

## PLG's Paradox: Diversity Climbs, But Black Population Plummets, 2020 Census Says

BY MILFORD PREWITT

Is it possible a neighborhood can experience growing diversity even as its largest demographic group recedes?

If that neighborhood is Prospect Lefferts Gardens, the 2020 Census says it's not only possible, it's verifiable.

The Census Bureau's decennial count of every person in the U.S. reports that PLG has never been more diverse. But the African American demographic—once 78 percent of the nine census tracts that makes up PLG—has fallen almost 30 percent in the past decade and currently makes up slightly more than half of the residential base.

“What these [census] numbers show us is that diversity isn't dependent on Blacks,” says Keith Mack, a Corcoran real estate agent and Midwood 1 resident who notes that higher-income renters and affluent home buyers—who often are not

Black—are changing the neighborhood's demographic mix.

Add that trend to retirees and older neighbors who bought decades ago and are now leaving the city, Mack adds.

“There's reverse migration, like Bette [Cunningham] and her sisters, for example, who are moving back to the South Carolina town where they were born.” The Cunninghams sold their Bedford manse for \$2.7 million this summer. (See story on page 2.)

Two recessions, a severe shortage of affordable housing, gentrification, stagnant wages, lingering and punitive Trump-era tax disallowances on the working and middle classes, and families cashing out of decades-owned homes (in transactions that sometimes exceed \$2 million) are changing the complexion and economic image of the neighborhood.

“Gentrification has been sweeping Black and Brown families from their generational homes for decades now,” says PLG

resident Yvette Clarke, U.S. Rep. of the 9th Congressional District. She says while she welcomes the diversity, she regrets there is no national policy to keep people rooted in their neighborhoods and stem displacement.

“Conversations like these are the precise reason we cannot abandon the central tenets of President Biden's Build Back Better Agenda,” she said in a statement. “Strengthening the care economy with childcare, paid leave and in-home and community-based care, investing in affordable housing, expanding Medicare to lower prescription drug prices and to include vision, dental and hearing benefits, and more.

“This is the sort of transformative change which I believe is critical towards tackling gentrification at the source.”

According to the 2020 Census, every racial or ethnic group grew in the neighborhood in the past (*continued on page 2*)

### I N M E M O R I A M

## Beverly Ballard, CPA Whose Teenage Dreams Included PLG Homeownership, Dies in Midwood Home at 71

As a teenager in the late 1960s, Beverly Ballard took a bus from her family's St. Marks Avenue home in Crown Heights to James Madison High School in Sheepshead Bay.

Part of the commute took her through Lefferts Manor where, over the course of her high school career, she fell in love with the Manor's tree-lined streets and dignified half-century-old homes.

She became inspired by the street-scapes and the architecture to the extent that she vowed to herself to become a Manor homeowner one day.

Beverly Frances Ballard, who became a certified public accountant, not only fulfilled her dream with the late 1980's purchase of a brownstone on

Midwood 2, but she also died there in October, under hospice care with breast cancer.

She was 71 years old.

Because she had been fighting the disease in private since 2015, looked much younger than her age, and was full of vitality, her death shocked neighbors, some of whom recounted bumping into her running errands just weeks earlier.

Moreover, Beverly was a fashionista and dedicated gym rat who, in the days before the pandemic, was addicted to the spinning classes at Crunch in Park Slope.

Regina Ballard, Beverly's sister, said it was her sister's daily commute to high school through Prospect Lefferts Gardens and her fondness for the neighborhood's stately old houses that made Beverly commit herself, even as a teenager, to buy a home here one day.

“Plus, we had friends who lived there and they supported and encouraged her decision,” she added.

Beverly earned a bachelor's degree in accounting and business administration from Baruch College and in 1987 obtained her certified public accountant license. In 1998, she received an executive master of business administration from Baruch.

Her credentials enabled her to work as a tax preparer before mounting the career ladder at various public and private companies, financial institutions and corporate employers—including *The New York Times*.

But it was the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey which she retired from in 2019 after a 26-year career.

She was on-site at the Twin Towers working for PATH in February 1993, when terrorists set off a van bomb in an underground parking lot at the World Trade Center. Six people were killed.

Beverly had many cultural and entertainment pursuits including fashion, music, museum exhibits, world travel, tennis, gardening, Broadway and Off-Broadway theatre.

She participated in a theatre group that provided discount tickets for colleagues, friends and family and worshipped for years as an active member of the Brooklyn Tabernacle.

One snapshot of her love of music occurred at the Prospect Park Bandshell several summers ago when she participated in an audience sing-along to Prince's “Purple Rain,” the movie screening that night.

Besides her sister Regina, Beverly is survived by her mother, Ivy Ballard; two uncles; one aunt; 19 cousins; and a host of friends and neighbors.

Faithful to her Brooklyn roots, Beverly was interred in the Evergreens Cemetery on Bushwick Avenue in Brooklyn on October 25.

## Ed Cornelius, 45-year Resident of Lincoln 2, Lifelong Percussionist and Music Teacher, Dies at 93

Music was part of Ed Cornelius's DNA.

At the age of four, encouraged by his talent-scout father who found gigs for jazz musicians, Cornelius showed an aptitude for the drums.

He would later gravitate to piano, becoming a sought-after studio and touring player for a few years.

But it was teaching music—not performing—that led to a distinguished 30-year career in New York City public schools.

Edward L. Cornelius died at 93 in September. He passed of an apparent heart attack approximately three weeks after admission to NYP Brooklyn Methodist Hospital on Seventh Avenue.

Born in 1928 and reared in Bay Shore, Long Island, Cornelius earned a master's degree at the Manhattan School of Music, to which he became a generous donor over the years.

He performed and taught almost immediately after grad school, landing one of his earliest teaching jobs at Harriet Tubman elementary school in Harlem, where he met his wife, the former Annette Eustace.

In what would turn out to be a career affirming event, he discovered from an *Ebony* magazine profile a distant uncle, Victor Cornelius, a prominent violinist who lived in Copenhagen. In an era before Google, Ed tracked down the phone number and address for his uncle and traveled to Denmark where they played together in clubs for a few weeks and maintained close family ties for the rest of their lives. (Victor died in 1961.)

(It's interesting to note that Victor had a grandson, Jan Cornelius—a jazz pianist and Ed's great-grandnephew—

who performs in Europe and regularly jams in New York City.)

The late great jazz drummer Max Roach—husband of the late stellar jazz singer Abby Lincoln—would become a mentor of Ed's.

Ed lived with Annette for 45 years in a beautifully appointed, century-plus-years-old Lincoln 2 brownstone they found in *The New York Times* in 1976. They kept and maintained the original molding, hardwood floors, pocket doors, and fireplaces with period mantels.

To get a dinner invite for a cookout in their landscaped, backyard patio garden was a summertime thrill.

Privacy lovers at heart, they participated in only one PLG House Tour.

In addition to a baby grand piano, the couple maintained an extensive library of books and hundreds of vinyl long-playing records.

Neighbors on Lincoln 2 hosted a birthday block party in Ed's honor in March.

“He was so loved,” Annette said.

The Corneliuses were also decades-long followers of WBAI 99.5 FM, the listener supported, progressive talk and news radio station.

Soft-spoken with a raspy voice, Ed championed liberal politics and human rights and could be a fierce and cantankerous opponent in a debate.

But he was decidedly abrupt and single-minded on one topic: his final arrangements.

Neighbor Joan Young recalled she and Ed got to chatting a few years ago in front of her house as he was pushing past with his shopping cart.

“How old are you now, Ed?” she asked.

Replying “Ninety,” Ed launched into a monologue about dying. He pooh-poohed the euphemisms “passed away,” “left us,” “laid down to rest,” “went to meet his Maker,” saying, “When I die, I want them to say, ‘He DIED!’”

Outside of the mobility challenges of old age, he was in decent health up until the end and suffered no chronic old-age morbidities. He was mentally sharp and had been an avid swimmer at Eastern Athletic fitness club.

Short, lean and walking with a stoop, Cornelius was a recognizable figure in the Manor with his thick snow-white Afro and granny cart.

The Corneliuses were also decades-long members of the Park Slope Food Coop.

In addition to Annette and Jan, he is survived by several nieces and nephews.

Cornelius was a humble man who wanted neither a funeral nor memorial.

His body was cremated.



photos: Beverly Ballard by The Ballard Family; Ed Cornelius by Paul Friedman



# Neighbors Saying Goodbye

**Cunningham Sisters Sell Home for Record Price. Moving Back to Family’s Century-Old Farmland in South Carolina. Hearts Remain in Lefferts Manor.**



The Cunninghams lived in 1880 Bedford Ave. for 30 years.

photo: Stefano Ukmar

BY MILFORD PREWITT  
When they bought 1880 Bedford Avenue in 1991 for \$250,000, Brown Harris Stevens real estate broker Bette Cunningham and her two sisters did not envision that one day they’d get more than 10 times that amount for their 98-year-old Flemish Bond, brick mini-mansion. But that’s just what happened in September when they sold their home for \$2.72 million—a record-breaking amount for a Prospect Lefferts Gardens home resale. In mint condition and lovingly decorated and furnished over the years, the Cunningham home was renowned in the neighborhood for their annual Christmas tree-lighting party. With Southern and modern design schemes, *The New York Times* called the house “a jewel,” in a 2004 article about house tours. The sisters are transitioning into retirement and are looking for a change, part of which entails moving back to their family’s 200-acre farmland in South Carolina where they have built a new home. Bette’s sisters—one a wealth management executive and the other an ad executive—were unavailable for comment.

**Was this idea of moving back home always in the plans?**  
It was always in my plan to return to the great homeland in South Carolina. But that doesn’t mean my life in Prospect Lefferts and 1880 wasn’t great. It was, and I absolutely adored our house. I shared it with two sisters (luckily one was always on the road). Both sisters were fiercely private but also ready for change.

**What do you look forward to in moving back home and where is it exactly?**  
I can say that my primary residence is located about 12 miles northeast of Columbia and it’s in a very rural part of South Carolina. I looked forward to returning to my old sod. There’s so much history there that can be passed on for many more generations to come.

**Like what? Tell me more.**  
The land has been in the family for many, many years. Great-great-grandfather and great-grandfather (father and son)—of Scottish and African descent—cultivated the soil and for over 100 years the land was profitable from farming. But when our grandfather passed on in the ’60s, the farming came to a halt. However, the 200-acre estate is still family-owned. There are seven homes on the main compound, several barns, three springs and a lake. The chimney from my great-grandparents’ home is still standing. The plan is to restore the barns for family events and to convert the chimney into a fire pit.

**Can you trace your family roots to slavery?**  
Yes, we traced our roots back nine generations. A family genealogist did this by using several different methodologies including a slave census but also complemented her research with previous family records and listening to stories told by some of our elders. A general census and ancestry.com were also instrumental in the research.

**What condition was 1880 in when you ladies purchased it?**  
The façade was in good shape but the windows had been badly neglected over the years. We incurred a huge expense restoring and replacing them but somehow managed to get through it. It took lots of patience because the contractors took several months to complete the project. Inside the house had very good bones but was clearly in need of some TLC—Cunningham style.

**You didn’t just own a beautiful home, you recruited them for the annual house tour.**  
I was involved in the house tour the very first year we moved into our house. I knew it was a good thing for the community. 1880 came on tour in 2004 and I remember feeling exhausted due to all the prepping. Later I felt well rewarded when so many folks showed up—many from out of town. But the 2015 house tour was my most memorable. It was the year after Carole Schaffer transitioned. Mary Miller spearheaded the tour that year and as I recall it was lovely and so diverse. It was also the year the Duane Eubanks Jazz Trio performed at Bluebird.

**In addition to the house tour committee, you served on the LMA board and the Centennial Project.**  
I was on the LMA board for two years. I came on under the leadership of Pia Raymond and it was a pivotal time. The association was in the midst of planning a centennial celebration and I was asked to serve on a committee with Carlene Braithwaite, Vincent Lisi (now LMA president) and others. There really was no time for a formal introduction—I had to hit the ground running and vigorously worked to help make the gala a success. Thanks to Jim Mamary and Bluebird for hosting all the tastings.

**What will you miss most about living here?**  
I’ll definitely miss the house. I’ll also miss the energy and long walks in Prospect Park; the neighbors; as well as many of the lasting friendships developed over time. I’m already missing Bluebird and Camillo, two of my favorite spots. I suppose the cool Brooklyn vibe will remain with me indefinitely.

## 2020 Census *(continued from page 1)*

10 years except the most historically dominant, African Americans, which fell 27.7 percent.

Blacks accounted for 78 percent of PLG’s residents in 2010 but squeaked out just 52 percent of the population base in 2020, Census numbers relate.

Whites, Asians and Hispanic/Latinos saw gains in their rates of population growth despite the fact that overall PLG had a minuscule fraction of increase, up less than 1 percent to 37,409 residents. In 2010, the Census reports that 37,262 people called PLG home.

The scant increase in PLG’s population contrasts with a soaring Brooklyn’s: up 9.2 percent, to 2.7 million. Were it a stand-alone city, Brooklyn would be the nation’s third largest, right behind Chicago.

Whites more than doubled their numbers in PLG from 4,545 in 2010 to 9,276, a 104 percent increase. Whites made up 25 percent of the neighborhood.

Asians jumped 119 percent, to 1,436. Hispanic/Latinos were up 7 percent, to 4,456.

To tally the number of residents, the Census Bureau used the nine census tracts that closely—but not perfectly—align to the traditional map of PLG: Nostrand Avenue to Ocean Avenue, east to west, and Empire Boulevard to Parkside Avenue, north to south. The Lefferts Manor Historic District made up four (not perfectly) of the nine census tracts.

One way N.Y. State Sen. Zellnor Myrie, who represents PLG as part of the 20th Senate District, intends to keep people in their homes is by restoring tax credits for those who bought their homes long before gentrification began and who remained.

“As a lifelong PLG resident, I know the importance of protecting and honoring those who have stayed in our neighborhood through thick and thin, and made it the place it is today,” he said. “That’s why I’ve introduced legislation to allow homeowners who have remained in neighborhoods that gentrified to take advantage of tax credits that are now no longer available because of that same gentrification.

“We must always make sure our neighborhoods remain affordable, safe and welcoming, especially for those who have contributed so much to them over the years.”

Myrie asserted that he considers himself a census guardian. “Our office was on the front lines of the 2020 Census, and I’m proud our efforts led to more New Yorkers being counted than ever before, despite a pandemic, federal hostility to getting an accurate count and inaction from the prior governor’s administration.”

- In other highlights from the 2020 Census:
- The U.S. population rose 7.3 percent, to 331.5 million.
  - The population of New York State rose 4.2 percent, to 20.2 million.
  - New York City’s population rose 7.7 percent, to 8.8 million.
  - New York City’s Black population fell 4.5 percent, down 84,404 in the past decade.
  - Blacks made up 1.8 million, or 20.2 percent, of the city’s total population in 2020, down from 22.8 percent of the total 2010 population.



**Dues are \$25 per household or \$15 per senior citizen household**

Dues cover January through December 2021. Pay online to the lefferts-manor-association.square.site or make checks payable to Lefferts Manor Association. Send payment with your name, address and contact info to: Kendall Christiansen, 151 Maple St., Brooklyn, NY 11225, or drop in the mail slot at 151 Maple St.

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The Echo is looking for a co-editor or a writer to volunteer their talents to help cover the evolving and dynamic narrative of this neighborhood. If interested, contact Milford Prewitt at 917-301-7700 or milfordprewitt@aol.com.

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