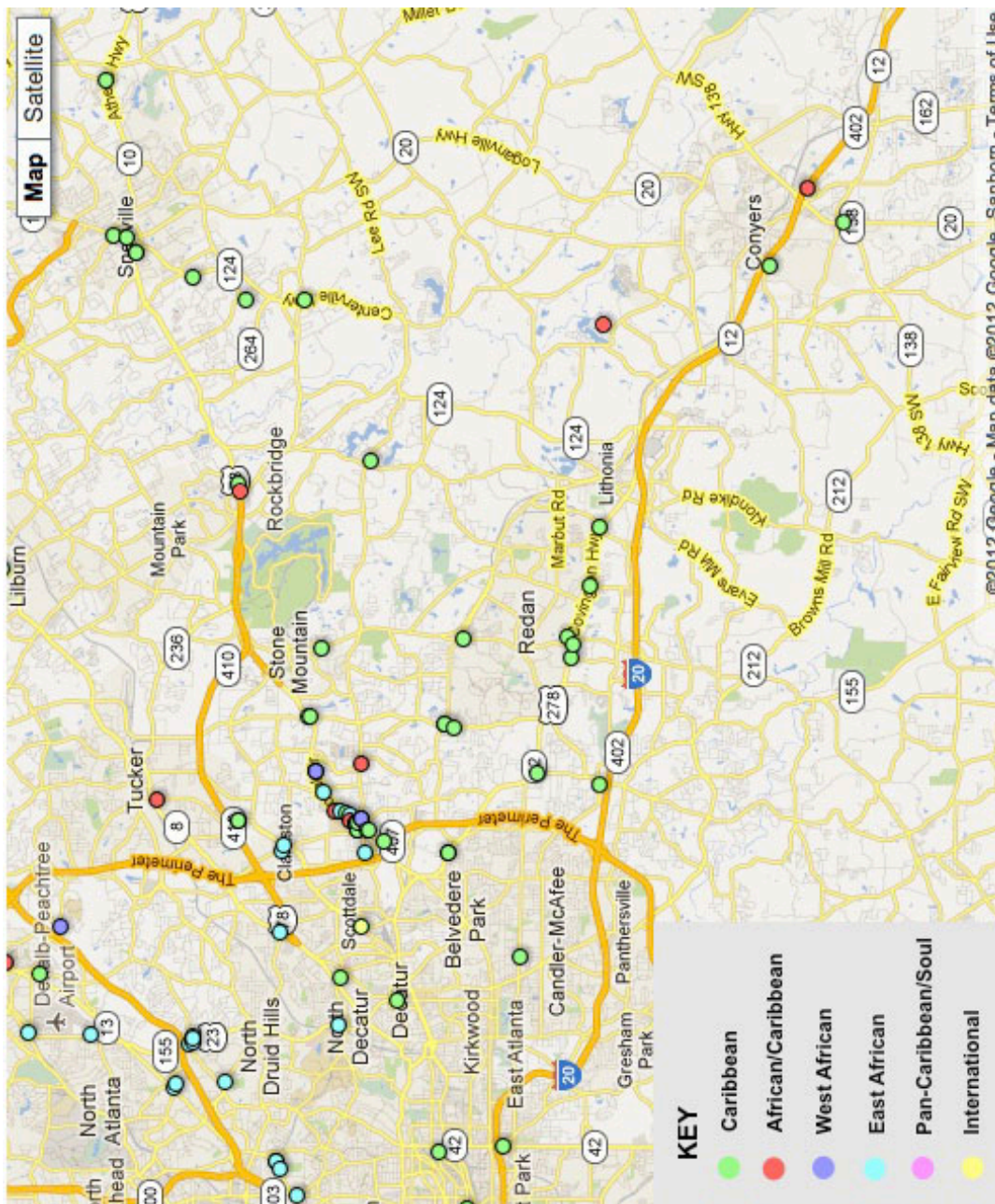


Figure 3.6: South DeKalb County Caribbean and African Restaurants, 2008-2011 (Map data ©2012 Google)

South DeKalb County illustrates a very different kind of spatial formation (Figure 3.6). Starting at the intersection of I-20 and I-285 east and moving towards Redan and Lithonia, there is a string of Caribbean restaurants—mostly along Covington Highway and overwhelmingly Jamaican. Additional Jamaican restaurants and African/Caribbean markets appear over the Rockdale County line near Conyers. Demographically, the Caribbean-born black population for the South DeKalb County PUMA is high at 5,218. Almost half are Jamaican, with a secondary concentration of 702 Guyanese. Sub-Saharan Africans are also represented with 1,943 people. The total population for the PUMA is 94% black, indicating likely high rates of intraracial contact with native-born blacks in these restaurants.

Unlike Cobb County, South DeKalb County has low black ethnic business diversity despite some diversity in black ethnic demographics. As an area that is identifiably Caribbean, if not Jamaican, it has a spatially clustered group of businesses and a large black population overall. These factors suggest that South DeKalb County's Jamaican restaurants may function as culturally hybrid social spaces in which native-born blacks interact with other black ethnic groups.

Perhaps the most striking spatial formation of black ethnic businesses is one that happens at the intersection of two roads in Clarkston, Stone Mountain, and Decatur: Memorial Drive and Rockbridge Road (Figure 3.2). More than any other formation in the Atlanta area, the Memorial-Rockbridge intersection forms a distinctive black ethnic business and cultural strip. One of the most interesting geographic features of this area is the fact that, in addition to sitting at the intersection of roads, Memorial- Rockbridge



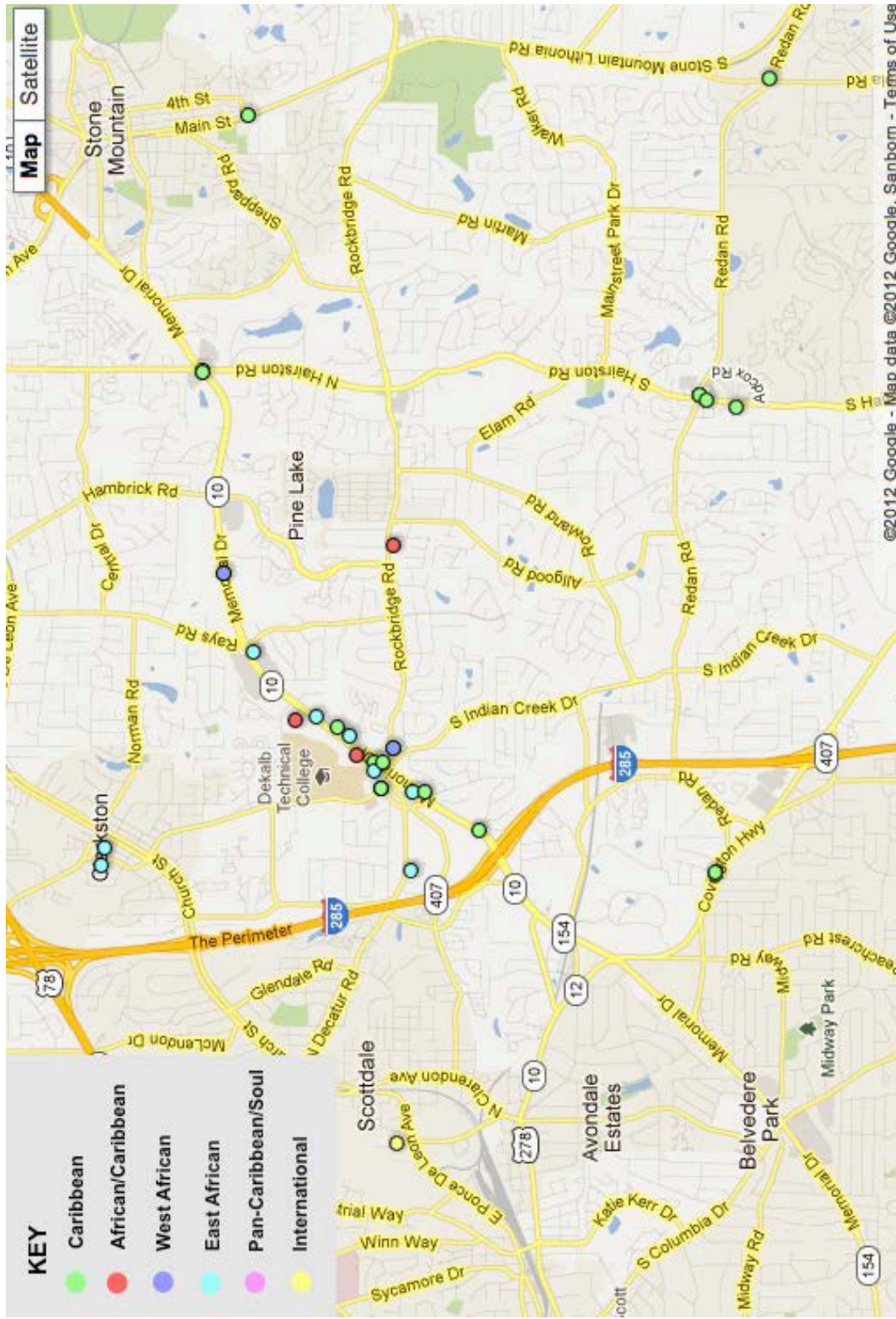


Figure 3.7: Clarkston/Stone Mountain Caribbean and African Restaurants, 2008-2011 (Map data ©2012 Google)

sits at the intersection of city limits. Businesses on different sides of the intersection are variously at addresses in Stone Mountain, Clarkston, and Decatur.

Memorial-Rockbridge also has a high level of diversity with multiple ethnic and regional restaurants and markets. East African, West African, Caribbean, and African/Caribbean establishments are all represented. This high level of diversity can likely be attributed to geographies of black immigration in Atlanta. Memorial-Rockbridge sits at a crossroads between black Caribbean-dominated Stone Mountain (which itself is highly diverse) and African Clarkston (which is even more diverse because of refugee resettlement). This collision accounts for the inclusion of East Africans in the ethnic mix of this area, since they are normally the most segregated black ethnic group. Jamaicans, Haitians, Eritreans and Ethiopians all own establishment here, as do Nigerians (who are not part of Clarkston's refugee ethnic populations).

More than the businesses in Cobb County, these establishments are highly clustered at one main intersection and east on Memorial Drive. This deliberate clustering by owners signals a high degree of intraracial, interregional, and interethnic collaboration between businesses who have sought proximity to one another. Together, these sites also form a commercial district recognizable to a variety of consumers across the region, including cultural tourist consumers and dispersed members of affiliated ethnic and regional groups.

In addition, the East DeKalb County-Stone Mountain PUMA (within which this intersection sits) was an area that I identified in Chapter 1 as the one PUMA with high concentrations of black people across the total black population and all migrant groups.

Indeed, in 2010, this PUMA has the third highest numbers for total black population in the Atlanta region. These 100,579 black people (89% of the total population) include 6,991 Caribbean-born immigrants, 3,200 African-born immigrants, and 22,051 return south migrants by place of birth. Memorial-Rockbridge symbolizes the intraracial intersection of black cultures in Atlanta and might constitute a new spatial formation: the multiethnic racial burb.

East Gwinnett County surrounding Lawrenceville, also a high growth zone for all black populations by 2010, may be in an earlier stage of developing a powerful multiethnic intraracial identity. In 2003, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution's* Rick Badie followed the story of the Tarlues, a Liberian couple who own the Tropical Market on Lawrenceville Highway inside the city of Lawrenceville:

Louise and Alex Tarlue live in DeKalb County, but their entrepreneurial spirit and quest for a quality family life are luring them to Gwinnett. The couple like the bustling county known for good public schools, jobs aplenty and seemingly endless subdivisions.

They plan to move here, following a trail being blazed by a small but growing number of Africans.

"You have to go to where people want you," said Louise Tarlue, talking one day during a business lull. "That's the reason I brought my store here. There are a lot of Africans beginning to move around here. Business is slow, but things are going to pick up. In business, you have to be strong."<sup>124</sup>

Seven years later, at 2010, population data shows that the Tarlues were part of a flow of African immigrants to Gwinnett County from DeKalb that shot Gwinnett County's Sub-Saharan African born population to 14,335, about 10,000 of them living in the east and

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<sup>124</sup> Rick Badie, "Entrepreneurial spirit brings Africans here; Growth points to bright future," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Gwinnett, March 9, 2003, 1JJ.



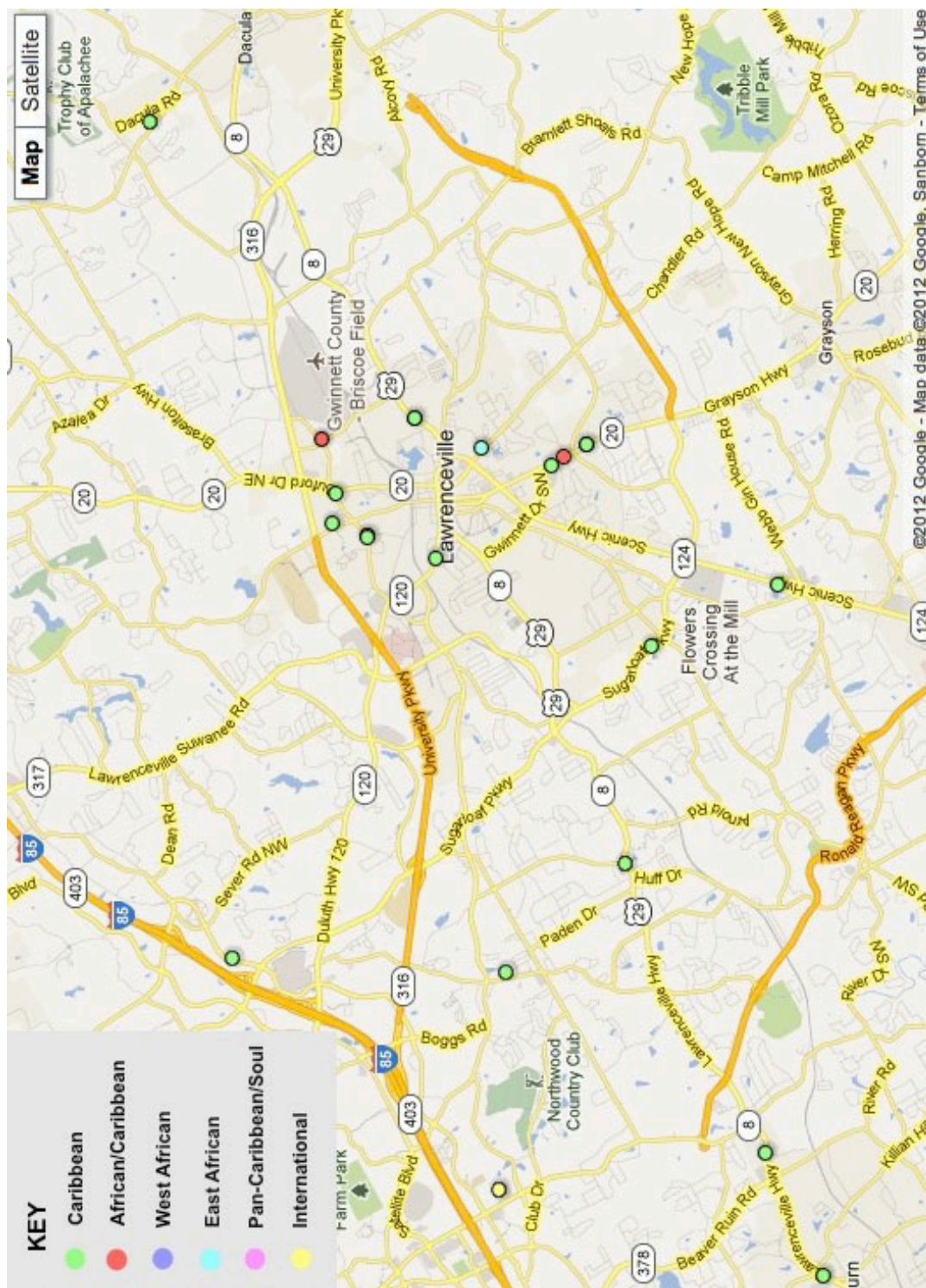


Figure 3.8: Lawrenceville Caribbean and African Restaurants, 2008-2011 (Map data ©2012 Google)

central part of the county. Numbers for Caribbeans were high as well: 13,214 also with about 10,000 in the eastern and central area.

The black ethnic businesses map for Lawrenceville shows that there is a concentration of primarily Caribbean and African/Caribbean establishments around Lawrenceville, although surprisingly few African ones of any regional identity (Figure 3.8). There is an even cross-section of restaurants and markets, and particularly African/Caribbean markets are likely sites of intraracial contact within the black immigrant population.

Aside from Clarkston's refugee population and east DeKalb County's longer history of black immigrant settlement, another factor distinguishes east Gwinnett County from Memorial-Rockbridge. Despite rapidly rising populations of black people, by 2010 Gwinnett County is 32% black. The contextual demography of the east Gwinnett County site then suggests that socio-cultural contact with native-born blacks is less likely there than at Memorial-Rockbridge.

All of the sites of black ethnic clustering appeared in suburbs, which makes sense given increasing or static high rates of black immigrant suburbanization. There was one exception: a group of restaurants and markets in Atlanta's center city (Figure 3.9). At first look, any clustering of ethnic restaurants and markets does not seem surprising. Downtown areas are high traffic zones in particular for cultural tourist consumers and Atlanta's downtown has a high rate of hotel and convention center turnover, making it a prime spot for a black ethnic restaurant. But the map of where exactly black ethnic



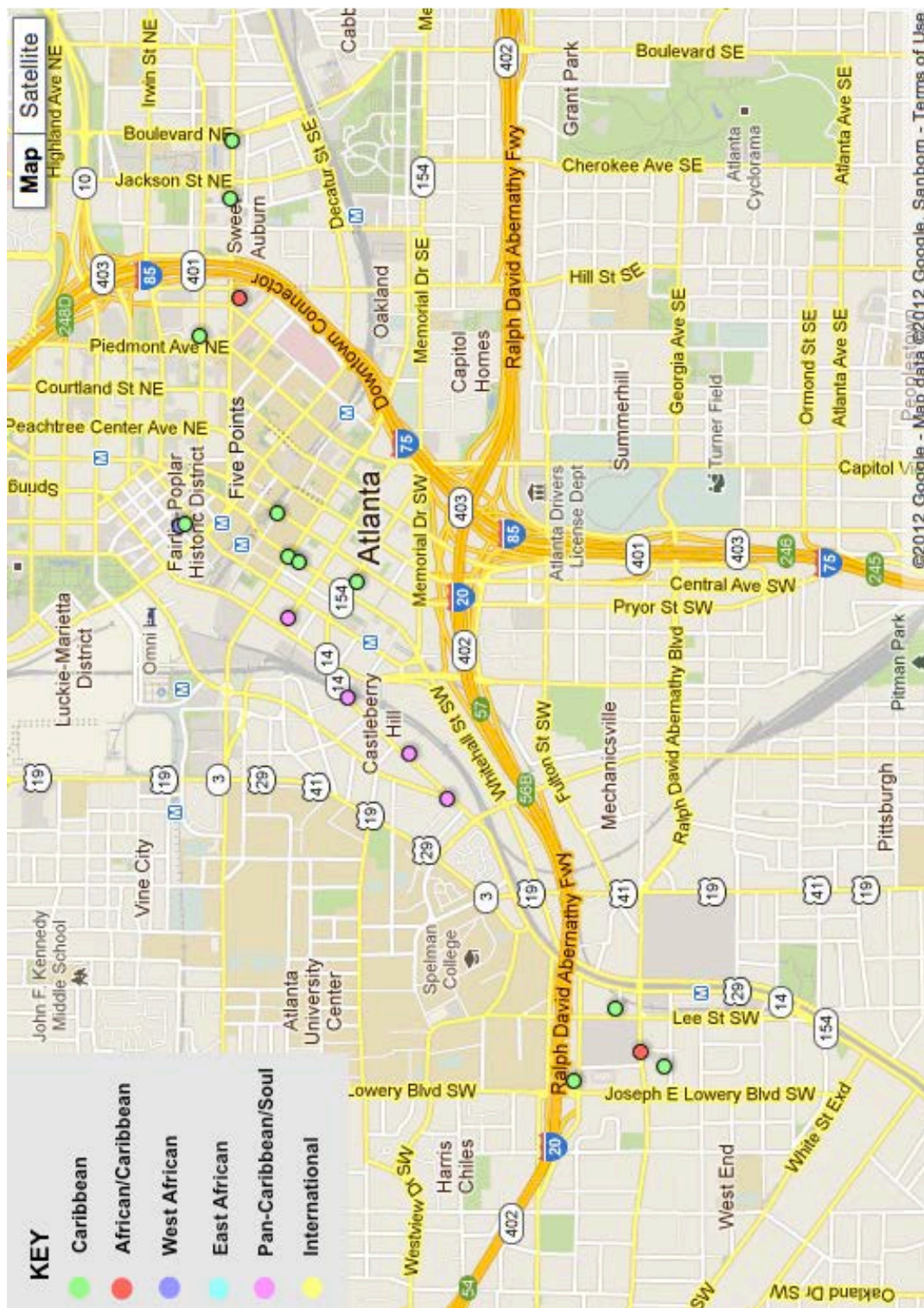


Figure 3.9: Auburn Avenue/West End Caribbean and African Restaurants, 2008-2011 (Map data ©2012 Google)

restaurants are in the center city has implications for the consumers that restaurant and market owners target and their perception that their products will sell there. Along with a group of restaurants in Atlanta's central business district, black ethnic restaurants and markets appear in identifiable historically black spaces: on Auburn Avenue and in the West End.

A line of pan-Caribbean/Soul restaurants—the only concentration of those in the region—forms a boundary between downtown and Atlanta's Westside. These restaurants symbolize a broader fusion of black cultures occurring in distinct social spaces in Atlanta's historically black areas. Black ethnic business owners, aware of U.S.-born black interest in African diasporic cuisines, may be capitalizing on an identified consumer base or engaging an intraracial social network. In either case, these owners have intentionally sought out native-born black places in which to market their products, inviting contact between groups and bringing evidence of black multiethnic populations to metropolitan places associated exclusively with native-born blacks.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter employs geographies of absolute space to map a set of complex intraracial, interregional, and interethnic relationships between a large group of black immigrants and native-born blacks. The identification of spaces of contact can only gesture at the possibility of exchange and speculate about the circumstances that might bring it about. As such, I recognize that this chapter cannot lay claim to evidence of strong evidence of intraracial relationships; it can only identify the particular set of

circumstances that invite them and the ways black ethnic business owners take steps towards doing so.

As a unified geography, black ethnic foodways institutions in Atlanta shows tremendous variety—from the relative isolation of East African restaurants to the interregional character of African/Caribbean markets. Because they use regional and interregional identifiers and target broad black ethnic consumers, they do not conform to patterns of ethnic singularity and geographic concentration that mark ethnoburbs. Because of their intraracial orientation and the patterns of racial residential segregation which place black immigrants and native born blacks in proximate (if not the same) communities, new models need to be developed to describe their clustered spatial formations. The Memorial-Rockbridge intersection offers a valuable case study for this endeavor.

## Chapter Four

### “Welcome to Atlanta”: Popular Narratives and Migrant Imaginaries

In this chapter, I argue that popular depictions of black migration to Atlanta emphasize new relationships between black migrants and metropolitan places that contribute to a more nuanced understanding of migration and its trajectories of influence. Why examine popular culture to study the migration of real people? Migration studies have long been the province of historians and social scientists, economists and demographers, whose work emphasizes the migration experiences of actual people from actual origins to actual destinations. But exploration of popular representation affords us a unique perspective on the complex process by which we come to understand migration and its impetuses.

When taken together, migration narratives embrace multiplicity by fusing real and imagined experiences. This popular picture provides an important supplement to scholarly work that identifies streams of migration and generalizes push-pull factors because it reflects a range of potentially contradictory possibilities even as it is built upon individual stories. Narratives challenge each other through the stories they tell as well as the forms they take and the audiences to which they appeal, endlessly complicating and revising totalizing explanations of population movement.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> I borrow the notion of migration narratives posing challenges through form in a general way from Farah Jasmine Griffin, “*Who Set You Flowin’?*”: *The African-American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 11.

This chapter extends my project's practices of mapping through new methodologies. Through close readings of music, literature, television, and film, my research uncovers a disproportionate emphasis on particular groups and modes of imagining Atlanta that favoring return south migrant experiences over immigrant ones. But I also argue that unexpected intersections and contradictions emerge within and between narratives, evincing a multiplicity of experiences with place. Such multiplicity reflects ethnic, class, and experiential diversity among black migrants. My analysis claims three distinct place-based narratives of black migrant experience with the Atlanta metropolitan area here termed "migrant imaginaries." Through these imaginaries, migrant characters variously encounter Atlanta as 1) an "inner city" place replete with signifiers of black urban culture, 2) a suburbanized site of social mobility and conspicuous consumption, and 3) a metropolitan landscape that denies black immigrants space, rendering them muted, invisible, and perpetually transitory within the narratives.

### **Popular Culture in Migration Studies**

Migration texts do not merely reflect established facts about migrant life; they are also modes by which creators, migrant and non-migrant, imagine and explain population movement and its impacts on the changing landscapes of places. As historian James Gregory argues, it is important to understand these materials not just as "artifacts of history," but as "factors in history."<sup>126</sup> Because migrants, their receiving communities, and national and local decision-makers interact with these materials, the stories

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<sup>126</sup> James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 44.

themselves help shape experiences and identities. As popular stories reflect aspects of the lived experience of migration, they also exercise the power to shape its perception in the local, national, and global networks and inform human action.

Although I argue that attention to consumption underscores the importance of popular culture to migration studies, I am not advocating for overly simplistic cause-and-effect relationships between individual popular stories and the actions of individual migrants. Rather, I mean to articulate a complex system of signifiers variously consumed across broad populations of people with different levels of exposure and interest in them. I also want to appropriately place these popular signifiers within a complicated system of factors that influence acts of migration and migrant reception, such as educational and employment opportunities and kinship networks. While popular culture plays some role in conveying economic and social opportunities in Atlanta, they are only one kind of source for that information, and not the most practical one. Particularly in the case of black refugee populations, popular culture has no impact on specific decisions to migrate to specific places, but it retains value as a mode by which refugee migrants understand the new world of their destination and understand cultural transition. Like the authors of these stories, migrants draw from varied sources to *imagine* the possibilities and perils of life in Atlanta's specific metropolitan places.

I intend to make a distinction between popular culture and mass media with an emphasis on the artistic side of culture. While popular culture is inevitably heavily influenced by mass media, I mean to suggest that migrants do not necessarily seek out artistic interpretations to form impressions of potential destination locations. With that said, mass media and popular culture mutually constitute one another, and the

imaginaries I define below exceed the boundaries of genre to inform work in all media fields. My interviews indicate that migrants build expectations of “place” through a complex process of consuming imaginaries constructed and circulated through media as well as networks of family and acquaintances.

In these interviews, references to black popular culture abound. College-age immigrants from Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad describe their early exposure to Dirty South rap music and recognized Atlanta as its capital when emphasizing the importance of relocating to a city with an influential music scene. A Nigerian family discusses the experience of watching several of Tyler Perry’s Atlanta-based “Madea” films and ponders cultural differences in U.S. family structures. A native-born migrant from New York City describes her first exposure to Atlanta’s Buckhead neighborhood and its Lenox Square mall through the first season of the reality television show, *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*. Although my analysis focuses primarily on the production of popular culture, these anecdotes indicate that consumption plays in equally important role.

### **Defining Migration Texts and Migrant Imaginaries**

Although many popular texts published or released between 1990 and 2010 feature images of black lives in Atlanta, I focus here on works from this period that feature actual or suggested black migration to the metropolitan region. As I mentioned earlier, internal migration appears much more often than does immigration, and all but one of the texts I review are created by U.S.-born artists. To find these migration texts, I explored many genres within popular culture, including music of multiple genres, popular

literature including niche genres such as LGBTQ erotica, street literature, and Christian novels, as well as sitcom, drama, and reality television shows, documentary films, feature-length films, and art exhibitions.

Migration stories, I discovered, appear often and in some of the most widely consumed works and are more prevalent after 1995. In the selection of texts I have chosen for this chapter, migrant characters appear singularly or in groups, and are featured centrally or peripherally to the storyline of each text. In the case of reality television and non-fiction books, these characters may be actual migrants, not fictionalized figures, although their stories have also been crafted to engender particular perceptions of their journeys and of Atlanta.

In other cases, texts may speak to a migration experience without featuring the experience of a particular migrant character, as in the case of the Jermaine Dupri and Ludacris song from which I draw my chapter title, “Welcome to Atlanta.” The creators of these texts are not necessarily themselves migrants, although some are, nor are the texts exclusively produced by black artists or directors, as in the case with Bravo’s *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* (2008-2010) and Dave Eggers’ *What is the What* (2006). In some cases, there is much less description of the migrant’s origins and the migrant’s journey than of the migrant’s experiences at her Atlanta destination—a consistent feature across the group.

This collective emphasis on destinations informs the core concept of my chapter: the migrant imaginary. To form a migration narrative, each text stages an interaction between a migrant (or migrants) and one or more specific Atlanta imaginaries as



destinations. A place-based imaginary functions as a set of tropes and scripts produced over time and disseminated through repetition and circulation that characterizes a particular “place” in terms of specific residential and commercial geographies, demographics, shared values, and bounded possibilities.<sup>127</sup> It contains a series of signifiers that potential migrants understand and reinterpret, sometimes with greater weight, to impact their own relationships and inform actual choices. The ways in which an individual place-based imaginary conceives of a place are necessarily incomplete, as imaginaries function to emphasize particular features of space and elide others to promote their particular characterization.<sup>128</sup> Individually, place-based imaginaries threaten to skew the portrait of a place, but taken in concert with one another, multiple imaginaries compete to broaden our understandings of “place—as variously informed, contested, changing across time, and ultimately unbounded”—and underscore its imagined nature.<sup>129</sup>

With migrant imaginaries, the audience of a text consumes the place-based imaginary through the experience of migrants confronting new destinations. Special attention to migrant imaginaries narrows our focus to the relationship between migrants and the destinations they confront. Although the texts in this study most often configure place using “Atlanta” as a primary signifier, I argue that they individually focus on more

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<sup>127</sup> Much productive work has been done with various applications of the term “imaginary.” For instance, for the cultural imaginary and the relationships between immigration and popular culture, see Rachel Rubin and Jeffrey Paul Melnick, *Immigration and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 6-7. For the political imaginary, see Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002). For a slightly different take on migrant imaginaries that situates the ability to imagine with migrants themselves, see Alicia R. Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

<sup>128</sup> See Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 5, 121.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

specific sites within the metropolitan region. The recurrence of particular places and kinds of space across narratives provides the foundation for three distinct migrant imaginaries. This privileging of place-based intersections between stories reveals a new geography of black migration that differs significantly from those created via other interpretive modes.

The first migrant imaginary scripts migrant encounters with “inner city” places.<sup>130</sup> Many of the texts that configure this imaginary set their stories in Atlanta’s historically black and low-income areas. Southwest Atlanta, the name for a group of center city neighborhoods surrounding the Atlanta University Center complex, features most prominently. Inner-city settings also include smaller cities that border Atlanta to the south and west, such as East Point and College Park and share similar history and demography. More rarely, Decatur and unincorporated south DeKalb County appear. These places map Atlanta’s zones of greatest black population concentration and poverty.<sup>131</sup> Within migrant narratives, they are identified by name and imagined as sites of rich black urban culture, as well as crime, poverty, and inequality associated with the inner cities.

The second migrant imaginary stages migrant relocation to “suburbanized” space. Texts that employ this “suburbanized” imaginary most often set much of their action in Atlanta’s northern suburbs. Migrant characters in these narratives most often live in north Fulton County’s wealthiest suburban areas, such as Sandy Springs and Alpharetta, as well

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<sup>130</sup> “Inner city” in this formation intentionally plays with uncomfortable ideas contested within black urban studies. I mean to link this imaginary of black urban life—an imaginary that associates poverty, crime, educational inequality, and unemployment with particular racially segregated sections of center cities populated primarily by African Americans. I use this particular term (and initially use it in quotes) to underscore its imagined nature. The “inner city” often references an implied relationship between people and spaces that sometimes relies on stereotypes, as it does in the texts that I classify within the inner city migrant imaginary.

<sup>131</sup> Keating, 43.

as Marietta and Vinings in Cobb County to the west, and Duluth in Gwinnett County to the east. And almost universally, these migrants spend much of their leisure time and money in Buckhead, an area in the northernmost part of the city known for upscale shopping malls, luxury dining, and expensive office space.<sup>132</sup> As with the “inner city” migrant narratives, these sites are explicitly named. In contrast, they afford migrants access to material wealth and the social power that comes with it.

Finally, the third migrant imaginary envisions immigrant experiences of “placelessness” in the region. Unlike stories operating within the first two imaginaries, these narratives do not focus on specific places; rather they depict the movement of immigrants between a variety of metropolitan sites without linking them to discernible black Atlanta geographies. The perpetual alienation of immigrant characters from places mirrors their broader muted and invisible status within texts. In this migrant imaginary, black immigrants are not rooted to particular spaces because these immigrants are in many ways unacknowledged. This lack of recognition affords them no symbolic place in the region and signals their larger erasure from mainstream black popular culture on local and national levels.

I want to clarify some of the ways that I am linking places to imaginaries and to migrants groups. First, in a discussion of the imagined character of place-based populations, much nuance is lost. Atlanta’s southwest neighborhoods have middle and upper-middle class sections and residents, although those are not acknowledged in the narratives. Similarly (as I have argued previously), suburbanization and wealth do not always correlate, as suburbs encompass a range of housing types and levels of resident

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<sup>132</sup> Keating, 15-23.

income, which is the case in parts of Atlanta's northern suburbs. Imaginaries characterize place in generalized terms which cannot account for class diversity that exists in their real counterparts.

Also, as I discuss the realm of imagined, I make a conscious departure here from the ways in which demographers classify some of the metropolitan places I discuss. Although I argue that Buckhead is more usefully considered as a suburban place in this context, it does in fact exist within Atlanta's city limit and as such is technically not a suburb. Similarly, I categorize East Point and College Park as part of the discourse of the "inner city," because they are contiguous to Atlanta's historically black neighborhoods and share their profiles in terms of socioeconomic status and black majority. In a study with different goals, they might be understood as part of a group of smaller suburban cities that ring Atlanta. I believe these liberties with cataloguing are justified and necessary to understand the ways in which imaginaries engage with metropolitan geography.

Finally, of the three imaginaries, only the third exclusively applies to immigrants as opposed to internal migrants.<sup>133</sup> While the vast majority of the "inner city" and "suburbanized" texts I discuss concern internal migrants, immigrants can also feature in these stories as I will discuss in Pearl Cleage's *Babylon Sisters* and *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*. The degree of immigrant absence from other migrant narratives represents the ways in which they are still largely absent from narratives of black life in Atlanta and from a national discourse about black migration to the region.

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<sup>133</sup> This is a distinction that I have decided to make based on my experiences with these texts. Internal migrant narratives of cultural rootlessness and invisibility may exist, but I have yet to find them. I also predict that they might do very different work with regard to place and culture than the immigrant narratives do.

## Avoiding Black Mecca

I want to contend briefly with a popular and problematic black Atlanta imaginary: “Black Mecca.” The discourse of Black Mecca dominates media characterizations of contemporary black Atlanta and is used to explain the recent migrations that are the subject of my project. Within its name, Black Mecca contains imagery of travel (or pilgrimage) to a utopian destination, positioning Atlanta as a United States “holy land” for black people. Popularized in print publications throughout the 1980s, it continues to be referenced casually in many journalistic discussions of black middle and upper class life in Atlanta to explain political, social, educational, and cultural achievements, the rise of cultural production groups such as Tyler Perry Studios, So So Def Records, or LaFace Records, and the influx of native-born black migrants from outside the region in search of economic and social opportunities.<sup>134</sup>

Charles Rutheiser argues that that purveyors of this imaginary find historical justification in the political and intellectual contributions of black intellectuals such as W.E.B. DuBois in residence at Atlanta’s historically black colleges and universities at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>135</sup> He asserts that Black Mecca also retroactively envelops the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King and Atlanta’s imagined status as the “Birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement,” and persists to explain the growing group of black

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<sup>134</sup> See Rutheiser, 62-65, for information about the early appearance of Black Mecca in print. Journalistic references to Black Mecca are too numerous to catalogue here, but for a few examples, see: Charles Whitaker, “Is Atlanta the New Black Mecca?” *Essence* (March 2002): 148, Kevin Chappell, “The Three Mayors Who Made It Happen,” *Ebony* (July 1996): 66, and for a more critical journalistic treatment of Black Mecca, see William Jelani Cobb, “The New South’s Capital Likes to Contradict Itself,” *Washington Post*, July 13, 2008, B1.

<sup>135</sup> Rutheiser, 62-65.

celebrities who have chosen to make Atlanta home as well as the election of successive black Atlanta mayors since 1974. Black Mecca positions Atlanta as an idealized space for black life, exempted from the limited economic opportunities, crime, educational inequality, segregated residential geography, and systemic racial discrimination that plague black populations in other U.S. metropolitan areas. As such, Black Mecca invokes a fantasy about black life in Atlanta that effaces the real experiences of black Atlantans coping with the perils of the “inner city.”<sup>136</sup>

Demographic analysis of the region indicates that Atlanta’s economic prosperity in the 1990s only widened the gaps between race and class populations already commensurate with those of Rust Belt and Western urban areas. Low-income residents of Atlanta’s center city, the majority of whom are black, indeed face massive challenges wrought by the relocation of business and white flight typical of U.S. cities.<sup>137</sup> Black Mecca masks these experiences by ignoring the ways in which upward mobility, wealth, and political power for some black residents coexists in metropolitan space with residential displacement and segregation, poverty, and structural inequality for others.<sup>138</sup>

However, in this chapter, my aim is not to debunk the factual accuracy of this label. After all, as I have mentioned, imaginaries inevitably perform acts of elision and selectivity. No single way of imagining a population, particularly a ethnically diverse racial one in a large metropolitan region, can equally attend to the needs of all constituent groups and experiences. Certainly Black Mecca is a place-based imaginary—it prospers

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<sup>136</sup> For more explanation of the untenable qualities of the Black Mecca imaginary, see *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> For a full picture of inequalities in Atlanta’s economic and geographic development by the mid-1990s and their impacts on black populations, see Keating.

<sup>138</sup> Dudley Clendinen, “Atlanta, Mecca for Middle-Class Blacks, Also Harbors Poverty,” *New York Times*, January 20, 1986, A16.

through repetition and circulation, and traffics in established tropes and scripts about black middle-class life such as celebrity, social mobility, business opportunity, and political clout. Clearly, Black Mecca attempts to imagine a particular relationship between race and one's concept of place.

There are several important reasons why I do not find Black Mecca critically productive as a category of analysis. First, it has thoroughly dominated popular discourse about black life in Atlanta and while I hope that the imaginaries I suggest will contend usefully with its central concept, I feel that its inclusion would overshadow the important work of identifying new and potentially more nuanced narratives. Second, in its application, Black Mecca became a major vehicle for disseminating narrow definitions of what constitutes "blackness" in Atlanta and that history forecloses its possibilities as a means to examine ethnic diversity within a single racial category (a central concern of this project). Additionally, when applied to migrants, it seems to predetermine universally positive outcomes from the act of migration that overly simplify readings of migrant imaginaries. Finally, Black Mecca has been so overused and so rarely unpacked that the relationships that it establishes between black Atlantans and places are vague at best. The Atlanta metropolitan region contains multiple kinds of places and varied populations, and relationships between places and populations constantly contest any one characterization of "Atlanta." Where precisely do we locate Black Mecca in this context? What kinds of residential, commercial, and public "spaces" does it encompass? If Black Mecca is place-based, it is not spatially specific enough to be useful for my purposes. It serves as a hypernym that oversimplifies ethnicity and class distinctions within race and ignores actual social spaces. Instead, I argue that the three new migrant imaginaries

together offer a more nuanced and specific portrait of black migrants' relationships to multiple metropolitan sites.

### **“Welcome to Atlanta”: Three Migrant Imaginaries**

Jermaine Dupri and Ludacris' 2002 musical collaboration, “Welcome to Atlanta,” and its music video exemplify these concepts.<sup>139</sup> The video for “Welcome to Atlanta” offers a glimpse of all three migrant imaginaries and as such it provides a useful vehicle for introducing them. Although exceptional within this study, “Welcome to Atlanta” illustrates the possibility that migrant imaginaries can operate alongside one another with a single text.<sup>140</sup> This threading allows us to explore new relationships between imaginaries through the interplay of characters and storylines.

I claim this video as a migration text for several reasons. First, through its “welcoming” orientation it introduces recent arrivals to one Atlanta specifically envisioned through testimony and image.<sup>141</sup> Although this interaction is staged in the video as a guided tour for a group of racially and ethnically diverse tourists on Dupri and Ludacris' “Atlanta Sightseeing—Keepin' It Crunk” bus, I would argue that tourism can

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<sup>139</sup> “Welcome to Atlanta” appears on Jermaine Dupri's album, *Instructions* (Def Jam South: 2002) and as a hidden track on Ludacris' album, *Word of Mouf* (Def Jam: 2001). The music video is directed by Marc Klasfeld. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5W73HaVOBg>.

<sup>140</sup> “Welcome to Atlanta” is exceptional, but I will also argue that Pearl Cleage's *Babylon Sisters* (2005) traffics in multiple migrant imaginaries.

<sup>141</sup> This orientation is likely intended to assert Atlanta's status as an important Dirty South site on the U.S. rap scene but it has consequences for migration as well. For more information about the importance of place to rap music in the context of the Dirty South and Atlanta in particular, see Matt Miller, “Dirty Decade: Rap Music and the U.S. South, 1997-2007,” *Southern Spaces*, June 10, 2008, <http://www.southernspaces.org/2008/dirty-decade-rap-music-and-us-south-1997-2007>.



function here as a short hand for migration.<sup>142</sup> Dupri and Ludacris are both migrants to Atlanta and Dupri claims this fact in his lyrics: “I been puttin’ it down here since eighty-three.” In a subsequent remix of the song, “Welcome to Atlanta (Coast 2 Coast remix),” Dupri acknowledges black migration as a broader movement in his opening verse: “Welcome to Atlanta remix it had to go down/I got something else to tell you ‘bout the new Motown/ where the people don’t visit they move out here/ and ain’t no tellin who you might see up in Lenox Square.”<sup>143</sup>

The “Welcome to Atlanta” video follows a bus full of tourists guided by Dupri and Ludacris to various sites where tourists of all ages and backgrounds consume black Atlanta culture in southwest Atlanta neighborhoods and at night clubs. Black Atlanta natives dress these tourists in street gear including athletic jerseys, head wraps, large jewelry, baggies pants, and boots, give them gold teeth, tattoos, cornrows, and teach them how to dance to crunk music. Many of these moments are captured through the freeze frames of souvenir photographs emblazoned with a “Welcome to Atlanta” caption in the bottom-right hand corner inside of the frame. Tourists use video cameras to document their journey, the wisdom of their tour guides, and their interactions with local black people until about halfway through the video, when they begin their dance lessons and finally become so engrossed in the scene that they are no longer interested in recording their surroundings. At the end of the video, tourists return to the bus, forever changed by their Atlanta tour.

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<sup>142</sup> I understand that generally it is dangerous to conflate tourism with acts of migration, but I do so here acknowledging the migrant rappers as an important context for the video, as well as the ways in which the entire journey of migration could be hard to sum up in a short music video.

<sup>143</sup> “Welcome to Atlanta (Coast 2 Coast remix)” was released as single in 2003 featuring Murphy Lee, P. Diddy, and Snoop Dogg. Video, directed by Marc Klasfeld. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5cXGtneAmps> (Accessed July 12, 2012)

Once of the most fascinating aspects of the video is its use of a map of Atlanta to chart the course of the tour bus. A circular icon on the map moves viewers from Downtown Atlanta, first to College Park where tourists photograph a local group of shirtless, tattooed black men with gold teeth outside of a block of typical single-story brick Section 8 housing. The bus then travels via the map to Decatur, where tourists examine a restored car with large rims, then to S.W.A.T. (Southwest Atlanta) where they buy new clothing and boots. Finally, the bus arrives in Buckhead where tourists learn how to dance at a nightclub. Through the use of this map, three migrant imaginaries in the video concretize through presentations of spaces.

First, the video portrays Atlanta as an urban space through familiar tropes and symbols of black urban street life: specific fashion, night clubs, public housing, restored cars, sky rise buildings, and block parties. The chorus engrains a number of these images: “Welcome to Atlanta where the players play/ and we ride on them thangs like every day/ Big beats, hit streets, see gangsters roamin/ and parties don’t stop ‘til eight in the mornin.” Although the song’s urban emphasis is largely hedonistic, even violent aspects of black urban street culture are suggested in Ludacris’ verse: “Skatin down Old Nat/ gat tucked and lean/I split ya spleen, as a matter of fact I split ya team/ No blood on the sneaks, gotta keep it so my kicks is clean.” This imagery of black urban life in Atlanta may appear somewhat generic in terms of “place,” particularly in the context of rap music’s broader promotion of cultures of violence and pleasure, but the presence of the map in the video helps to anchor the urban aspects of the video to familiar Atlanta

urban neighborhoods in College Park, Decatur, and Southwest Atlanta.<sup>144</sup> Potential migrants imagined by the orientation of the video encounter Atlanta's southwest sections (and Decatur) as familiar inner city spaces with urban pleasures and urban problems, although pleasures are more emphasized here.

Buckhead as the final destination of the tour functions to shift the attention to a very different way of imagining black migration to Atlanta. The presence of Buckhead on the map (and Dupri's aforementioned reference to Lenox Square mall) cements the video's portrayal of the second migrant imaginary: migrants' engagement with suburbanized sites with opportunities for conspicuous consumption and social mobility. Such images abound in the many visuals of expensive liquor, abundant cash, and fashionable attire within the video as well as in song lyrics that place Ludacris and Dupri in various upscale cars: "J. D. in the Rolls/ . . . I won't stop until I'm rich as those whites'll come." But social mobility also emerges as one of the video's meta-narratives: the possibility of social mobility evinced by an all-star line-up of black Atlanta celebrity musicians, personalities and athletes with cameos, including Lil Jon, Da Brat, T.I., Evander Holyfield, Vernon Forrest, Dominique Wilkins, and Monica.<sup>145</sup> While a few of these celebrities appear in the urban scenes, most of them are shot either in isolation from the tourists and the rappers or in the nightclub scene in Buckhead. In this way, the possibility of wealth that they connote becomes linked to suburbanized space.

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<sup>144</sup> For more about Dirty South rap music's emphases on violence and pleasure, see Miller. For further reading about the history of rap music, see Cheryl Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and Murray Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).

<sup>145</sup> Although arguably most American celebrities experience some degree of upward mobility, I do not intend this observation as a generalization about the social class origins of these particular celebrities. I merely want to suggest that celebrities in this context are a vision of the opportunities that a particular place can afford.

Lastly, and perhaps most surprisingly, the video presents a vision of the remaining migrant imaginary in my study: the segregation and invisibility of immigrants across metropolitan places and spaces. As I have mentioned, place-related status often appears through exclusion from place. While not mentioned in the lyrics to “Welcome to Atlanta,” black immigrants (or black foreign tourists) do make an appearance in this video, alongside a number of non-black immigrants/tourists. They materialize as part of the crowd of tourists composed of whites, Asians, Indians, and other blacks. Although they appear very briefly in the background of the video (and one is captured in a souvenir photo admiring a refurbished car), these “immigrants” are easily discernible from U.S.-born black tourists because they are entirely dressed in Kente cloth outfits. Their experience as tourists is the experience of tourists in the video – by the time the bus reaches the Buckhead nightclub, U.S.-born black tourists (coded as middle- or upper-class by the sweaters they wear around their shoulders) have begun to blend seamlessly into the fabric of club nightlife by acquiring dance moves more quickly than their non-black counterparts, but the foreign blacks are nowhere to be found. Instead, they are imagined here as perpetual visitors or tourists consigned metaphorically to ride the sightseeing bus without a destination. Within the script of this migrant imaginary, black immigrant characters are rendered invisible in metropolitan settings by U.S.-born whites and blacks alike. This video captures a moment in time that articulates the three imaginaries for a range of consumers.

Each of the next three sections of this chapter addresses one migrant imaginary as it develops across several instances of popular representation. I have selected examples of the migrant imaginary at work, and my interpretations are intended to unpack the

process by which a text participates in place-based imagining. I do not offer a comprehensive list of all of the narratives in which these imaginaries are manifest. Instead, I use close reading to show imaginaries variously at work and to describe them through the explication of shared scripts, symbols, and trends.

### **Migration to the “Inner City”: Street Culture and Urban Struggle**

Earlier, I discussed the specific geographic spaces identified within the inner city Atlanta migrant imaginary. Through an examination of two texts, the 2006 film *ATL* and the novel *Cake*, I will argue that migrants’ interactions with these spaces are imagined through scripts, tropes, and symbols that determine the circumstances of migrant reception and adaptation. Migration to a particular place—in both cases Southwest Atlanta—offers a starting point for scripts of this imaginary. In adapting, migrants from other larger metropolitan areas both enjoy the pleasures of local street culture and are exposed to the consequences of its more sinister aspects. These narratives emphasize connections between the “inner-city” imaginary and Atlanta’s hip-hop cultures.

The 2006 film *ATL*, set and filmed in Atlanta’s southwest Mechanicsville neighborhood, features a secondary character named Brooklyn, who migrates from New York City.<sup>146</sup> A member of the group of teenaged male friends who form the film’s core of characters, he is memorable for a few important qualities in the film: his poetic way with the ladies, his inability to keep a job because of his smart mouth and bad temper, and his insistence on calling Atlanta “country” in contrast to New York. Rashad, the

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<sup>146</sup> Chris Robinson (director). *ATL*, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2006.

film's main character, schools Brooklyn at the Waffle House about the subtle shifts in slang that mark the distinction between these urban places:

*Brooklyn:* Why after every sentence do you call me “shawty?” “Yo shawty....shawty.” I’m taller than you!

*Rashad:* Okay, well, let me ask you this then: in New York City then why ya'll gotta say “yo, son” after every sentence? I'm not your kid, I'm not your child, why I gotta be your son?<sup>147</sup>

Other friends at the table mock Brooklyn, and his protestations about Atlanta's “country” character are silenced. Signified here as a shift in language, Brooklyn's process of adaptation to life in Atlanta is bound up in his decision to accept Atlanta as urban and modify his street slang accordingly. In many ways, this moment recycles one of the oldest tropes in migration narratives, as oldtimers try to school newcomers on how to dress, speak, and act in the new city.

*ATL* is music video director Chris Robinson's first feature-length film and his heavy attention to images of urban spaces belies this background. The film is full of skyline shots, portraits of vacant buildings and vacant lots photographed in a sped-up shift from day to night, and urban traffic through the Mechanicsville neighborhood, as well as on nearby Interstate 75/85. Robinson also includes many images of particular buildings connoting urban Atlanta. As gated communities and shopping malls are residential and commercial tropes of suburban migrant imaginaries, streets crowded with shotgun homes and barren commercial districts dotted with abandoned warehouse buildings signify the presence of the urban migrant imaginary. Within the film, Mechanicsville's crumbling physical and rich cultural landscapes appear in direct

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

contrast to the manicured lawns, imposing mansions, and cultural assimilation towards whiteness presented by the Garnett family and their Sandy Springs suburban environment.

Robinson is equally interested in filming people in locations and much of the most interesting visual work in the film is done at Cascade, the local rollerskating rink where Rashad and his friends go to skate and socialize on Sunday nights.<sup>148</sup> But life in *ATL*'s Mechanicsville is more complicated than rollerskating and hanging out at Waffle House. Many of the inner city problems presented in the film arise from the storyline of Antwan, Rashad's younger brother. Frustrated by high school and his minimum wage, janitorial after-school job, he starts selling marijuana for Marcus, a violent local drug dealer. Scenes frame Marcus in terms of inner city images of crime and violence: Marcus owns vicious, chained pitbulls (potentially for fighting), carries a switchblade (which he threateningly uses to tear open a bag of dog food) and guns, and beats up his teenage workers who do not bring his money on time. After Antwan is mugged by a group of anonymous black men in front of a strip mall and loses his earnings, Marcus hunts him and ultimately shoots him. While Antwan lives, a climactic scene at the hospital offers a sobering reminder to Rashad, Brooklyn, and friends of the perils of succumbing to the prevalent temptations of quick cash through hustling. In these ways, although he plays a smaller role in the film, Brooklyn speaks to the experience of Atlanta migrants confronting socio-economic disadvantage and temptation in black neighborhoods.

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<sup>148</sup> Like most sites in the film, Cascade is an actual rollerskating rink at the intersection of Cascade Road and I-285 in Southwest Atlanta.

Other migrant narratives place both migration and Atlanta's urban perils closer to the center of the story. The novel *Cake* by D (2008) comes from a new genre of black popular literature called street lit (or urban literature).<sup>149</sup> Like many works of male-authored street lit, *Cake* is concerned with black urban young men, their rites of masculinity, violence, drugs, explicit sexual encounters with women, and the consequences of this "street" lifestyle. While readers of the novel might assume that such protracted attention to black masculine street culture would inevitably glorify it, *Cake*'s nameless migrant narrator is murdered at the end of the novel, in his last moments acknowledging that "Living by the sword comes back to you. Living by the gun only accelerates the process."<sup>150</sup>

Told exclusively from the second-person perspective, the novel positions the reader as the intimate audience for its cautionary tale by dissolving the distance between speaker and listener. It relates the narrator's flight from Brooklyn to Atlanta after he kills several people in self-defense during a drug deal gone bad and runs away with \$250,000 dollars. Planning to enroll in college and finish the degree, the narrator sees Atlanta as an opportunity for a clean slate from drug dealing and crime. The novel opens as he arrives at his cousin Duronté's house in Southwest Atlanta.<sup>151</sup> Like *ATL*'s Brooklyn, the narrator prefigures Atlanta as "country" (in this case, a "country-ass city"), an early assessment summarily disproven by its mounting parallels to his past experiences in Brooklyn.<sup>152</sup> In early scenes, he enjoys the pleasure of the neighborhood: smoking weed, watching

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<sup>149</sup> D, *Cake*, (New York: Akashic Books: 2008).

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 138-139.

<sup>151</sup> The novel refers to Duronté's neighborhoods as the "SWATS" (14) and the narrator offers signposts during his travels in the area (Joseph Lowery Boulevard, the West End Mall, Cascade Road) that suggest that Duronté lives somewhere near the West End.

<sup>152</sup> D, 18.



pornography, and drinking with his cousin and cousin's friends, and picking up an attractive woman at a nearby bus stop with whom he makes later plans to have sex. This section of the novel reads like a guided tour of Southwest Atlanta locations that emphasize its inner city features:

You come up a steep hill past the broke-down supermarket and the community center with the park on the other side. You see empty drugstores and banks. A homeless man dances on the corner, hoping to score change in his Dunkin' Donuts cup... If you were to head straight, you'd find yourself in the no-man's-land called East Point, a place where you've heard it's good to have friends, where you shouldn't roll on the solo. So you don't. When in Rome, you do whatever it takes to keep you and yours from getting your ass kicked. You turn left on Cascade.<sup>153</sup>

Like *ATL*, *Cake* portrays inner city spaces—"broke-down supermarkets" and "empty drugstores and banks"—of urban blight and commercial abandonment. This landscape of Southwest Atlanta figures a threat of violence implicit in the boundary crossing between neighborhoods and a site of poverty captured in the symbolic image of the dancing homeless man who "hop[es] to score change" despite his lack of audience. This journey through Southwest Atlanta both mirrors the narrator's process of adaptation to his new surroundings ("When in Rome. . .") and, through his touristic observations, signals that he travels confidently in what he believes to be a familiar inner-cityscape.

Despite his college aspirations, the narrator soon returns to dealing which sets off a chain of events resulting in his death. To establish a reputation (but no literal name) for himself in world of power-hungry men jockeying for position and skeptical of a newcomer, the narrator offers his knowledge of drug dealing to his more bumbling cousin, Duronté. This decision to adapt to the power politics of his new environment is a

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<sup>153</sup> D, 17-18.

turning point after which the possibility of a new life begins to slip away. Beginning at his first Atlanta drug deal in a Bankhead motel, the narrator watches his associates get gunned down one by one by a pair of elusive twins who are acting on behalf of a hidden drug boss. Journeying to strip clubs, motels, and drug-processing warehouses, he uncovers a ring of criminal activity and a cycle of violence in which he is forced to participate to survive.

Although the novel reveals ultimately that the source of much murderous violence is Will, one of the narrator's old business partners from Brooklyn, Will's ability to instigate a criminal change of events in Atlanta suggests a network of criminal activity that connects these urban spaces through street contacts and business deals. Despite the promise of school and a budding sexual relationship, the narrator finds no transcendence in inner city Atlanta precisely because it cannot afford him an escape from the street problems from which he flees. Although much bleaker and more violent than *ATL*, *Cake* similarly confronts a New York migrant with a familiarly urban and dangerous Atlanta landscape.

As these examples reveal, the inner-city migrant imaginary appears most often in male-centered stories that depict competition for authority and status in relation to place—a theme that reveals their close relationship to Atlanta's rap cultures. Also male-dominated, Atlanta rap promotes similar equations of problem and pleasure and familiar geographies of Southwest Atlanta, Decatur, and College Park as signifiers of black urban identity. Conflicts over Atlanta's relative urbanity mirror larger regional debates in rap music that have discredited southern rappers as “country” or outside of hip-hop's sphere

of influence. Part of the inner-city migrant imaginary's trajectory then forces the male migrant's recognition of Atlanta's particular brand of urban identity.

### **Migration to “Suburbanized” Spaces: Conspicuous Consumption and Social Mobility**

In this section, I explore images of conspicuous consumption and social mobility promoted in the “suburbanized” migrant imaginary. Three narratives, the reality television shows *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* (2008-2010) and *Keyshia Cole: The Way It Is* (2006-2008), and Nikki Rashan's lesbian erotica novel *You Make Me Wanna* (2009), offer particular insight into the ways that this imaginary constructs the relationship between material consumption and suburbanized spaces. In all of these examples, characters conspicuously consume through exorbitant spending on fashion, dining, nightlife, and home buying—all important modes by which they exercise power in their social suburban worlds. This spatial imaginary stages the constant quest for social status and approval as well as consumption. These may be ongoing processes or may culminate in the achievement of a new level of social class by the end of the narrative possible only through the acquisition of suburban residence.

Bravo Television's *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* provides the most extensive and most widely consumed manifestation of the “suburbanized” migrant imaginary to date.<sup>154</sup> The show began in 2008 for four seasons and by season three attracted approximately three million viewers per episode, ranking in September 2009 as the

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<sup>154</sup> I will hereafter refer to the *Real Housewives* series as *RH* and the *Real Housewives of Atlanta* show as *RHA*.

Number One Unscripted Cable Entertainment Telecast.<sup>155</sup> As a reality television show, *RHA* portrays the lives of actual residents of the Atlanta metropolitan area filmed and edited into a narrative designed to emphasize particular aspects of their lifestyles. It is the third show in Bravo's *RH* series, following the *Real Housewives of Orange County* and the *Real Housewives of New York*, respectively. The *RH* series offers viewers a glimpse into the lives of wealthy women residing in particular places.<sup>156</sup> The larger theme for the series is conspicuous consumption and so it is not surprising that this idea characterizes the *RHA* installment as well. As the first *RH* show to feature a primarily black cast of women, *RHA* broke new ground when it first aired in 2008.<sup>157</sup>

Certainly Bravo could have made a *Real Housewives* show in Atlanta using a cast of wealthy white women. But the network's decision to cast black women suggests that particular ideas about Atlanta and black upper class life anchor the show from its inception. Of the eight women who appeared during the first four seasons, four are black migrants to Atlanta from other parts of the U.S.: DeShawn Snow from Detroit, Lisa Wu Hartwell from Los Angeles, Shereé Whitfield from Cleveland, and Cynthia Bailey from New York (born in Alabama). Other cast members are either white (Kim Zolciak) or Georgia natives (Kandi Burruss from Atlanta, NeNe Leakes, and Phaedra Parks from Athens). All four black migrant characters relocated to Atlanta since the early 1990s: Hartwell and Whitfield in the mid-'90s and Snow and Bailey in 2008 and 2009,

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<sup>155</sup> Rating statistics found at: <http://www.thefutoncritic.com/news.aspx?id=20090911bravo01>. (Accessed 15 July 2012.)

<sup>156</sup> The *RH* series uses the signifier "housewife" very loosely, as many of the women work outside of the home. In the case of *RHA*, five of the eight women have careers outside of the home. All of the housewives have children and four are married, two are divorced, and two have never been married.

<sup>157</sup> Before the *Real Housewives of Atlanta*, only one other woman of color (Latina) had appeared for one season of *Orange County*. In the three *RH* shows produced since *RHOA*, only one features another woman of color (one black woman in a white cast, *Real Housewives of DC*.)

respectively.<sup>158</sup> Hartwell, Whitfield, and Snow are all wives (or ex-wives) of NBA and NFL athletes, while Bailey becomes engaged in the third season to Jamaican immigrant Peter Thomas, owner of the Atlanta nightclub Uptown Restaurant and Lounge. Thomas' inclusion in the suburbanized narrative of the *RHA* is particularly important because it offers a rare piece of evidence that there is room for wealthy Caribbean migrants within narratives about Atlanta's black elite suburban society.

Because of the characters' backgrounds, black migration becomes an important backdrop for *RHA*. The show depicts Atlanta's black-upper class as substantially migrant-based, and Atlanta as chosen destination for black upper-class migrants. Producers use these ideas in the opening dialogue of the very first episode:

*NeNe*: Atlanta is a mecca for wealthy African Americans.

*Lisa*: Nowhere else is there an elite society of African Americans going to galas, fashion shows, and living in luxury gated communities.

*NeNe*: Atlanta is the black Hollywood. We have a lot of A-listers around town.

*Shereé*: Atlanta is new money.

*Nene*: You have to watch what you say. There's a lot of gossip.<sup>159</sup>

*Lisa*: Image is everything in Atlanta. Everyone wants to be in Atlanta. It's hot.

This dialogue is accompanied by many of the show's recurring images: Atlanta's skyline surrounded by a network of interstate highways, lavish suburban mansions in gated communities, Atlanta-based black celebrities such as music producer Dallas Austin, expensive cars, the women in the cast at photo shoots and on red carpets wearing expensive jewelry and clothing, shots of high-end designer storefronts such as Versace,

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<sup>158</sup> This information about the characters' background is available both at <http://www.bravotv.com/the-real-housewives-of-atlanta> and in episodes of the show. (Accessed 12 July 2012).

<sup>159</sup> *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*, Season 1, Episode 1, "Welcome One, Welcome ATL." Bravo Television.

and black men at country clubs playing golf. Images of conspicuous consumption anchor the visual dimension of the show. They are used by *RHA*'s editors in the opening credits (as introductions move from housewife to housewife), as visual transitions between scenes in any given episode, and as parts of the show's central plotlines. Hartwell, for example, sells luxury suburban real estate, and can be seen giving music producer Jazze Pha a tour of a home that he ultimately purchases. Two of the housewives, Hartwell and Whitfield, produce fashion lines and host fashion shows in Season 2. Leakes and Snow both host upscale events to raise money for their charity foundations for underprivileged girls and women who are victims of domestic violence, respectively, in Season 1. Of the Atlanta housewives, two are celebrities prior to appearing on the show: Grammy-winning producer and 1990s recording artist Kandi Burruss (Seasons 2 and 3) and model/actress Cynthia Bailey (Season 3). Other black Atlanta-based celebrities make appearances on the show, including recording artist Tionne (T-Boz) Watkins, comedienne Niecy Nash, NFL player Willis McGahee, and multiple celebrity clients who meet with entertainment attorney, Phaedra Parks (Season 3).

If the show floods viewers with images of luxury, indulgence, and celebrity, then how do these images appear situated in particular places? Because the *RHA* is a reality television show, it negotiates relationships with space and place differently than most fictional representations. As Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette argue, reality television is "an unabashedly commercial genre united less by aesthetic rules or certainties than by the fusion of popular entertainment with a self-conscious claim to the discourse of the

real.”<sup>160</sup> Classified as a “docusoap,” the *RHA* stages drama between real people who appear as characters and privileges particular events and interactions over others to appeal to popular audiences with soap-opera style plotlines.<sup>161</sup> But unlike other docusoap shows, such as originating series MTV’s *Real World*, which introduce characters to one another in a shared living space created by the show, the Atlanta housewives are filmed living in their own homes and shopping and working within their own familiar geographic spheres.

This version of the docusoap format then invites viewers to link narratives of wealth and consumption contained within the show’s plot with actual places in the Atlanta metropolitan region. All but one of the Atlanta housewives live in gated suburban developments in Alpharetta, Vinings, Duluth, and Sandy Springs.<sup>162</sup> In the opening episode, the Snow family visits their new multi-million-dollar home in Alpharetta’s The Manor Golf and Country Club.<sup>163</sup> Many of the shows scenes are shot in Atlanta’s most expensive shopping districts: the designer stores and salons in and around Buckhead’s Phipps Plaza and Lenox Square Mall, as well as Burruss’ clothing store, Tags, in Smyrna. The housewives host and attend events in each others’ homes, Buckhead hotels like the W Hotel Buckhead, and more rarely at Midtown nightclub venues such as Peter Thomas’ Uptown Restaurant and Lounge. Scenes of travel to downtown functions are often framed by travel on the interstate, evincing the distance

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<sup>160</sup> Susan Murray and Laurie Ouelette, “Introduction” in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, ed. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouelette (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>161</sup> Murray and Ouelette, 5.

<sup>162</sup> <http://www.bravotv.com/the-real-housewives-of-atlanta/season-3/bios>. (Accessed 12 July 2012). Also see Hartwell’s Season 2 bio and Snow’s Season 1 bio. Burruss lives in a large home in Fayetteville, a southern suburb of Atlanta, and Bailey lives in Glenwood Park, a upscale subdivision in the city of Atlanta.

<sup>163</sup> To get a sense of what homes at the Manor look like and cost, visit <http://www.themanorgolfandcountryclub.com/>. (Accessed 12 July 2012).

between the housewives' chosen residences and the center city and the social value of mobility.

The housewives also provide commentary on the coded meanings of Atlanta spaces. For example, cast member Cynthia Bailey hosts a mother's day event for the women at her intown home in "Hot's Mama's Day" (Season 3, Episode 5). As Phadrea Parks travels to Bailey's home, footage of her car ride is interspersed with interview clips detailing her opinions about living in-town: "Cynthia lives in a re-gentrification zone, which is basically when they make the hood into the suburbs. It's not for me personally."<sup>164</sup> Parks' disdain for re-gentrification zones seemingly resonates with the choices of the other five housewives to live outside the Atlanta perimeter. In another episode, cast member Shereé Whitfield goes on a blind date at a surprise location. Her date sends a car to pick her up and Whitfield's apprehension mounts as she travels away from familiar areas and south on the interstate to East Point. The show flashes East Point footage—a package store, a check cashing business, a "Wings R Us" restaurant, and group of police cars flashing sirens—as Shereé questions the driver about where they are going and expresses increasing concern. Finally the car pulls up into a strip mall as sirens blare in the background and ominous music plays. As she exits the car, she asks the driver: "Is this a joke?" Entering the dance club, she remarks aloud: "I could have worn my tennis shoes. He has definitely, definitely lost some points right here. Are you kidding me?"<sup>165</sup> A first date in East Point violates Whitfield's sense of propriety commensurate with her social status and lifestyle. These scenes help to illustrate spatial and class distinctions between the approved suburban spaces occupied by the housewives

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<sup>164</sup> *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*, Season 3, Episode 5, "Hot Mama's Day." Bravo Television.

<sup>165</sup> *Real Housewives of Atlanta*, Season 3, Episode 2, "Model Behavior," Bravo Television.



and other sections of the metro region deemed unacceptable spaces in which to live or socialize.

*RHA* offers an imagined blueprint for the ways upper-class black migrants should negotiate metropolitan space in Atlanta. Privileging both residential and commercial life in the suburbs, the show underscores the importance of conspicuous consumption and socialization within “society” to upward mobility. Many of the show’s central conflicts coalesce around issues of social class and upward mobility as the women fight over who is invited to which elite social events, which celebrities they are socially connected to, and which housewives wield power through their social alliances with celebrities, other socialites, and each another. Upward mobility and maintenance of social status, particularly measured by a housewife’s ability to host a successful event or wear the most fashionable clothing, provide central motivations for the Atlanta housewives. These goals are intimately connected to their choices about space—*where* they will live, shop, and socialize. These choices shape the experiences of the black migrants and the ways they interact with the Atlanta metropolitan region on the show in important ways.

*RHA* precedes a group of “celebrity” television shows that follow the lives of black female musicians in Atlanta, including BET’s *Monica: Still Standing* (2009-2010) and VH1’s *What Chilli Wants* (2010). These shows similarly portray black elite life through suburban spaces and encounters with a culture full of celebrity athletes, actors, and musicians. Within this subgenre, only BET’s *Keyshia Cole: The Way It Is* (2006-2008) predates *RHA* and also offers a migrant narrative within the suburbanized imaginary. The show chronicles Cole’s move from Oakland, California, to Atlanta to work with producers on her music. Over the course of the show, Cole purchases a luxury

home in an Alpharetta gated community and brings her biological mother and sister to live with her. Although the show's primary drama centers on Cole's attempted reconciliation with her biological family and attempts to unite this family with her foster family, as opposed to the jockeying for social status that characterizes *RHA*, *Keyshia Cole* nevertheless offers viewers a vision of black celebrity life in Atlanta and its suburbanized social and residential settings. As with the *RHA*'s Deshawn Snow, viewers follow Cole's process of home buying and renovation within a seemingly limitless budget. Cole's remodeling of the home in particular evinces a taste for luxury through her choice of decoration and amenities.

Like the *RHA*, *Keyshia Cole: The Way It Is* situates celebrealty within non-fictional places, such as Buckhead's fine dining restaurants, nightclubs, and suburban recording studios. In the spatial contexts of these establishments, the show often portrays the conflicts between Cole and her biological mother Frankie Lons, an alcoholic prone to embarrassing public behavior who has spent multiple stints in prison for drinking, drug, and prostitution offenses.<sup>166</sup> Many of these clashes represent Cole's complex negotiation of class politics in Atlanta's elite society—a world in which Lons does not fit in and often poses a threat to Cole's celebrity reputation therein. Lons' erratic social and financial behavior becomes a foil against which the norms of upper class status can be read. She also provides evidence of the social mobility afforded by Cole's celebrity.

In these ways, *Keyshia Cole: The Way It Is* traffics in the tropes and signifiers of the suburbanized migrant imaginary: celebrity, social mobility, expensive suburban housing, and conspicuous consumption in Atlanta's expensive suburban shopping and

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<sup>166</sup> These stories about Lons are told throughout the show.

leisure districts. Unlike *RHA*'s insular world of privilege, this show features a regular character (Lons) who helps define social status and consumption in the suburbs through its inversion.

Outside the world of reality television, Nikki Rashan's black lesbian erotic novel, *You Make Me Wanna* (2009) offers a final example of the suburbanized migrant imaginary. In this text, Rashan marries a social mobility plotline with a journey for acceptance as an out lesbian. The narrator, Kyla, moves to a Midtown neighborhood near Atlanta's Piedmont Park from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, fleeing a broken engagement to a man and a tumultuous relationship with her first female lover. She rents an apartment with her cousin, David, in a "beautiful mid-rise community in Midtown": "The fenced-in dwelling resembled a gated community, with trees lined at the courtyard entrance. An Olympic-size swimming pool decorated the back of our building . . . ." <sup>167</sup> Kyla values her Midtown apartment for the ways it reflects a suburban lifestyle in an urban context. She finds work as a fashion buyer for a store at Buckhead's Lenox Mall. She narrates her adaptation to Atlanta commuting as a material upgrade: "Adjusting to the congested traffic had been one difficult hurdle to overcome after I'd moved. That's why I quickly traded in my outdated Toyota Celica for the drop-top, 5-speed Mustang that cruised in and out of clogged traffic with ease." <sup>168</sup> As a fashion buyer, Kyla is as conscious of her choice of vehicle as she is her daily wardrobe, narrating in detail the cost and brand names of the various outfits she wears throughout the novel.

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<sup>167</sup> Nikki Rashan, *You Make Me Wanna* (New York: Urban Books, 2009), 23.

<sup>168</sup> Rashan, 26.

For Kyla, Atlanta offers both the opportunity to embrace material luxury and to explore her newly declared lesbianism by dating within “Atlanta’s notorious gay scene.”<sup>169</sup> Many of her dating choices also reflect her penchant for social status and materialism: “Angie was by far one of the most sought-after lesbians in the community, not only for the slammin’ burgundy Lexus GS300 she drove, or the fact that she made well over six figures, but she knew how to treat a woman.”<sup>170</sup> Kyla receives lavish gifts and treatment from Angie and the many women she dates in the novel’s opening chapters—expensive lingerie and fancy dinners in Atlanta four-star restaurants. Material wealth becomes a method of foreplay in the novel’s sex scenes, as Kyla’s anticipation of sexual experience seems intimately connected to her sense of how she is being treated materially by lovers in dating contexts.

Kyla meets Asia and they begin a serious relationship in the middle of the novel that marks the culmination of Kyla’s sexual awakening and her maturation into a seasoned lesbian woman. Although the relationship is full of the emotional connection that she lacks with other women in *You Make Me Wanna*, the theme of materialistic consumption and the desire for suburban life persist through their courtship. In the novel’s “Epilogue,” which takes place four years after she meets Asia, Kyla’s physical and metaphorical journeying to find herself in Atlanta culminates in a move to the suburbs:

Our fierce dedication to saving more than we budgeted allowed us to place a rather decent down payment on our new luxurious home in a Stone Mountain

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<sup>169</sup> Rashan, 3.

<sup>170</sup> Rashan, 2.

subdivision. Did we need 4,000 square feet? Not necessarily. But we wanted it.<sup>171</sup>

The home in Stone Mountain symbolizes Kyla's achievement of related goals: her desire to accumulate material wealth and use that wealth to purchase a comfortable home for her new life with Asia which links sexual freedom with material excess in the narrative.

These goals are possible only with the acquisition of more "space": an opportunity realized in a move from a small Midtown apartment to unnecessarily large suburban house. Kyla "wants" this home not for its physical spaciousness, but for the ways that an excess of physical space reflects her increase in status—the fruit of her professional and personal accomplishments.

In the final scenes of the novel, Kyla gives her ex-lover Angie a tour of their new home, emphasizing its lavishness. Perhaps the most elaborate description, fittingly in the context of an erotic novel, comes as Kyla shows Angie her new bedroom:

It was truly the master suite of the house, decorated in colors and flavors of my taste. Sitting alongside one of the walls was a grand, king-size four-post canopy bed in red mahogany, covered in pillows, and a comforter in shades of cream and rust. A chaise longue sat next to the gas fireplace that warmed the room on chilly nights. A matching dresser and chest in the same red mahogany sat along two separate walls, distanced by another matching entertainment center that encased the television and stereo system.

Through the bedroom was the suite's bathroom, fully equipped with a whirlpool tub, stand-alone shower, two sink basins and separate lighted vanity tables. And, still, beyond the bathroom was a walk-in closet, which could have serve as a seating area of its own. "Girl, this is serious," Angie said, admiring the closet. "You needed some space to put all those pretty work suits of yours."<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Rashan, 254.

<sup>172</sup> Rashan, 252-253.

Angie, previously a symbol of social status, wealth, and notoriety within Atlanta's black lesbian circles, appears to affirm Kyla's success in upward mobility. Angie's approval is evidence that she has "arrived" on the Atlanta gay scene. The acquisition of the extravagant house in Stone Mountain pulls together all of the novel's themes of journeying and self-discovery into a neat, suburbanized, happy ending. Like *RHA* and *Keyshia Cole: The Way It Is*, Rashan's novel imagines black migration to Atlanta as a process of material acquisition reflected in the choices to navigate primarily suburban spaces. In this way, migrants acquire social status as part of the process of adapting to their new upper-class environments, whether status is maintained or achieved in the Atlanta suburban context.

If narratives employing the inner-city can be characterized by masculine contests for power, then those employing the suburban imaginary stage different kinds of competition that are most often female-centered. This particular manifestation of competition reinforces negative ideas about women and their duplicitous and competitive natures, particularly with one another. In the case of both *RHA* and Frankie Lons, this negative discourse of femininity takes on a particularly racialized dimension, when black women who violate the social standards of "class" are deemed "ghetto" and cast out of the discourse of the upwardly mobile suburban. Unfortunately, these are the moments that racist American television audiences root for, because they give lie to the notion that black civility is possible, even in upwardly mobile circles.

### **Immigration to Atlanta: Refugees Denied Spaces**

If the texts within the first two migrant imaginaries can be characterized by the particular urban and suburban spaces they repeatedly invoke, then the third imaginary—immigration narratives of placelessness—works very differently. Migrants in these narratives find no home in particular places and are portrayed in constant spatial transition. Place within this imaginary is significant both because it is withheld as an identifier and because this absence coalesces with myriad ways in which immigrants are silenced and rendered invisible within the narratives. The absence of fixed places then becomes a metaphor for the absence of recognized identity and presence, which may help explain the larger dearth of black immigration narratives from the black migration collection. Without spaces of their own, immigrant characters lay no claims to particular parts of the metropolitan region and hold no stake in its histories and cultures.

In surveying popular films, novels, music, and television shows, I found very few instances in which black immigrants to Atlanta appeared at all. With the exception of Jamaican immigrant Peter Thomas, a secondary character on *RHA*, all other instances of immigrant representation emerge from refugee narratives. While refugees are an important part of Atlanta's black migrant population, they offer a particular story about migration. Refugees by definition migrate to flee from persecution, disaster, or famine in their home countries. They are often resettled by international agencies in designated areas that they do not necessarily choose. They offer some of the most extreme narratives of immigration and cultural acclimation.

In my discussion of the immigrant imaginary in this section, I use the term “immigrant” as opposed to “refugee” for several reasons. First, refugees are a subset of immigrants, and their experiences in the Atlanta metropolitan region share important commonalities, specifically in terms of confrontation with local cultures, local populations, and experiences with acquiring employment and education. Like black immigrants more generally, black refugees demonstrate a wide range of class origins in their home countries, levels of education, and particular success and difficulties with adaptation to life in Atlanta. Finally, I believe that the appearance of refugees and the absence of other immigrant narratives speak to the ways popular representations conflate refugee experiences with other immigrant stories. Refugee stories are easier for Americans to embrace. At a glance, they offer flight as a simple explanation for immigrant presence in the Atlanta metropolitan area without requiring us to investigate immigrant adaptation and diversity further. They position the United States generally, and Atlanta more specifically, as benevolent and advanced societies welcoming less fortunate people generously across their borders. They position local populations as at best charitable givers to the needy, and at worst tolerant of these strange new people from afar. When popular narratives address refugee experiences and elide other immigrant ones, refugees stand in for black more generally in the ideas about black immigrant populations that consumers take away.

This conflation of refugees with a general black immigrant population occurs in Pearl Cleage’s popular novel, *Babylon Sisters* (2005). Within her master narrative of family reconciliation, Cleage positions refugee immigrants as a plot device used to uncover an underground network of sex trafficking in Atlanta that delineates local good



guys and local bad guys. The language of “family” in the novel offers an easy metaphor for the human community and does not include an involved look at immigrant characters and the ways they occupy space or have agency in the metropolitan region. Instead *Babylon Sisters* acknowledges immigrant presence and diversity only to sublimate the development of immigrant characters in favor of an elaborate narrative about how they require saving and intervention from native-born Americans.

The novel’s narrator, Catherine Sanderson, runs an organization called Babylon Sisters, which provides the novel’s framework for the potential inclusion of immigrant characters. Catherine describes her job at the beginning of the novel:

What I do is coordinate and integrate services for programs assisting female refugees and immigrants. Atlanta is a magnet for people trying to make a new start in a new country, and even though the town’s natives still think in terms of black and white, in reality we’re looking more and more like the Rainbow Coalition. My job is to ease the transition on all sides by serving as a kind of conduit, clearinghouse, counselor, and all-around communications facilitator.

I tell people the language I speak is the future, and I love it. All you have to do is help a Cambodian family find safe housing or a Haitian mother register her children for school or reunite a Cuban father with a son he never thought he’d see again or attend a Liberian wedding party to know that there isn’t nearly as much difference between people as some of our governments and institutions want us to think there is.<sup>173</sup>

At first glance, the inclusion of such an agency in the novel would appear to be a positive step towards black immigrant representation—an acknowledgement of Atlanta’s diversifying population and the ways locals can work to ease immigrant transitions. Unfortunately, Catherine’s occupation largely functions to develop her character as a benevolent do-gooder in a world of hidden agendas and corrupt power brokers. In the course of the novel, Sanderson becomes involved in a collaborative project with a local

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<sup>173</sup> Pearl Cleage, *Babylon Sisters* (New York: Randomhouse, 2005), 4-5.

maid placement service, Mandeville Maids, and readers meet none of her immigrant clients nor see them living and working within metropolitan spaces.

Through her lawyer friend Amelia, Sanderson does encounter the novel's one somewhat developed immigrant character—Miriam, a Haitian refugee girl who works in Amelia's office. Miriam has been in the city for several months working for Amelia but her life and living situation outside of Amelia's office remain unknown. Upon meeting Catherine, Miriam reveals the story of her flight with younger sister Etienne from Haiti by boat to Florida. At the Florida beach, Miriam, Etienne, and the other women on the boat are guided into vans by anonymous men and then taken to a house in Atlanta where they are imprisoned and forced to work cleaning office spaces at night. The men take Etienne away to another unknown location and Miriam eventually escapes, vowing to somehow find her sister. Catherine suspects that Etienne may have been kidnapped into a forced prostitution ring and offers to help Amelia and Miriam uncover whatever information she can.

Miriam's relatively straightforward story is constantly articulated through Catherine's narrative reactions to it, providing an explanatory commentary to the presumably uninformed reader about the experiences of refugees and the perils of life in a new country: "People who come here illegally are terrified of being discovered and sent home to face whatever made them flee in the first place . . . Whatever made Miriam's mother spirit her away from Haiti into the arms of shadowy strangers must have been every mother's worst nightmare."<sup>174</sup> Catherine acts as an interpreter of experience through her narration, which denies Miriam an intimate interaction with readers and

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<sup>174</sup> Cleage, 89.

narrative agency. Although Miriam has worked with Amelia for months and her story has circulated, Catherine's sympathy for Miriam's plight motivates the major action in the novel—her decision to help investigate refugee sex trafficking in Atlanta.

While Miriam is allowed within the space of the narrative to tell her migration story, she has been able to do nothing to locate her sister until Catherine intervenes. Because she is a child, she does not understand the dark possibilities of what could have happened to Etienne in the way that adults do, and decisions about her safety are made by native-born adults on her behalf. Because she is more a plot device than a developed character, Miriam only surfaces in the narrative to retell her story to journalists who join the search for the illegal sex trafficking ring. In subsequent scenes, Amelia and Catherine make decisions about where Miriam should be for her own safety, moving her in to live with Catherine, then to live with Catherine's neighbor, Miss Iona. In this way, Miriam appears placeless in the novel and often silent—incapable of making decisions about her own location and her own safety.

Miriam and Etienne appear in the novel through the circulation of their story in a local newspaper and an image of Etienne's face which Catherine and her colleagues plaster in public places. This appropriation and circulation of their images and migration stories underscores the ways the novel uses these characters to detail its plot about local Atlanta activism without devoting significant attention to the girls as characters. Etienne only appears in the novel at the very end when Catherine and her friends' work reunites the sisters at the Vine City house where Etienne is being kept for sale. Interestingly, Miriam, Catherine, and Catherine's daughter are also captured before the reunification scene, creating a hollow "sisterhood" moment at the novel's climax.

After the evil sex traffickers are brought to justice, Catherine narrates a “fairytale” ending to wrap up storylines for almost all of her character. These “happily-ever-after” endings include details about relatively peripheral neighbors, characters central to Cleage’s other West End novels, and villains from the story. About Miriam, Etienne, and the other Haitian refugee girls rescued, Catherine only says: “the prostitution ring was broken up and the girls found homes with families who loved them.”<sup>175</sup> The end of the novel offers the readers as much detail as is to be expected in a narrative which uses refugee characters as plot devices and for the development of benevolent local characters. Where are these homes? Who are these families? Did the girls resolve their illegal immigrant status? Did they reconnect with their Haitian families? Within the immigrant imaginary of placelessness, these secondary refugee characters are offered little voice and no access to spaces of their own.

Themes of displacement and invisibility are also central to Dave Eggers’ novel, *What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (2006). Where *Babylon Sisters* appears to offer a refugee story only to render it invisible through narrative structure, Eggers’ text details Valentino’s refugee story while acknowledging the ways in which he is silenced outside of the text. Constructed as a novel from a series of interviews with first-person protagonist Valentino, Eggers narrates his journey as one of Lost Boys of Sudan—from childhood in southern Sudan to United Nations refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya to his relocation in Atlanta. While most of the action in the novel takes place outside of Atlanta, Valentino tells his stories using present events and

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<sup>175</sup> Cleage, 291.

locations in Atlanta as a relevant backdrop. At the beginning of the novel, Valentino describes the power of storytelling in a world that has rendered him invisible:

When I first came to this country I would tell silent stories. I would tell them to people who had wronged me . . . I still do and not only to those I feel have wronged me. The stories emanate from me all the time I am awake and breathing, and I want everyone to hear them. Written words are rare in small villages like mine, and it is my right and obligation to send my stories into the world, even if silently, even if utterly powerless.<sup>176</sup>

Egger's narrator finds agency through storytelling in the novel even as its Atlanta characters refuse to acknowledge or see him. In this way, the novel imagines black immigrant experiences of placelessness and invisibility without reinforcing or participating in them.

To tell three sections of his migration story, Valentino travels between three different spaces and interacts with three different characters that form his audience in tandem. As the novel opens, Valentino is the victim of a home invasion at his rented apartment, in which his car and valuables are stolen by woman named Tonya and her friend who Valentino calls Powder. When he resists the home invasion, Powder brutally beats Valentino, yelling: "Fucking Nigerian motherfucker! . . . No wonder you motherfuckers are in the Stone Age!"<sup>177</sup> After knocking Valentino unconscious, Tonya and Powder leave him under the supervision of a young boy so they can make another trip back for his television. Lying on the floor, bleeding and bound, he tells the boy the story of his childhood and flight to refugee camps across the Sudanese desert. Through the narrative style, Valentino speaks to the boy about childhood although he does not

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<sup>176</sup> Dave Eggers, *What is the What* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 29.

<sup>177</sup> Eggers, 9.

speak to the boy aloud: “Each night of our walk, TV Boy, sleep was a problem.”<sup>178</sup>

Within the space of the text, the narrator speaks but is not heard—his story appears but is not consumed by other characters.

After Tonya and Powder collect the television, Valentino is eventually discovered by his roommate Achor Achor and driven to Piedmont Hospital in Midtown. There, he waits for fifteen hours for medical treatment for his wounds that he never receives. He speaks several times with attending nurse Julian, who treats him as though his requests are pushy and his needs will be met. In the hospital waiting room and the later examination room, Valentino tells Julian the story of his days in Ethiopia and Kenya, and his struggles in Kenyan refugee camp, Kakuma. Although Julian has long abandoned him at the end of his shift and ignored his requests for care, he selects Julian as the audience within the narrative for more “silent stories.”

After the long wait at the hospital, Valentino eventually leaves and walks down Piedmont Road to Roswell Road, and then back to his apartment to prepare for his job as a receptionist at Century Club, a fitness center. His constant journeying invokes images of the endless walking of the Lost Boys of Sudan, as well as his state of displacement. Arriving at his job, he continues to tell his silent stories to patrons of the fitness club who look through him, past him—regular customers who do not remember his name and have no context for his migrant journey. Here he tells the story of his relocation from Kakuma to Atlanta and the loss of his girlfriend Tabitha, a fellow Sudanese refugee.

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<sup>178</sup> Eggers, 33.

Displaced from his home by thieves and ignored at the hospital and at his job, Valentino finds no spaces in Atlanta that welcome him. His stories fall on the deaf ears of the people who surround but do not acknowledge him—a metaphor his invisibility and his attempt to contest the absence of his story from popular understandings of immigration in the U.S. Unlike Cleage, Eggers works within the immigrant imaginary of placelessness and silence only to reveal its injustices through the powerful narrative of Valentino's refugee experiences.

“Placelessness” in the immigrant imaginary can appear in several different forms, depending on the positionality of the narrative's creator. In the case of Cleage's novel, it is a function of the narrative othering of black refugees that denies them status as central characters and agents and relegates them to plot devices. Other narratives, such as Warren St. John's *Outcasts United*, position black refugees alongside non-black refugees, sublimating their racial status in favor of pan-ethnic immigrant identification. In these stories, immigrant placelessness operates within traditional U.S. immigration rhetoric to describe immigrants' difficulties with social and cultural acclimation or assimilation and continue a long thematic tradition of immigrant journeying in U.S. popular culture. Only Eggers' narrative offers an example of how placelessness might be employed as a subversive commentary on social conditions in a particular place, such as Atlanta, with global ramifications.

## Conclusion

While I find these three migrant imaginaries at work in popular representations of black migration to Atlanta, it is also important to note what kind of narratives I did not uncover. The most surprising of these is the “return to homeplace” narrative, popular in scholarly understandings of return south migration. Within this imaginary, Atlanta features as a site of cultural return to black southern roots and a space in which to reconnect to family, heritage, and ancestry. When I discovered these narratives, they inevitably refused to situate Atlanta as the return migrant destination. One example of this is Tyler Perry’s 2008 film *Meet the Browns*. The film follows one Chicago family’s chance return to the funeral of an estranged relative. The plotline follows a familiar narrative of escape from urban crime and poverty to reconnect with roots, but the migrant family in this film relocates to an unnamed rural Georgia town. As in Perry’s film, the return imaginary appears in connection with rural destinations not available in the Atlanta metropolitan region.

Also, as I indicated previously, I have not found any non-refugee narratives of black immigration to Atlanta. Likely this has to do with the fact that relatively recent immigrants generally have neither the access to centers of cultural power that produce most of these migration narratives nor the attention of sympathetic American audiences so ready and willing to consume refugee stories working for them. The immigrant imaginary of “placelessness” also resonates with a larger popular and scholarly inattention to black immigrant and the diversification of metropolitan black populations. As Caribbean and African immigration populations in Atlanta continue to grow, new



narratives will emerge that should be considered within a critical framework of black migrant stories.

Certain places are also absent from the geography of popular narrative mapped through imaginaries. These prominently include non-northern suburbs in Atlanta, which, as my previous research suggest, are popular black destinations, especially in eastern DeKalb County. Although Nikki Rashan's *You Make Me Wanna* uses Stone Mountain to imagine black migration to suburban space, it is the exception and not the rule. So much of the suburban geography of migration narratives is northern perhaps because it is aspirational—imagined as narratives of black celebrity and upper class life in the region. Not surprisingly, migration narrators have also not turned their attention to dramatic changes occurring in Atlanta's exurbs perhaps for these same reasons. Popular narrative reveals a hierarchy of status within suburban places consistent with the suburban imaginary's emphasis on conspicuous consumption and upward mobility.

Disparities between real and imagined geographies of black migrations to Atlanta illustrate the differences between the ways these movements map demographically, the ways scholars understand their relationships, and the ways they are spatially perceived by local, national, and international audiences. Collectively, these modes of understanding black migrations reveal a multiplicity of lived and experiences that contest and revise fixed place identities. While these migrant imaginaries dictate sharp distinctions between metropolitan places in terms of class, gender, and mobility, their descendants can provide a vehicle to conceive of Atlanta's black geography anew.

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