

Newark, City of Dreams:
Black Americans, the Great Migration & The Post-Civil Rights Era in Newark, New Jersey



Waiting for a northbound train in Jacksonville, Florida, 1921

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Between 1910-1970, an estimated six million Black Americans took to the roads and rails, daring to relocate from the rural South—the only communities most had ever known—and venture to cities in the North, Midwest, and West in search of economic opportunities and greater social autonomy. These descendants of slaves also sought an escape from the racial violence and terror their families had experienced for generations. New Jersey was one of the most popular destinations due to its heavy industrialization and many factories. Migrants were confident they would find employment. As a result, more Black migrants settled in New Jersey between World Wars I and II than any other state in the North. Between 1910-1930 alone, the state’s Black population increased by 132%, and Black migrants had already begun referring to it as “the Georgia of the North.” Located just 12 miles (18 kilometers) west of New York City, no other city attracted migrants more than Newark. Not only is it New Jersey’s largest, most populous city, it served as the state’s financial and industrial center.

This discussion explores the impact Black migrants had on Newark by first giving an overview of the Great Migration and how it caused one of the biggest demographic and political shifts in American history. It will touch on who the migrants were and the push/pull factors that brought them to the North. The lived experiences of the migrants and their families through resettlement and encounters with foreign-born immigrant communities will be shared. However, special focus will be placed on the turbulent 1960s and the post-Civil Rights era, when the violence they thought they had left behind erupted in Newark. Information gleaned through interviews will supplement research derived from secondary sources, and the evidence of return migration will be examined before this discussion concludes with a snapshot of contemporary Newark and the Renaissance the city is currently undergoing.

Biographical Statement

Natoschia Scruggs, Ph.D.



Dr. Natoschia Scruggs is an Assistant Professor of African & African American Studies as well as Director of the Lee Hagan Africana Studies Center. Her research interests revolve around contemporary and historical public policy formation and analysis, particularly as they pertain to global migration. She specializes in using mixed methods to examine the personal narratives and life histories of individuals, alongside government documents and state-provided information, to discover how immigration and refugee policies are implemented, and how those policies shape people's lived experiences across societies and time, with emphasis on urban spaces.

Before joining NJCU, Dr. Scruggs held positions at other academic institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and in government, including having served as principal advisor on research to Ambassador Susan Rice, Ambassador Samantha Power, and Ambassador Nikki Haley at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations. In addition to hands-on, extensive experience working with conflict-affected populations, refugees, asylees, and survivors of gender-based violence, Dr. Scruggs has published peer-reviewed articles and book chapters addressing family violence, elder abuse, sexual exploitation, displacement, and state violence. She earned an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in African Diaspora Studies with a focus on global migration and emphasis on women, gender and sexuality from the University of California, Berkeley. She is a member of Phi Beta Kappa, and was a Ford Foundation Fellow, Rotary Ambassadorial Fellow, Fulbright Scholar, and American Field Service high school foreign exchange student.