



**BROOKLYN**

**CONNECTIONS**

# **BEDFORD-STUYVESANT**

**PRIMARY SOURCE PACKET**

Student Name

## INTRODUCTORY READING

### **Adaptation**

Bedford Stuyvesant's name is from two middle-class communities in 19th century Brooklyn. Originally, there was Bedford (to the west) and Stuyvesant Heights (to the east). The neighborhood is often nicknamed Bed-Stuy.

In the 1630s the **Dutch West Indian Company** purchased the woodlands that became Bedford from the Lenape, a Native American tribe that lived throughout Long Island and Manhattan. Bedford became a farming town inhabited by Dutch families.

After the **Battle of Brooklyn** (1776) during the Revolutionary War, the area was invaded by British troops. Later, the farmland was divided into housing lots and sold to new arrivals. As early as 1790, more than one-quarter of the residents were African American (mostly slaves). One area in particular, Weeksville, became a **prominent** community for African Americans living in Brooklyn. It was settled by free Blacks shortly after the **abolition** of slavery in New York State (1827).

By 1873, the population also included Irish, German, Jewish and Scottish residents. The opening of the elevated railway in 1885 and the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883 linked the area more closely to Manhattan. This resulted in a growth in population and the building of the neighborhood's famous brownstones, which attracted residents from the middle and upper classes.

As the population continued to grow, brownstones that had formerly housed one family were **subdivided** into several units. The opening of the subway in 1936 gave the community a new link to Manhattan. The Neighborhood attracted large numbers of eastern European Jews, Italians, and later blacks from the South and the Caribbean.

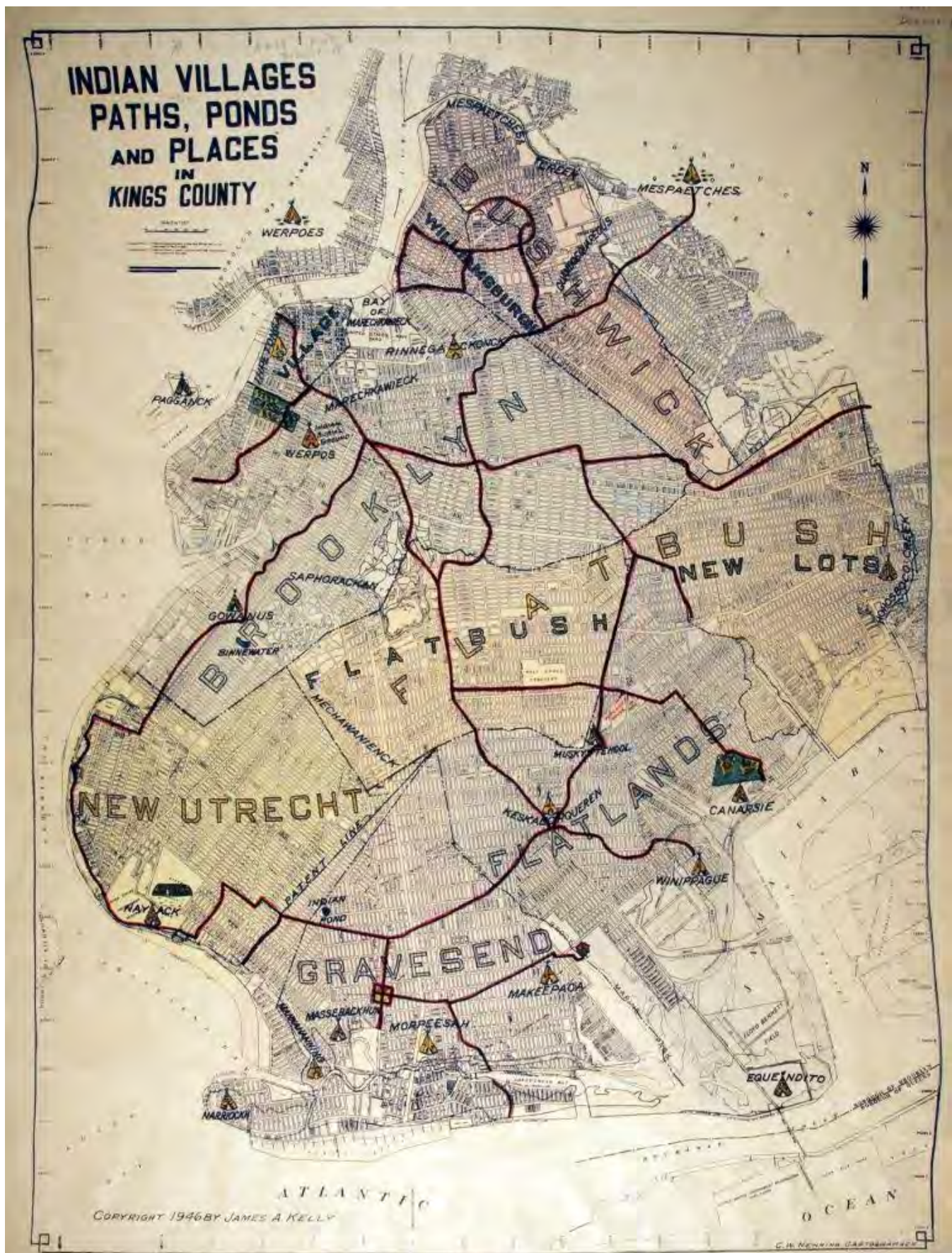
Eventually, the communities of Bedford and Stuyvesant Heights joined to become one large area of black settlement, and the neighborhood acquired its current name. By 1940 it had more than 65,000 black residents, and members of other ethnic groups began to leave.

The 1980s saw large-scale settlement of black immigrants from the Caribbean, primarily Guyana, Jamaica, and Barbados, and to the lesser extent Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. By the late 20th century, Bedford-Stuyvesant was the largest black neighborhood in New York City.

Today, most of the neighborhood consists of well-maintained brownstone and brick-front housing that was built before World War I. Among the historic features of Bedford-Stuyvesant are the Weeksville Historic District and Boys High School (1891), an enormous, striking terra-cotta building in a **Romanesque Revival** style.

**Citation** - Charles, Mario A. "Bedford Stuyvesant." *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, 2nd ed., 2010, pp. 109–110.





**Document 1** - Nenning, C.W. "Indian Villages, Paths, Ponds, and Places in Kings County." *Brooklyn Collection*, Brooklyn Public Library, 1946.

1. The thick lines on DOCUMENT 1 represent Native American paths and trails throughout Brooklyn. Describe where these paths and trails go.

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2. Look at the native settlements marked by teepees on DOCUMENT 1. Are they mostly inland or near the shore? Why do you think that is?

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3. Historians have different ideas on who named Bedford. According to the book *Brooklyn by Name: How the Neighborhoods, Streets, Parks, Bridges, and More Got their Names* (2006), “the origin of Bedford’s name remains contested. Most root it in the English, either for the Duke of Bedford or England’s Bedfordshire; others attribute it to the Dutch word Bestevaar, or “the place where old men meet,” itself a translation of an Algonquin word meaning “council place.”

Which group do you think is responsible for naming Bedford – the Dutch, English, or Native Americans? Why?

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**Document 1** - Nenning, C.W. "Indian Villages, Paths, Ponds, and Places in Kings County." *Brooklyn Collection*, Brooklyn Public Library, 1946.





**1. What does DOCUMENT 2 depict? How do you know?**

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**2. Use details from DOCUMENT 2 to describe how this area may have looked to people living in Brooklyn in the 1700s.**

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**3. How did people traveled from Bedford to Manhattan at this time.**

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**4. Find and circle “Bedford” on DOCUMENT 2. What do you think life was like in Bedford at this time? What do you think most people did for work?**

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**Document 2** - Ratzer, B. “Plan of the Town of Brooklyn and Part of Long Island.” *Brooklyn Collection*,  
*Brooklyn Public Library*, 1766.

# A FACT A DAY ABOUT BROOKLYN

*The Bedford section of Brooklyn was the site of the third oldest public school in the borough, which was erected in 1663 at the corner of what is now Fulton St. and Bedford Ave., but was then known as the junction of the old Clove and Cripplebush roads. The school flourished there until 1841.*

*The Bedford school was remarkable for the longevity of its teachers. John Vandervoort presided over it for 60 years, teaching three generations of pupils. He occupied one half of the building as a living apartment and added to his income by selling groceries. Teaching was in the Dutch language exclusively until 1758. In the years between 1758 and 1800, all Brooklyn schools gave instruction in both English and Dutch, and in Bushwick the Dutch language persisted in the schools until 1830.*

**Glossary Terms:** Longevity; Flourished

**Document 3** - "A Fact a Day about Brooklyn." *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 14 Mar 1941.

1. According to DOCUMENT 3, which Brooklyn neighborhood was home to the third oldest public school in the borough?

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2. What was remarkable about the Bedford school?

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3. What was the first language taught in Brooklyn schools?

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4. What language was introduced to Brooklyn's schools in the mid-1700s? What does this tell you about the type of people who were beginning to live in Brooklyn at this time?

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**Document 3** - "A Fact a Day about Brooklyn." *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 14 Mar 1941.





### **Adaptation**

Weeksville was a nineteenth century African American community located in the Ninth Ward of Brooklyn, New York. It was named for James Weeks, a Black man who purchased land there in 1838 from the Lefferts family estate. Gradual **emancipation** in Brooklyn began in 1827, so this made Weeksville the first free Black community that owned its own land in Brooklyn. Weeksville was rediscovered during an **excavation** of the neighborhood in 1968 by a Pratt Neighborhood College workshop, led by historian James Hurley. They found old photographs, artifacts, and other remnants of Brooklyn's first free Black community. Today, the Weeksville Heritage Center continues to preserve that history.

**Document 4** - Maynard, Joan, and Gwen Cottman. Weeksville, *Then & Now: The Search to Discover, The Effort to Preserve, Memories of Self in Brooklyn*. Society for the Preservation of Weeksville & Bedford-Stuyvesant History, 1983.

**1. Why is Weeksville historically significant, according to DOCUMENT 4?**

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**2. What modern-day neighborhoods surround the former community of Weeksville?**

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**3. Who was James Weeks and when did he purchase land? Who did he purchase it from?**

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**4. Do you think it was rare for a Black person to buy property at this time? Why or why not?**

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**Document 4** - Maynard, Joan, and Gwen Cottman. Weeksville, *Then & Now: The Search to Discover, The Effort to Preserve, Memories of Self in Brooklyn*. Society for the Preservation of Weeksville & Bedford-Stuyvesant History, 1983.



*Moses P. Cobb, the first Black Policeman in the City of Brooklyn's, Ninth Ward owned a home in Weeksville. He was born into slavery in Kinston, N.C. in 1856. After emancipation, to increase his chance for a better life, he is said to have walked from North Carolina to New York City. A natural leader, he worked on the city's waterfront before joining the force in 1892. He worked in the area now covered by the 77 Precinct, which includes Weeksville. Police Officer Cobb retired from the force in 1917. Wiley Overton, a Black man, also served on the force from 1891 to 1892 in downtown Brooklyn.*

**Document 5** - Maynard, Joan, and Gwen Cottman. *Weeksville, Then & Now: The Search to Discover, The Effort to Preserve, Memories of Self in Brooklyn*. Society for the Preservation of Weeksville & Bedford-Stuyvesant History, 1983.



**1. Where and when was Moses Cobb born? Was he born free or a slave?**

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**2. Why did Moses Cobb migrate to Brooklyn?**

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**3. What did Moses Cobb do for a living?**

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**4. What do you think it was like being a black police officer in the late 1800s to early 1900s?  
What obstacles might Moses Cobb have encountered?**

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**Document 5** - Maynard, Joan, and Gwen Cottman. Weeksville, *Then & Now: The Search to Discover, The Effort to Preserve, Memories of Self in Brooklyn*. Society for the Preservation of Weeksville & Bedford-Stuyvesant History, 1983.



### **Adaptation**

The **social and economic history** of Bedford-Stuyvesant goes back to a home-building boom in the late 1800s when row after row of splendid three-story houses were built and sold to upper-middle class families, mostly English, German, Irish and Italian.

The cost of operating these luxury houses became expensive after World War I. The original owners were getting older and, as the Great Depression set in during the 1920s and 30s, the older residents started moving away to smaller homes. This started to change the neighborhood, as the houses were sold at much cheaper prices.

Non-white families who had saved their money, but never before afforded such houses took advantage of the situation. They paid for their houses by **sub-dividing** one house to consist of several apartments.

**Document 6** – (Top 6A) *Jefferson Avenue Looking West from Marcy*. 1954. Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Collection. (Bottom 6B) Brennan, Richard A. *A Look at the Bedford-Stuyvesant Community by an Insider*. Brevoort Savings Bank of Brooklyn, 196-.

1. Describe what you see in DOCUMENT 6A.

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2. Who originally bought these houses?

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3. According to the text, DOCUMENT 6B, how did the Great Depression affect the residents of Bed-Stuy?

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4. Who wound up moving into these houses and how were they able to purchase them?

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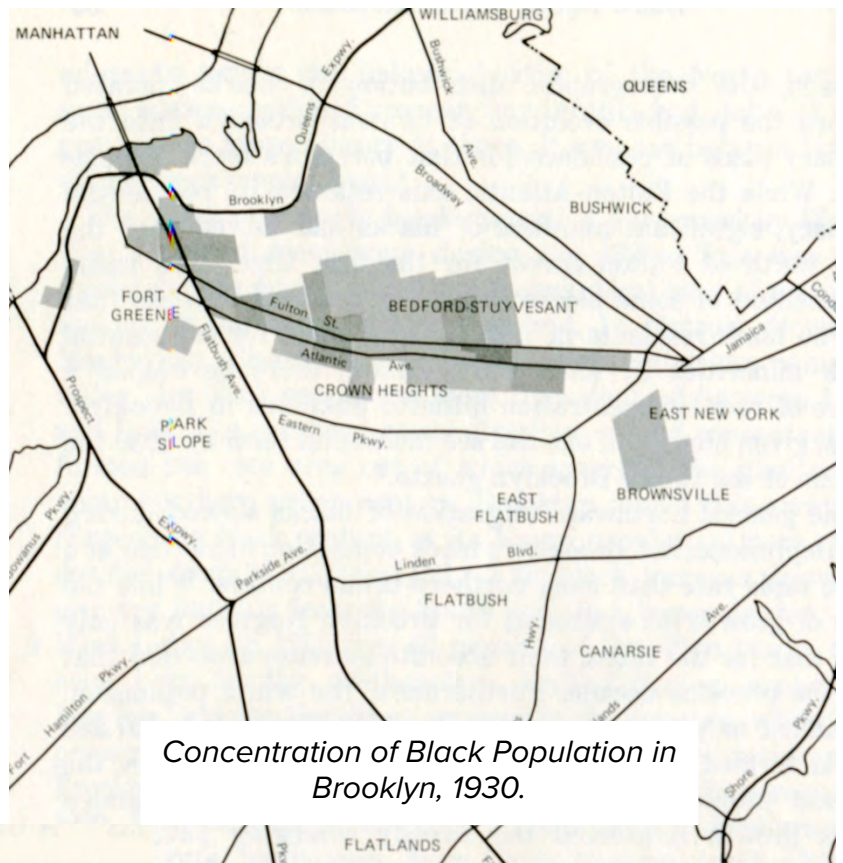
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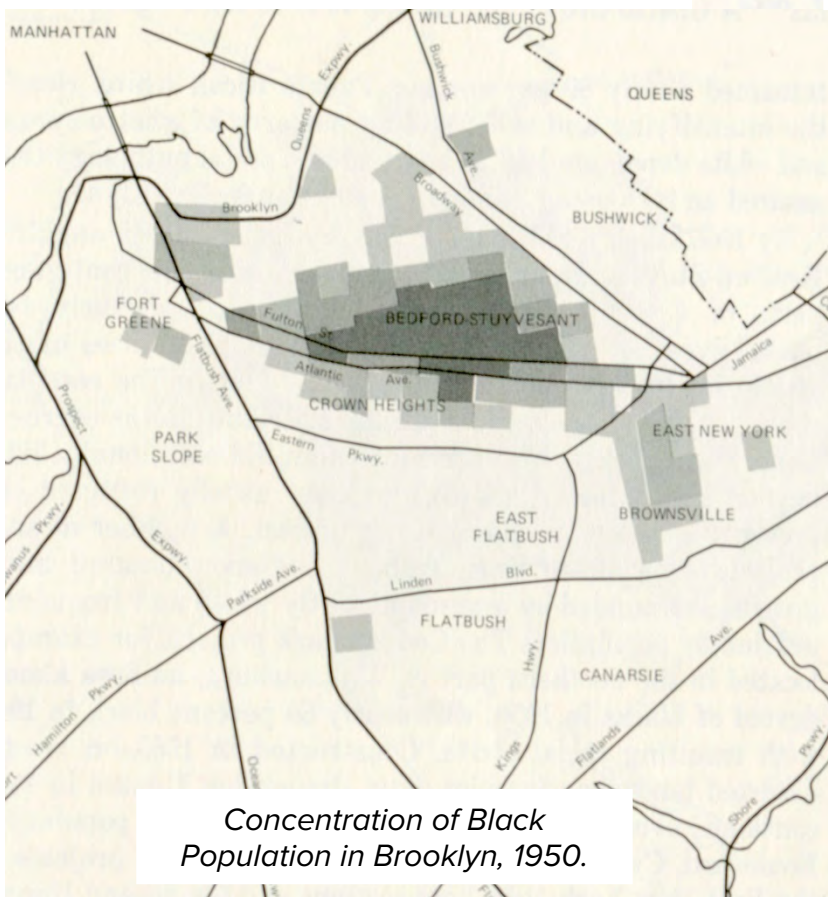
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**Document 6** – (Top 6A) *Jefferson Avenue Looking West from Marcy*. 1954. Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Collection. (Bottom 6B) Brennan, Richard A. *A Look at the Bedford-Stuyvesant Community by an Insider*. Brevoort Savings Bank of Brooklyn, 196-.





*Concentration of Black Population in Brooklyn, 1930.*



*Concentration of Black Population in Brooklyn, 1950.*

**Document 7** – Connolly, Harold X. *A Ghetto Grows in Brooklyn*, 1977, pp. 56, 131.

1. According to DOCUMENT 7, what neighborhoods held the highest concentrations of black people in the 1930s and 1950s?

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2. What percentage of black people lived in Bed-Stuy in the 1930s? In the 1950s? How much did the percentage change between these years?

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3. Do you think the founding of Weeksville impacted the kind of people who chose to live in the Bed-Stuy (HINT: refer to DOCUMENT 4)? Why or why not?

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4. Why else did black people move to Bed-Stuy at this time (HINT: refer to DOCUMENT 5, DOCUMENT 6A and DOCUMENT 6B)?

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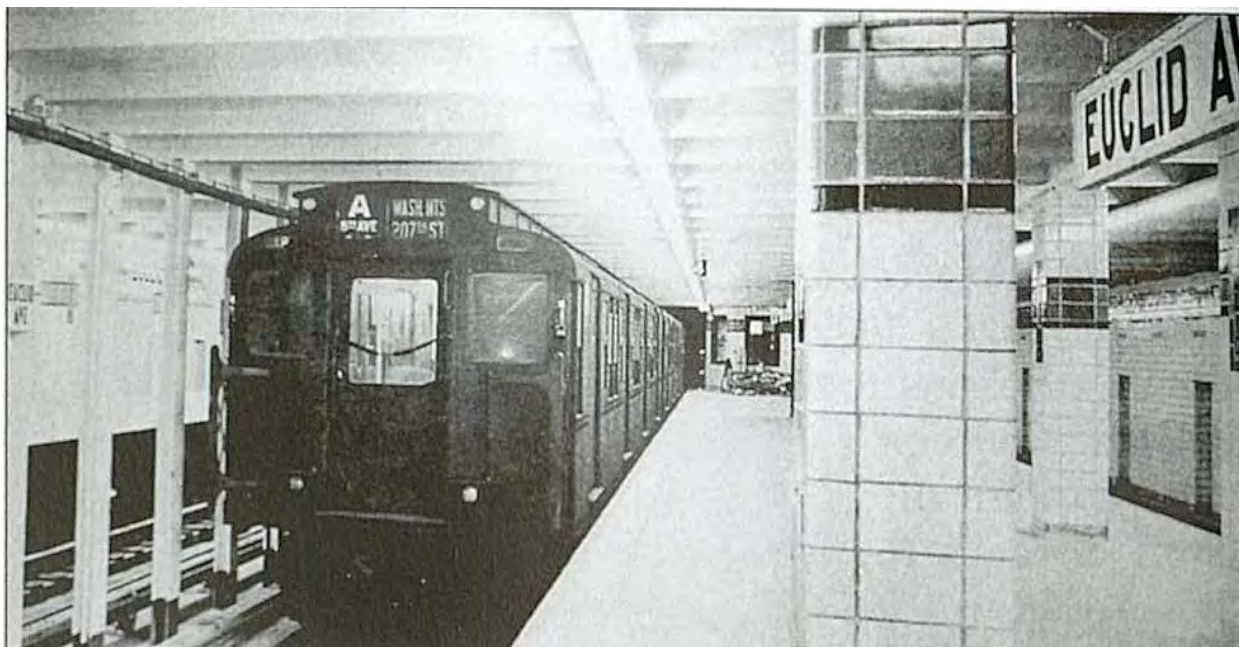
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**Document 7** – Connolly, Harold X. *A Ghetto Grows in Brooklyn*, 1977, pp. 56, 131.







### **Adaptation**

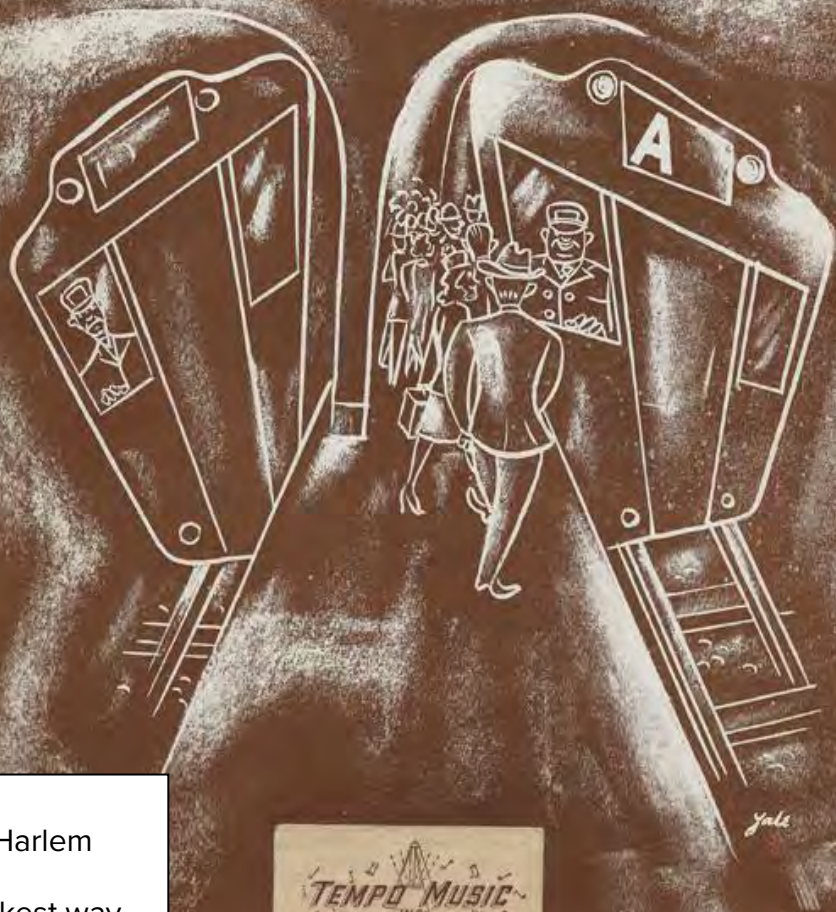
The opening of the subway in 1936 gave Brooklyn's community a new link to Manhattan and caused the population to grow even larger. The A train was credited with causing a mass **migration** of residents out of Manhattan to Brooklyn. The train link between the two boroughs allowed Harlem's black population to move to neighborhoods with more jobs and better housing. Within a few years of the A train's construction tens of thousands of blacks left Harlem for Bedford and Stuyvesant Heights.

It was also during this time the communities of Bedford and Stuyvesant Heights merged into one neighborhood. By 1940 Bed-Stuy had more than 65,000 African American residents, and members of other **ethnic** groups began to leave.

**Document 8** – (Top 8A) Forde, F. Donnie. *Caribbean Americans in New York City 1895-1975*, 2002. (Bottom 8B) Charles, Mario A. "Bedford-Stuyvesant." *The Encyclopedia of New York City*. 2nd ed, 2010, pp. 392.

# TAKE THE 'A' TRAIN

by BILLY STRAYHORN



You must take the "A" train  
To go to Sugar Hill, way up in Harlem  
If you miss the "A" train  
You'll find you missed the quickest way  
to Harlem

Hurry, get on, now it's coming  
Listen to those rails a-thrumming  
all aboard  
Get on the "A" train  
Soon you will be on Sugar Hill in Harlem

**Document 8** – (Top 8C) Strayhorn, Billy. *Take the A Train*, Tempo Music, 1943, Sam DeVincent Collection of American Sheet Music, National Museum of American History Archives Center.

1. According to DOCUMENT 8B, when did the “A” train open?

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2. Why were black people compelled to move from Harlem to Bed-Stuy once the A train opened?

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3. What changes took place in Bed-Stuy as a result?

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4. Why do you think Billy Strayhorn choose to immortalize the “A” train in his song?

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**Document 8** – (Top 8A) Forde, F. Donnie. *Caribbean Americans in New York City 1895-1975*, 2002. (Bottom 8B) Charles, Mario A. "Bedford-Stuyvesant." *The Encyclopedia of New York City*. 2nd ed, 2010, pp. 392. (Top 8C) Ellington, Duke. *Take the A Train*, Tempo Music, 1943, Sam DeVincent Collection of American Sheet Music, National Museum of American History Archives Center.







## **Bedford-Stuyvesant Renaissance Hailed**

By Jessica Johnson

For most of his 45 years, Glenn Williams has seen his Bedford-Stuyvesant community in a poverty-driven free fall. Nowadays, Williams sees the **earmarks** of a rebounding Brooklyn community: revived brownstones, waning crime and hip shopping districts. It's a welcome shift for one of the borough's most **maligned** locales and one underscored by steadily rising property values.

Ravaged first by 1960s riots, then by drugs and crime, the Bed-Stuy in which Williams came of age bore little resemblance of the tidy community prior generations of his family knew. But Williams, who was raised on Monroe St. and Throop Ave., has never considered leaving Bed-Stuy. "My grandmother was one of the first blacks to own a home on Monroe St. It was all white and Jewish at that time, up to the 1920s," he said. Two decades later it was home to more than 65,000 African-Americans, and one of the few areas in the city where large numbers of blacks owned homes ... it was a thriving predominately black, working-class neighborhood.

Slowly **commerce** is returning. Doctor's Cave Café – named after a beach in Montego Bay, Jamaica – opened on Marcy Ave. two and a half years ago. Owner Jean Williams-Culter, a Bed-Stuy resident for 15 years, says the neighborhood **renaissance** has been good for business.

The gradual return to stability for Bed-Stuy is being driven by a number of factors, the most important of which is committed residents. Curtis Felton, a resident since 1963, has been president of 300 Quincy Street Block Association for 15 years. He said cooperation between residents and the police has helped transform Bed-Stuy. "We work with the precincts, and they work with each other to fight crime," Felton said.

Executive Office Kevin Kerley of the 79<sup>th</sup> Precinct agreed. He said that crime is down 9.4% for the year and 65% from nine years ago. Safer streets have attracted **investment** in real estate, he said. "People who are buying homes aren't putting up with crime, and they're calling us. They demand that their homes be made safe."

The city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) has helped reclaim hundreds of once-elegant brownstones lost in the 1970s and 1980s, first to disrepair, then to **foreclosure**. Department spokeswoman Carol Abrams said that since 1986, the agency has either **rehabilitated** or built more than 8,000 housing units in Bed-Stuy. HPD Commissioner Jerilyn Perine said the agency wants to preserve the community's prime housing stock, as well as its heritage of home ownership. "Bedford Stuyvesant is one of the most important historically African American communities in the city and in the country," she said. "We're encouraging homeownership because this is a community with a long tradition of residents owning their own homes."

Still there are growing pains, say residents. With rents on the rise, there are fears some long-time community members won't be able to afford to stay. As new ethnic groups discover Bed-Stuy, some **lament** the dilution of one of the city's African-American enclaves. And for the new arrivals, a lack of amenities and services are a reminder of Bed-Stuy's not-too-distant past. "Businesses aren't serving the needs of the people who live there now," said local Realtor Leo De Leon, adding that practical stores like groceries don't seem to offer everyday products and aren't well-maintained. City services also are below par, said De Leon. "Nostrand Ave. and Fulton St. is an enormous business area, and it doesn't even get proper sanitation," De Leon said. "The block associations are strong, but the city needs to do its part with paving and better traffic lights."

**1. According to DOCUMENT 9, what changes are Bed-Stuy residents seeing in the neighborhood?**

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**2. What is responsible for these changes?**

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**3. What issues still exist in the community?**

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**4. Are Bed-Stuy residents generally pleased or upset by the changes? Provide examples from the text to support your answer.**

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**Document 9** – Johnson, Jessica. “Bedford-Stuyvesant Renaissance Hailed.” *Daily News*, 30 Jun 2002.



BAT: Bedford Stuyvesant

DAILY NEWS NYDailyNews.com

Tuesday, October 1, 2013 39

BROOKLYN NEWS

# A shop's final chapter

## Bed-Stuy's True South Bookstore loses its struggle to stay open

BY REUVEN BLAU  
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

THE final page has been turned at a beloved black bookstore in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

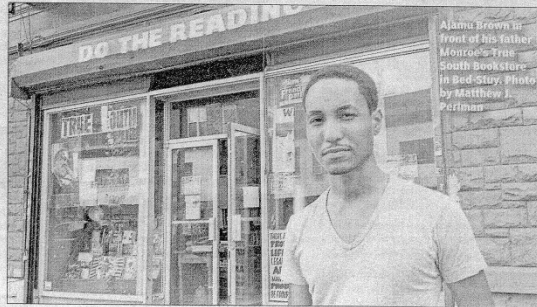
True South Bookstore sold its last book Sunday after struggling to stay open since its owner, Monroe Brown Jr., suffered a stroke in July.

Brown, 71, opened the Nostrand Ave. bookstore in 2007, not just to sell books, but to champion black heritage.

Shortly after Brown fell ill, fans and customers rallied at the shop/cultural center in an effort to save it. The 40 people who attended the fund-raiser collected several thousand dollars.

But that wasn't enough to keep pace with rent that, for some, is just too damn high.

"At the end of the day how many fund-raisers can you do?" asked his son, Ajamu Brown, 36. "You have to be able to generate a profit in order to keep the business open."



The store's rent was recently raised from \$2,200 to \$3,500 a month, he said.

Such a rent hike is becoming a common phenomenon in the neighborhood as landlords seek to

cash in on Bed-Stuy's increasing trendiness, which has put the squeeze on mom-and-pop shops like True South.

The shelves of the bookstore, a former barbershop, were packed

with books on African and African-American history and culture. And customers could still come in to get a haircut, or attend a community meeting.

"It wasn't just a bookstore," Ajamu

mu Brown said. "It was where people came and felt safe to talk about their issues. It was somewhere that had a special place in people's hearts."

In recent years, Monroe Brown, a retired junior high school English teacher, had been subsidizing True South with his own money. But that's become impossible now that he's recovering at a rehabilitation facility in Queens.

Still, community activist Jalal Sabur, 54, and others did everything they could to help keep the store open.

"It's sad," Sabur said, as he helped pack up boxes of books inside the store on Sunday.

He pointed out that the Slave Theater, another storied hub for black activists, has been sold to developers looking to carve it into high-end condos.

"These cultural gems are being pushed out and we are not coming out... to make sure we have them available for our children in the future," Sabur said.

With Ryan Sit

### Adaptation

The final page has been turned at a beloved black bookstore in Bedford-Stuyvesant. True South Bookstore sold its last book Sunday after struggling to stay open since its owner, Monroe Brown Jr., suffered a stroke in July. Brown opened the Nostrand Ave. bookstore in 2007, not just to sell books, but to champion black heritage.

The store's rent was recently raised from \$2,200 to \$3,500 a month ... such a rent hike is becoming a common **phenomenon** in the neighborhood as landlords seek to cash in on Bed-Stuy's increasing trendiness, which has put the squeeze on mom-and-pop shops like True South.

The shelves of the bookstore, a former barbershop, were packed with books on African and African-American history and culture. And customers still come in to get a haircut, or attend a community meeting. "It wasn't just a bookstore," Ajamu Brown said. "It was where people came and felt safe to talk about their issues. It was somewhere that had a special place in people's hearts."

In recent years, Monroe Brown, a retired junior high school English teacher, had been running True South with his own money. But that's become impossible now that he's recovering at a **rehabilitation** facility.

Still, community activist Jalal Sabur and others did everything they could to help keep the store open. "It's sad," Sabur said, as he helped pack up boxes of books inside the store on Sunday. He pointed out that the Slave Theater, another hub for black activists, has been sold to developers looking to carve it into high-end condos. "These cultural gems are being pushed out and we are not coming out ... to make sure we have them available for our children in the future," Sabur said.

Document 10 – Blau, Reuven. "A Shop's Final Chapter." *New York Daily News*, 1 Oct 2013.

BROOKLYN CONNECTIONS

Bedford Stuyvesant Primary Source Packet

**1. What is True South Books and why was it opened?**

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**2. What led to True South Book's closure?**

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**3. Why was True South Books special to Bed-Stuy's community?**

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**4. What can you infer is happening in Bed-Stuy by True South Book's closure?**

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**Document 10** – Blau, Reuven. "A Shop's Final Chapter." *New York Daily News*, 1 Oct 2013.

**LANDGRABBERS**  
**REALTY CORP.**

Removing **YOUR**  
history, buying  
one Brownstone  
at a time.

**OH YEAH?!\*!'. **

Show these developers  
**WE OWN THIS HOOD.**

Shut it **DOWN BED-STUY**  
➤➤ *by any means necessary*

**#standupbedstuy #thelastsupper**

Document 11 – "Anti-Gentrification Fliers Appear in Bed Stuy." *Brownstoner*, 11 Jun 2015.

**1. What is DOCUMENT 11? Who was made for?**

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**2. Why do you think the author made DOCUMENT 11?**

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**3. What point of view is the flier trying to communicate?**

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**4. Would you say the author is in favor of or against gentrification? How do you know?**

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**Document 11** – "Anti-Gentrification Fliers Appear in Bed Stuy." *Brownstoner*, 11 Jun 2015.



## GLOSSARY

**Adaptation:** to modify or rewrite based on the original text

**Abolition:** the abolishing of slavery

**Battle of Brooklyn (also known as the Battle of Long Island):** an American Revolutionary War battle that occurred in Brooklyn and was a major defeat for the Americans

**Commerce:** buying and selling of goods especially on a large scale and between different places

**Dutch West Indian Company:** a Dutch merchant company chartered in 1621 to trade with Africa, the West Indies, North and South America and Australia

**Earmark (n.):** a mark or quality by which something can be identified

**Economic History:** the history of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services

**Emancipation:** the act of freeing, in this case from slavery

**Ethnic:** of or relating to groups of people with common traits and customs and a sense of shared identity

**Excavation:** to uncover by digging away covering earth

**Flourish:** to succeed

**Foreclosure:** to take legal measures to take possession of one's property because the owner has failed to make payments on it

**Gentrification:** the process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents

**Investment:** the outlay of money for income or profit

**Lament:** to express sorrow for

**Longevity:** long life

**Malign:** showing strong ill will

**Migration:** to move from one country, place, or locality to another

**Prominent:** important; famous

**Rehabilitate:** to restore to a state of good health, or repair

**Renaissance:** a movement or period of great activity

**Romanesque Revival Architecture:** a style of building used in the mid to late 1800s characterized by rounded arches, towers and symmetry. It was inspired by Romanesque architecture from medieval Europe.

**Social History:** history that concentrates upon the social, economic, and cultural institutions of a people

**Sub-divide:** to split one house into two or more apartments