

# MEALS AS COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The food we eat and where we eat it are integral parts of cultural identity. *Meals as Collective Memory*, an oral history project powered by Weeksville Heritage Center (WHC) in partnership with NYC Commission On Human Rights, seeks to capture the memory-making utility of food and document both the social and culinary history behind Black-owned restaurants in Central Brooklyn.



**A Brooklyn Guide of Black Owned Eats:  
CURATED BY STEPHANYE WATTS & OBDEN MONDESIR**

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## **Meals As Collective Memory**

The 1940s saw a rise in the migration of Blacks from the American South and Caribbean to Central Brooklyn, soon becoming a large part of the identity of those neighborhoods.

We are now living in a time when the pursuit of 'authentic' experiences and spaces has accelerated the process of gentrification. Through the collection of oral history interviews from long time Black restaurateurs and the owners of burgeoning neighborhood staples, and the sponsorship of supporting programming, WHC will show that authenticity is the cultural right to stay put.

Through *Meals As Collective Memory*, we will celebrate and explore Brooklyn's food culture from across the African diaspora. In addition, we will promote the kind of self-reliance that made historic Weeksville a model community by providing workshops to assist community members in starting or expanding their own food businesses.

We invite community members, food and culture enthusiasts, and local entrepreneurs to join us in learning about the history of the meals we consume and the restaurateurs behind them.

## **MaCM Programming**

### **May 11:**

Meals As Collective Memory Oral History Listening Party, 1:30 - 3pm  
A Conversation on Food and Space, 3:30 - 5pm

### **May 15:**

Entrepreneurial Workshop w: Black Owned Brooklyn, 7 - 9pm

### **May 22:**

Minority/Women-Owned Business Workshop by New York City Commission on Human Rights and Small Business Services, 7 - 9pm

### **May 29:**

Meals as Collective Memory Community Dinner featuring Cheryl Smith and Tonya Hopkins, 7 - 9pm

### **June 18:**

Juneteenth Community Festival, 6-9pm

## **Weeksville Heritage Center**

Weeksville Heritage Center is a one-of-a-kind 21st-century cultural institution with a 180-year history. The organization's mission is to document, preserve and interpret the history of the 19th century African American community of Weeksville, Brooklyn—one of America's many free black communities—and to create and inspire innovative, contemporary uses of African American history through education, the arts, and civic engagement. Using a contemporary lens, Weeksville activates this unique history through the presentation of innovative, vanguard and experimental programs.

## **New York City Commission on Human Rights**

The New York City Commission on Human Rights enforces the NYC Human Rights Law, one of the most protective in the country which covers many protected classes, including race, gender, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, and others in housing, employment, public accommodations and other jurisdictions. The Commission's Law Enforcement Bureau is a team of dedicated lawyers and human rights specialists who work to get justice for New Yorkers who have faced discrimination. The Commission's Community Relations Bureau provides education, outreach and support, as well as fosters dialogue among the diverse communities that call NYC home. Programming and the creation of this zine was generously funded by a grant provided by the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs and the NYC Commission on Human Rights.





...being here now, next spring will be 20 years. So, I had a kid came in here yesterday, I remember he was in his mother's womb. He's about 6'5" now. And that's one of the great things for having business for a long time. Your customers, you get to know them. So, it's I'm a part of the Muslim community here. A mainstay, and if you go through up, down the street here, I'm the only indigenous African American with a business on the block.

-Idris







And people will always be like, "I never eat Haitian food." But the moment they eat it, it's like, it grabs them, especially the rice. That you could eat the rice without having no meat or gravy on it because of the taste.


- Louisias



Because Bed-Stuy is amazing. It's just ... Bed-Stuy just resonates and we had the r  
It just felt right to have it in the neighborhood that has so much historical context. Ha  
backdrop. And just the different people. Whether it's Caribbean or African or there's  
and tapestry of just human beings here. And it's such a location for creative. So a lot  
and musicians and film producers or makers or whatever come into this space. And  
hoped they would because we knew they existed there.



. BROOKLYN.  
Tea



name Brooklyn Tea.  
is such a beautiful  
such a great blend  
t of creative artists  
d we knew or we

- Jamilla McGill





**Weeksville has a history of women in business as well. Dr. Susan McKinney Steward was the first Black woman doctor in New York State after graduating valedictorian from New York Medical College for Women. She went on to run her own medical practice from 1870 - 1895.**



I would say everyone's objective is money and financial security, but for me, it's satisfying to know that I'm giving you my best. I'm not just here for money, for money, but I want you to feel good giving me your money. Like, "You deserve it. I've gone to places to eat, and I just don't feel that. I don't feel that love, that as



It's more  
which I'm here for  
it." Sometimes  
respect in the food.

- Michael





The greatest gift  
of life  
is friendship  
and brick by brick  
you have helped  
build this  
labor of love

- Melissa Gonzalez & Erika Munro
- Fred in Service Troop
- Sly & Phillipine
- Gerold & Tina Bell
- Diane & Natasha Casabier
- Jeani Weisak & Family
- Webster & M. Pietto
- Charles & Shantavia Dumas
- Jessie & Holly Stein
- Chris & E. Gibb
- Helair & Jason
- Carlie Borden
- Colbie & Brandon Babenzien
- Traig & M. M.
- Dennis & Sacha Kaneko
- Tiffany & Baben Peter
- Ejaz Kahn
- William & Melissa Clanton
- London

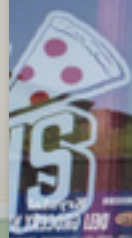




According to The 2018 State of Women-Owned Business Report, commissioned by American Express, companies owned by Black women grew by 164%, almost three times the rate of all women-owned businesses which grew 58%.



DADDY  
GREENS



# DADDY GREENS



Pizza. It's affordable. Right? That goes without saying. The price of pizza, there's a study. I've forgotten when it came out, it was like in the '70s, the price of pizza is concurrent with the price of New York City subway fare. You go look it up. I'm sure you could find it. But it's concurrent with the New York City subway fare, right? So if you could afford to get on a train, you could afford a slice of pizza. And in New York City, everyone claims that their pizza's the best.

- Rodney



Weeksville's beginnings date to the early 1830s when several large landholders, started to break up their land and sell off parts of their property. Black investors purchased, divided, and resold some of these properties, advertising specifically to people of color in the newly emerging Black press and mainstream newspapers. These early land investors included businessmen like Henry C. Thompson, an African- American bootblack manufacturer and president of the African Woolman Benevolent Society and Sylvanus Smith, a hog driver who also owned property in downtown Brooklyn.





**CLINTON HILL**

Gates Av

12

18

4

1

3

16

7

10

Atlantic Ave

**PROSPECT  
HEIGHTS**

19

5

Nostrand Ave

New York Ave

**BROO**

6

11

5

Rogers Ave

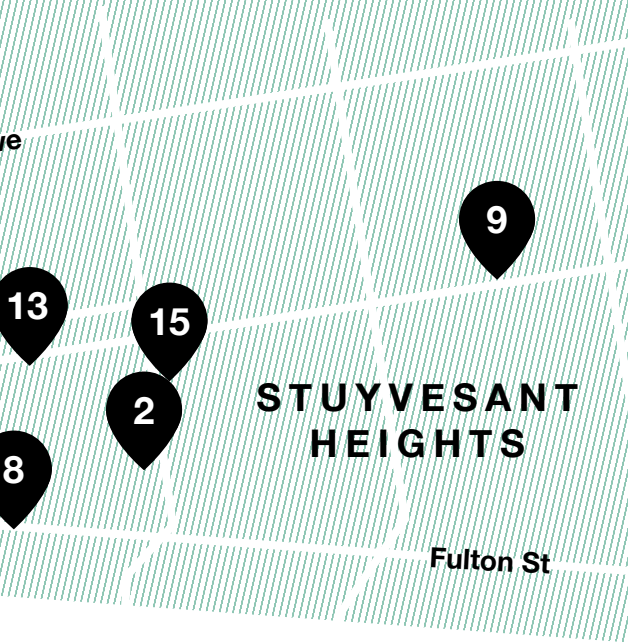
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**CROWN HEIGHTS**

# MEALS AS COLLECTIVE MEMORY

## BROOKLYN, NY

- 1. Abu's Bean Pie Company**  
*1184 Fulton St*
- 2. Beso**  
*370 Lewis Ave*
- 3. Brooklyn Tea**  
*524 Nostrand Ave*
- 4. Brown Butter**  
*413 Tompkins Ave*
- 5. Cafe Rue Dix**  
*1451 Bedford Ave*
- 6. Cheryl's Global Soul**  
*236 Underhill Ave*
- 7. The Crabby Shack**  
*613 Franklin Ave*
- 8. Daddy Greens**  
*1552 Fulton St*
- 9. Grandchamps**  
*197 Patchen Ave*
- 10. Greedi Vegan**  
*1031 Bergen St*
- 11. Ital Kitchen**  
*1032 Union St*
- 12. Joloff**  
*1168 Bedford Ave*
- 13. Kafe Louverture**  
*392 Halsey St*
- 14. Lakou**  
*195 Utica Ave*
- 15. Ma n' Pop Soul Food**  
*349 Lewis Ave*
- 16. Ode to Babel**  
*772 Dean St*
- 17. Piklis Cafe and Lounge**  
*903 Franklin Ave*
- 18. Sistas' Place**  
*456 Nostrand Ave*
- 19. Suyas**  
*717 Franklin Ave*









“It is encouraging to note that in many of the residential sections of the city of Brooklyn young colored men are trying to get into the business mart. Recently, one observes the Negro huckster with his horse and well-laden wagon appealing to you for your patronage, with fish, vegetables and fruit. In Fulton Street near Ralph Avenue, on Saturday evenings, the number of hucksters are about equally divided between the whites and the blacks. Last week, John Hicks, one of the Weeksville boys, started a route and succeeded in clearing out all of his stock in trade each day.”

New York Age, September 3, 1908





“Look at the ground we now stand on and on the section about one mile square known in the early days as Weeksville, after one of our race named James Weeks. Think of those people who occupied all those places when building lots have been bought for \$25 and \$50 and \$100 each, and look upon the present occupants, Italians. Think of our city’s most famous caterers of forty or fifty years ago. They were the Downings, Mars, Watson, Vandyke, TenEyck, Day, Green and others, all colored. Their names were as familiar and as representative in high class work as are Delmonico and Sherry today. Who have succeeded to the business that these colored caterers had in those days?”

Samuel Scottron, July 13 1905, “Future of the Afro-American”







Want to be about that UJAAMA (cooperative economics) life? Be sure to follow Black Owned Brooklyn, created by Cynthia + Glenn Giwa on Instagram at @blackownedbrooklyn and bookmark their site, [blackownedbrooklyn.com](http://blackownedbrooklyn.com), for interviews on Brooklyn's diverse group of Black entrepreneurs.

The City of New York Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (M/WBE) Program expands opportunities for minority and women entrepreneurs to access government contracts and grow their businesses. When eligible businesses are certified with the City they become more visible to prospective buyers, including City agencies and private contractors seeking to purchase goods and services.

Visit [www.nyc.gov/sbs](http://www.nyc.gov/sbs) to learn more.





THE NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY  
PROCLAIMS  
**SISTAS' PLACE**  
Honorary  
**LANDMARK**  
In recognition of 20 years of expanding  
and deepening the appreciation of  
**JAZZ**  
The Original African-American Art Form  
June 8th, 2015



**Looking for free resources to start, operate, or grow, your business? Head to the NYC Business Solutions Brooklyn Center at 9 Bond Street in Downtown Brooklyn.**





We started to do the work and to sign the lease and it was history. We hadn't even fully decided that it would be a Haitian restaurant, yet, we just knew that we wanted to do something and we wanted to do something that would be good for this community.

- Sabrina



A stylized logo consisting of the letters "G." in a cursive, orange font. The logo is enclosed within a white hexagonal shape with an orange border.



KAFE LOUVERTURE



# Joloff



**At one point in Weeksville's 100 year history, it boasted the highest rate of property and business ownership in any African American urban community.**





So, I'm just saying, every culture has their soul food. It was just my way of not having to stick to just one type of soul food. Like I said, having food that feeds the soul makes you feel really grounded and good once you've eaten it.

- Cheryl





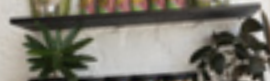
oothies, Crepes, Kava & Vibes

CONNECT WITH US    @LAKOU.CAFE

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LAKOU

OPEN







So Lakou, the reason why I picked the name. Lakou means the court. Literal translation means the courtyard. Essentially the lakou is a shared, community space think in Brooklyn, the lakou, when it comes to community building or where people gather is probably closer to the stoop, where people hang out. So I kind of see this as our little stoop where people can get to know each other and we've been pretty successful at that, for sure. There's customers that come every day. The customer's don't just say hi to us, they say hi to each other now, which is cool.

- Cassandre



# AFTERWORD

The 5th of July Resource Center for Self-Determination & Freedom housed at Weeksville Heritage Center is dedicated to the production & dissemination of knowledge concerning histories of post-emancipation, freedom, and its promise. Through *Meals as Collective Memory*, we tied 19th century Weeksville's historical themes of entrepreneurship and self-determination to look at the contemporary history of Black-owned restaurants in Central Brooklyn.

Black-owned restaurants represent a spatial history of inequality and the importance of cultural representation. They also reflect how restaurants are communal spaces that represent the symbolic annihilation that occurs in late capitalism to neighborhoods affected by gentrification which brings in citizens of higher tax brackets, but lacking in shared culture.

As the initial iteration of *Meals as Collective Memory* comes to a close, we have developed a living archive representing Black entrepreneurs based in Central Brooklyn in their own words. These oral histories collected throughout this project illustrate the necessity for creating these spaces, difficulties and growth experienced by the restaurant owners and chefs. Here, they share memories around food and express their dreams for a Brooklyn that reflects its people.

As lead on this project, I'd like to thank the New York City Commission on Human Rights for being incredible partners and seeing the urgency of *Meals as Collective Memory* in archiving the history of our borough. To Maya Meredith, your assistance in realizing this project and collecting oral histories was irreplaceable. Special thanks to the Weeksville staff for always being a huge support. For all of the restaurateurs who have shared their stories with us, this is a living testament to the community you served and helped create. Black Owned Brooklyn, Nikita Richardson, Ligaya Mishan, Tonya Hopkins, Chef Butta, and Klancy Miller, we cannot thank you enough for the richness and wealth of knowledge you brought to each event. Lastly, but certainly not least, thank you tenfold to the caterers that kept us fed throughout this project; Lakou Cafe, Pikliz, Island Pops, Cheryl's Global Soul, Bed-Stuy Fish Fry, and Ital Kitchen. Finally may this sentence be a portion of the encomium deserving of Stephanye Watts who as the outreach and programming consultant was integral to the success of this project.

Obden Mondesir  
Oral History Manager,  
Weeksville Heritage Center

Listen to Meals as Collective Memory oral histories at <http://5thofjuly.org>  
Learn more about Weeksville Heritage Center at [weeksvillesociety.org](http://weeksvillesociety.org)

# WHC

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@weeksville



Weeksville Heritage Center



Commission on  
Human Rights

Department of  
Cultural Affairs