INTRODUCTION

Haitian Religion in Miami

Spiritually, poetically, and politically it is altogether fitting that the heart of Haitian life in Miami beats precisely at the intersection of streets named for the great Haitian poet Félix Morisseau-Leroy and the great African American civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. Félix Morisseau-Leroy was the first major writer to compose plays and poetry in Haitian Creole, the language of the Haitian masses, a language whose official recognition by the Haitian government—a status previously reserved for the French of the Haitian elite—was in large part the result of the bard’s advocacy and international acclaim. Like so many of his compatriots, “Moriso,” as he is affectionately known to Haitians, had to flee Haiti in 1953 because of political oppression and take refuge abroad, first in France and then in several African countries before settling in Miami in 1981. There, in the “Magic City,” he would pass the last seventeen years of his life, just as Miami’s Haitian diaspora was beginning to swell, a community in which he “was hailed as the forerunner of many of their efforts; as one of them said on his death: ‘He realised that for people to understand the problems, they need to be taught in their own language, not a language they don’t understand. Otherwise, they’re being mystified, they’re being shown a lack of respect’” (Caistor 1998). Martin Luther King’s profound commitment to the gospel and to social change toward securing civil rights for African Americans, meanwhile, exemplifies the faith and resilience of another African-descended people, Haitians, who have come to America in search of life, of a better life, for themselves, their loved ones, and for Haiti.

On any given Sunday, multitudes from the Haitian diaspora congregate at the intersection of these two streets at the intersection of King and Morisseau-Leroy in Little Haiti. Most of them gather at Notre Dame d’Haiti Catholic Church, while others shuffle to their
Protestant storefront churches, toting Bibles; others purchase herbs or have a spiritualist reading done by a Vodou priestess in a temple, and others pick up cornmeal, red beans, and ground Haitian coffee in the Caribbean Market. Just across the street from the market, Notre Dame d’Haiti, the primary Haitian Catholic Church in Miami, literally overflows with prayerful, beseeching believers, many clutching rosaries or photographs of loved ones who remain across the water, in Haiti. Not only are the pews full but people are standing in the back and in the doorways of the sanctuary and outside on the patio and in the parking lot. Speakers hung on an exterior wall project the liturgical prayers and lively hymns to those who didn't make it in time to find a spot inside the church, a squat building that was originally designed as a high school cafeteria. The parking lot is also overflowing with cars; every marked spot is taken, forcing dozens to park their vehicles haphazardly on the grass or in more orderly fashion outside the churchyard curbside along two of the neighborhood’s busiest commercial corridors. Nearer to the building a few women oversee small temporary food stands and a few others sell novena manuals and icons of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, while a group of adolescents take to the basketball court for a pickup game of hoops; beyond them several people pray the rosary before the grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes. All of these activities ensure that, even between each Sunday’s five masses, Notre Dame and the vicinity teem with Haitian life.

But, the main draw is the mass. Men and women, the elderly and the youth, families and singles, all crowd inside the church. Eventually they are swaying to music driven by Vodou drums that infuse the congregation with African rhythms, joyfully singing hymns of praise in French and Haitian Creole. The homily is bilingual, primarily in Creole, but also in English for the second-generation youth who prefer it. Although Notre Dame continues to attracts more Haitians than any other Roman Catholic Church in South Florida, and though it remains the spiritual home and springboard to new lives for thousands of Haitian immigrants in Miami, there are many more Haitians now living elsewhere in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Miami, which currently offers Creole and French masses at no fewer than fourteen other churches.

Because Saint-Domingue, later the Republic of Haiti, was born out of the French colonial project that enslaved hundreds of thousands
of Africans and Creoles, historically Haiti has been a predominately Roman Catholic—and Vodouist—country, although Protestantism also has a long history in the Caribbean nation and has grown considerably influential over the last three generations. All of these historical and contemporary religious and demographic realities are increasingly transnational as evinced by the scores of Haitian Protestant churches in Miami. Little Haiti, a 50-x-12 block swath of inner-city Miami that despite the spread of Haitians and Haitians Americans throughout South Florida, remains the densest concentration of Haitians outside of Haiti. It is home to over one hundred Haitian Protestant churches, most of them located along the neighborhood’s chief commercial corridors, though some are tucked away less visibly on side streets in private homes, which are transformed into sanctuaries for worship services on Sundays. A few of them we have managed to find only because the inspired sermons preached by their pastors or the lively hymns sung by their choirs are amplified by loudspeakers and echo down the streets, beckoning the wayward and the seeker alike.

Though fewer by far, there are scattered among Little Haiti’s churches about a dozen botanicas, religious goods stores that cater to practitioners of African-derived religions, in this case Vodou, the religion of a slight but declining majority among Haiti’s national population and one of the three sides to what Drexel Woodson (1993: 157) refers to as a “religious triangle of forces” that pervades Haitian society and culture. To be sure, Vodou is alive and well in Miami, as testified not just by the city’s Haitian botanicas but by the home-based and ambulatory practices of the estimated two hundred oungan and manbo (priests and priestesses) who currently lead that faith in South Florida, and by a few operative temples. And, even among those Haitian Christians in Miami who reject Vodou as satanic, belief in its reality is no less forceful in the diaspora than in Haiti. Indeed, comments made to us by several Little Haiti residents that while doing our fieldwork, we should be careful to avoid the Sabel Palm Court housing complex for fear of encountering loup garou or zonbi (werewolves and zombies of Vodouist lore) in that densely populated part of the neighborhood. We have been left to wonder whether residents of the neighboring Jewish nursing home are aware of such nemeses!

All of these churches, botanicas, practices, and beliefs powerfully reflect how central religion is to most Haitians and Haitian Americans
in Miami. Survey data indicates that the majority of Haitian immigrants in Miami attend religious services more than once a week, making them one of the most (if not the most) religiously active immigrant groups in the United States (Stepick 1998).2 In her extensive fieldwork among transnational religious communities comprised of Haitians in Palm Beach County, Florida, and Leogane, Haiti, Karen Richman (2005a; 2007) similarly concludes that for most Haitian immigrants in South Florida, the church itself is central to life, perhaps even more so than it had been in the homeland. Less scientifically, we have taken numerous visitors of a wide array of ethnic and economic backgrounds to Sunday church services and/or botanicas in Little Haiti, and almost all of them have remarked to us how devout and “spiritual” they find Haitians in Miami to be. We taught at Florida International University, a public university in southwest Miami, which probably has more Haitian and Haitian American students than any other university in the United States. There we often found that asking Haitian students, especially those who were shy or withdrawn, about their churches invariably inspired fairly open conversation—the ultimate ice-breaker, as it were.

This book is a historical and ethnographic study of Haitian religion in Miami, based on many years of formal fieldwork in the city as well as in Haiti, and extensive archival research. While intending generally to contribute to our understanding of “new immigrant” religion in the United States—an interdisciplinary academic field that has received much attention over the past twenty-five years—more particularly our study aims to advance our understanding of Haitian religion, with especial contributions in mind for two subcategories of the study: (1) Haitian immigrant religion in the United States, and (2) Haitian religion approached holistically, that is, in consideration of the three major forms of Haitian religion taken together, namely Catholicism, Protestantism, and Vodou. Toward developing our thinking and research design of Haitian religion in the United States, we have benefited handsomely from several excellent studies on the topic, namely single-authored books by Karen McCarthy Brown (1991), Elizabeth McAlister (2006), Karen Richman (2005b), and Margarita Mooney (2011). The first three of these books focus primarily on Haitian Vodou and are based in large part on fieldwork in Haiti, although Richman’s also contains important discussions of Protestantism, while Mooney’s study focuses
on immigrant Haitian Catholics in three diasporic locations, including Miami, the chief site of our own research. Like all four of these scholars, our methodological approach has been primarily ethnographic, based on extensive participant observation and many interviews.

In our conceptual orientation, we follow the leads of Paul Brodwin (1996) and André Corten (2001) in seeking to view Haitian religion as a whole, despite a sometimes violent history of strife between Catholicism, Protestantism, and Vodou. Brodwin and Corten, too, both approached their subjects ethnographically, and their studies are focused entirely on religion in Haiti. Thus, *Crossing the Water and Keeping the Faith* is in part patterned on these two subcategories of the study of Haitian religion, even though it moves beyond the first in approaching Haitian immigrant religion holistically, and beyond the second by doing so while focusing on Haitian religion in Miami. Consequently, making any sense of Haitian religion in Miami required us to make numerous trips to Haiti over the years, the religious lives of Haitian immigrants being so profoundly transnational. And, at the end of it all, we make two central novel arguments: (1) that underlying and transcending religious difference in Haiti and the Haitian diaspora there can be identified a unifying *Haitian religious collusio*, and (2) that Haitian religion in the diaspora is largely explicable in terms of the generation of and quest for “salvation goods” in the form of luck (*chans*), magic (*majì*), protection, health, prosperity, and, especially, *worthiness*.

A Word on Haitian Religious Demographics

A tired cliché has it that “Haitians are 90 percent Catholic, 10 percent Protestant, and 100 percent Vodouist.” In its wild statistical inaccuracy, this popular myth greatly oversimplifies the transnational Haitian religious field. In reality, the best statistical data on religion in Haiti clearly demonstrates that the community of Protestants throughout the country, who generally condemn Vodou as diabolical, has blossomed in the last three decades to constitute roughly one-third of the entire national Haitian population (Hurbon 2001: 126). In light of the putatively traditional reluctance of Haitians to reveal their Vodouist affiliation to social scientists and journalists, these figures are as sound as one can have on the percentage of Vodouists in Haiti by way of subtraction: If
Protestants generally do not practice Vodou (practice here defined as routinely performing devotions to spirits and/or ancestors and not as merely the occasional consultation with an oungan or manbo), then at a maximum, Vodouists today constitute three-fourths of the Haitian population, though probably considerably less than this because there are more katolik fran (lit. “frank Catholics”—Haitian Catholics who do not also practice Vodou) than is generally acknowledged in scholarly or journalistic literature. Judging by the proliferation of Haitian Protestant storefront churches in cities like Boston, Chicago, Miami, Montreal, Newark, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, the figure is certainly even higher in the Haitian diaspora.

This proliferation of Protestant storefront churches in the Haitian diaspora is hardly surprising in light of the statistical data available on religion in Haiti. From 1982 to 1997, for instance, the number of Protestants in the Haitian capital city of Port-au-Prince, home to roughly one-fourth of country’s total population, had doubled to nearly 40 percent of the city’s total population (Houtart and Rémy 1997: 34); rural statistics from around the same time indicate that the Protestant population in Haiti was then between 27 percent and 33 percent (Woodson and Baro 1996: 54; 1997: 38). With no indications of any subsequent decline in Protestant affiliation either in Port-au-Prince or the countryside, one could reasonably estimate that today Haiti is already more than one-third Protestant and, as François Houtart and Anselm Rémy (1997: 35) conclude in one of the two largest demographic studies of religion conducted in the country, that “Haiti is on pace to becoming a country of a Protestant majority.” Furthermore, as Drexel Woodson and Mamadou Baro (1996: 54) assert in the other study, because throughout Haiti “the mixture of sèvis lwa [Vodou] with Protestantism is rare,” and because many Haitian Protestants consider Vodou to be satanic and the source of Haiti’s many trials and tribulations, including the tragic 2010 earthquake, it is likely that more than one in three people in Haiti today (and certainly more in the Haitian diaspora), does not practice Vodou. If we add to this population the number of katolik fran in Haiti, it would appear that today Vodouists in Haiti constitute a slight but seemingly declining majority of the population, far from “100 percent,” certainly.

That said, most people in Haiti still practice Vodou; many others nominally and/or situationally enter the religion, usually for guidance,
healing, or protective magic. Nonetheless, just about everyone’s understanding of the universe and her place and purpose therein is influenced in some way by the religion, which is a cornerstone of the Haitian religious collusio. Pierre Bourdieu (2000: 145) coined the term “collusio” to mean “an immediate agreement in ways of judging and acting which does not presuppose either the communication of consciousness, still less a contractual decision, [which] is the basis of practical understanding, the paradigm of which might be the one established between members of the same team, or, despite the antagonism, all the players engaged in the game.” And, even among Haitian Evangelicals or Pentecostals who demonize Vodou, there is little or no doubt that Vodou is real—that it effectively accesses and negotiates a supernatural reality that is objectively existent. Thus like any nationally popular religion, Vodou’s ethos spreads well beyond the confines of the personal and communal spiritual lives of its actual practitioners. This is very much the case in Haiti, and to a noticeably lesser extent, it remains the case in Haitian Miami. Comparatively speaking, Vodou functions for most Haitians, whatever their religious persuasion, somewhat like Calvinism does in the United States for Americans of an even wider range of religious or secular commitments: although not all Americans are Calvinists, the Protestant work ethic, inspired in large part by Calvinist theology, broadly influences how Americans of all ethnic and religious backgrounds understand life. So, just as many American Christians can believe that money is the root of all evil while being nevertheless materialistically self-indulgent in good conscience, so do some Haitian Pentecostals use their Bibles as amulets much like their Vodouist ancestors would have used a gourd filled with water or a packet of leaves. We know, for instance, of some illiterate botipiel who attribute their successful crossing of the water to Miami to pocket-sized copies of the New Testament that they carried with them at sea. Of course, such forms of maji do not always work, as reflected in one journalist’s description of the tragic scene of the drowning of thirty-three Haitian migrants just off shore from Hillsboro Beach in 1981: “Lying near the body of one expectant mother was a waterlogged burlap sack containing a small cellophane bag of hair curlers and a small, blue soft-bound New Testament” (Gersuk 1981).
Conceptualizing a Haitian Religious Collusio

Not all Haitians are religiously devout; in fact, we personally know a few Haitians who are atheists or agnostics, and one of us recalls hearing the owner of a travel agency in Port-au-Prince reject his employees’ request for a day off on a major Catholic feast day by dismissing the widely popular national Catholic tradition as “a bunch of superstition” (yon pakèt superstitison). Yet, for most Haitians in Miami, as in Haiti, religion is a central guiding force in life. Furthermore, over the course of many years of research and living in Miami and in Haiti, we have come to believe that even though the forms of worship in which Haitians and Haitian Americans engage are diverse and sometimes theologically and socially at odds with one another, there is a generally shared substratum of features that runs beneath this diversity and animosity.

In conversation with our own field experience, a careful review of the literature on religion in Haiti and the Haitian diaspora would seem to confirm this sense that there is indeed, across religious difference, something like a Haitian religious collusio. It would not be unfair to think of collusio as a kind of collective habitus, or at least as the predictable and relative uniformity of habitus of all members of a given delineated collectivity or social status group, be it family, class, race, or ethnicity. By habitus, which is perhaps Bourdieu’s (1977: 95) most signature theoretical notion, is meant the “matrix of perception” through which one makes sense of the world and the seat or generator of one’s dispositions, inclinations, and tastes.

Because it unites people even across denominational difference and “antagonisms” and permits people on opposing “teams” to play on the same playing “field,” collusio is a much better concept to use in speaking about Haitian religion holistically than the related notion of habitus, which is more individualized, though as thoroughly socially constructed, in Bourdieu’s theory of practice. More specifically, Bourdieu (1971: 319) conceives of the religious habitus as “the principal generator of all thoughts, perceptions and actions consistent with the norms of a religious representation of the natural and supernatural worlds.” To speak of a generalized Haitian religious habitus would gloss over very real and important differences between a Haitian Catholic habitus, a Haitian Protestant habitus, and a Haitian Vodouist habitus, the notion
of habitus being fundamentally about perception and inclination. For example, a Haitian Catholic habitus will incline a Haitian Catholic to reach for the holy water and cross herself upon entering a Catholic church, but a Protestant habitus would not. The habitus of a Haitian Protestant who comes across a Vodou ceremony would not incline him to perceive of what is happening as holy and would likely incline him instead either to leave or to denounce what he perceives. A Vodouist habitus, furthermore, inclines one to perceive of both a Vodou temple and a Catholic church as sacred spaces, whereas a Protestant habitus would not. A Vodouist habitus would likely not incline a Vodouist to enter a Protestant church, but if he did so, he would not perceive of a great deal of religious capital, there being neither icons of saints nor much other religious paraphernalia there. These are real differences that a claim for a unifying Haitian religious habitus would unsoundly mask, distort, or deny; however, what is still shared is a Haitian religious collusio, a collusio in which Catholic, Protestant, and Vodouist religious habitus all operate. “As such, habitus is the basis of an implicit collusion among all the agents who are the products of similar conditions and conditionings, and also a practical experience of the transcendence of the group” (Bourdieu 2000: 145, emphasis in original). Put otherwise by Catherine Robinson (2002: 9), “habitus and a commonality of experience are important in the production of collusio, a collusion of subjects which in turn assures the shared investment, and maintenance of, the habitus.” Furthermore, for Bourdieu (1992b: 110), “everything is social” and socially constructed, and so characteristics of the members of any given collectivity can generally be explained in terms of the socially (and culturally, politically, religiously, and economically) environmental factors that shape them. Members and participants in any given collectivity thereby coherently belong and participate by virtue of collusio, or the shared “feel for the game” that their common socializations have inculcated into their habitus (Bourdieu 1992a: 66). Whether that habitus be Haitian Catholic, Haitian Protestant, or Haitian Vodouist, it operates according to the generalized contours of the Haitian religious collusio, “the collective and tacitly affirmed understanding of ‘the done thing’” in Haitian religion conceived of holistically (Rey 2007: 154).

The Haitian religious collusio consists in large part of a “a practical sense” (Bourdieu 1980) that life in this world is inhabited by invisible,
supernatural forces that are to be served and which can be called upon and operationalized toward healing ills, mitigating plight, enhancing luck, and achieving goals. In one of the only two other major ethnographic studies of Haitian religion to engage at once Catholicism, Protestantism, and Vodou, Brodwin (1996: 1) reaches a similar conclusion that central to such a collusio lies a disposition to turn to religion for healing, one that inclines Haitians in general “to ally themselves with a morally upright source of healing power—connect to one or another spiritual being—and ardently denounce the competing religious options.” In the other study, Corten (2001: 30) aims to understand Haitian religion holistically and to identify long-standing and/or emergent unifying threads across Haitian religious diversity. He, like Brodwin, concludes that in being confronted with ever deepening levels of poverty and despair, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Vodou in Haiti all operate “around a persecutory conception of evil: occult forces persecute us, and one must protect oneself.”

In this conceptual scheme, the meaning or purpose of religion is thus inflected by one’s social position. For those who are privileged, religion serves to legitimate their status—a sense that they are worthy of their privileged social positions. For those who are not so materially fortunate, religion functions to provide a sense of dignity that may be otherwise absent—a sense that they are worthy in spite of it all; as such, Weber (1963: 106) states that religion provides members of “dis-privileged classes” with “a worthiness that has not fallen their lot, they and the world being what it is.” Religious habitus thus inclines people to embrace symbolic systems that pronounce for them their worthiness, systems that are predicated upon the existence of supernatural forces, and thus orient their lives in accordance with them. When laypersons embrace the symbolic systems of a given religious institution, say, the Catholic Church, as legitimate, they do so, according to Bourdieu’s theory of the “religious field,” because that institution has secured in them the recognition (or the “misrecognition”) that it possesses “religious capital.” Fundamentally a form of power to consecrate and thereby produce salvation goods for one’s consumption, this religious capital in turn ensures adherence to the Church instead of the “heresiarch.” In such recognition lies the key to a given religious institution’s gaining the upper hand in the competition over souls that structures any given religious field (Rey 2004; 2007).
Immigrant Religion, Symbolic Capital, and Salvation Goods

For immigrants, religious congregations clearly can be a source of social support, solace, and identity formation, as numerous studies have demonstrated (e.g., Abdullah 2010; Kurien 1998; Min 2005). These forms of support can be conceived of different kinds of “symbolic capital,” for example, as resources that can be transformed or “transubstantiated” into material capital (Bourdieu 1983; Coleman 1988; Portes 1998). Many immigrants benefit from social relations forged in American churches by landing jobs, finding affordable babysitting, or accessing professional medical care at free health fairs. Immigrant congregations are thus commonly the sites of the formation of social capital that is utilized in the adaptation to the host society (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000b; Richman 2005a). Korean immigrants, for example, develop and reinforce social ties through their churches that they self-consciously use for business purposes (Chai 2000; Hurh and Kim 1990; Kim and Kim 2001; Kwon, Ebaugh, and Hagan 1997; Min 2000; Suh 2001; Yoo 1998). And, in fortifying relations in these ways in diasporic contexts, religious congregations often provide immigrants with an arena for the maintenance of their homeland cultural identity, wherein they also accrue these and other forms of symbolic capital.

Whether or not they employ these theoretical concepts explicitly, most studies of immigrant religious life in fact focus primarily on symbolic capital. The literature broadly demonstrates religion’s role in reinforcing and perpetuating migrants’ ties to the homeland culture as a mechanism for both easing the psychological distress occasioned by immigration and providing a community of co-ethnics who can assist each other in adjusting to life while retaining ties to those they left behind (e.g., Chou 1991; Legge 1997; Min 2005). Jay Dolan (1992: 153) finds that certain nineteenth-century letters of first-generation Italian immigrants in New York reflected an “understanding of the afterlife as a place of reunion” that mirrored immigrants’ separation from their loved ones in the homeland. Religion has thus served to tie immigrants to each other socially and to the homeland symbolically (see also, e.g., DeMarinis and Grzymala-Moszczynska 1995; Tweed 1997), just as it has helped provide a meaningful sociocultural identity, thereby reinforcing immigrant ethnic and national home country identities (e.g., Al-Ahmary 2000; Tiryakian 1991).
During the “old immigration” (i.e., at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries), the American Catholic Church self-consciously created ethnic parishes that made it easier for immigrants to continue practicing their faith (e.g., Juliani 2007; Orsi 1988; Tomasi 1975). Such is no longer formally the practice in Catholic archdioceses and dioceses in the United States, but in reality many churches in America remain effectively ethnic parishes. As Ann Chih Lin and Amaney Jamal (2001) indicate, for contemporary immigrants religion indeed continues to forge cultural identity and social purpose (see also Bankston 1997). Congregations that immigrants attend often are (or soon become) perceived locally as serving a particular ethnic group, often in languages that exclude native-born Americans. Mainly for social and cultural reasons, though often also for less obvious theological ones, such congregations naturally draw people of similar ethnic composition to those already seated in the pews. In all, immigrants and religion are almost invariably closely linked in contemporary America (as has generally been the case throughout American history), and this is especially true in the case of Haitians in Miami.

The study of Haitian religion in immigrant contexts can shed useful light on the function of religion for other groups among “the new immigrants” in the United States. Haitian immigrants in Miami are not unique in attending church more frequently than native-born Americans. Carl Bankston and Min Zhou (2000) observe that Vietnamese Catholics in New Orleans attend with similar frequency, as do Korean immigrants, mostly as Presbyterians (Kim and Kim 2001) in that case. Reasons offered to explain such high church attendance among Korean religious practice in the United States might help us understand Haitian immigrant religion. Nationwide surveys of Presbyterians reveal that 70 percent of first-generation Koreans in Los Angeles are members of Korean ethnic churches in the United States, in part because such denominational affiliation not only generates social capital for adherents but also aids in the assimilation process in a majority Christian host society (Hurh and Kim 1984; see also Min 1992; Kim and Kim 2001). The scholarly literature further demonstrates that many Koreans adopt Christianity upon migrating to the United States, and that the maintenance of national cultural identity is a driving force in the preponderance of Korean religion in America (Min 2005: 99). These religious
trends among Korean immigrants, in our view, also help explain why Haitian immigrants in Miami are so religious and why a smaller percentage practice Vodou in South Florida than in Haiti. Richman (2003; 2005a; 2005b) notes a trend among Haitian immigrants in West Palm Beach of abandoning Vodouist devotions in part to gain better control over remittances that they send to Haiti. Likewise in Miami, we have heard some recent Haitian immigrants witness in churches that they are committing themselves to Christ as part of the new life that they hope to make in America for themselves and their families. This sometimes is stated when newcomers at Protestant church services are asked to stand, introduce themselves, and say what brings them there on this particular Sunday (or Saturday, in the case of Seventh Day Adventists). At one worship service in 2005 at the Philadelphia Church of God, a Haitian storefront located on NE 54th Street in Little Haiti, for instance, one young man stood and explained: “I am here because I am looking for a church where I can rest my weary head. I don’t speak English and had a very hard time coming to Miami. I am tired of the lwa and that old stuff [vye bagay sa yo]; I came here looking for life and I want a new life in Jesus.”

In this book, we reify such general findings in the scholarly literature on religion and the new immigrants by carefully describing and theorizing the religious lives of Haitian immigrants in Miami, while highlighting an additional factor that is perhaps somewhat unique to them among immigrant communities in general: Among Haitian Catholics, Protestants, and Vodouists alike, Haiti is conceived of as being a place of profound religious importance, whether as a nation chosen by God to act out some divine plan (McAlister 2012), as a site of choice for Marian apparitions (Rey 1999; 2002), or as the residing place of Vodou spirits and the dead, who are both deeply tied to the land (Lowenthal 1988; Richman 2007). This conceptualization among Haitian immigrants serves to deepen the religious aspect of their transnational lives. Some salvation goods, in fact, can be acquired only in Haiti, while others still are of greater value if acquired in the homeland than in the diaspora. There seems to be, from the perspective of Haitian immigrants in Miami, more religious capital in Haiti than in the United States, which is one reason why church attendance increases considerably when a priest or pastor from the homeland is in Miami to preach or celebrate mass.
Bourdieu (1991: 22, emphasis in original) perceives of religious capital as “power durably to modify the representations and practices of laypersons by inculcating in them a religious habitus. This religious capital is the generative basis of all thoughts, perceptions, and actions conforming to the norms of a religious representation of the natural and supernatural world.” Put otherwise, religious capital is the power possessed by religious institutions and their ordained representatives to produce “salvation goods” and effectively market them to the laity in the “religious field.” Derived from Weber, by the term “salvation goods” (*Heilsguten/biens de salut*), Bourdieu means especially sacraments and any officially recognized membership in an ecclesial community, which is regarded as requisite to salvation (Stöltz 2008). The concept proves especially useful for understanding the transnational Haitian religious field when one considers the etymology of the word “salvation.” The first thought that the word usually brings to mind is that of heaven, of being redeemed from sin and delivered to an eternal life of glory with God. Indeed, Catholic sacraments are important salvation goods in this sense of the word, though etymologically “salvation” connotes health, vitality, wholeness, and well-being, along with holiness. As Leonard Swidler (1992: 16) explains:

The term comes from the Latin *salus*, “health,” whence a number of English and Romance cognates are derived, all fundamentally referring to health: salutary, salubrious, salute, salutation. The Germanic counterpart is *Heil*, “salvation,” and as an adjective *heilig*, “holy,” whence the English cognates health, hale, heal, whole, holy. To be “holy” means to be (w)hole. “Salvation” ultimately means attaining, preserving or restoring a healthy, holy, whole human life—however understood.

To drive home the relevance of these etymological observations for the study of Haitian religion, we allude to conclusions reached by Brodwin (1996) and Brown (1989) respectively that *healing* is an ultimate concern in Haitian religion (in Brown’s case the reference is to Vodou alone). More generally speaking, in African and African-derived contexts, religion is likewise fundamentally about helping people live whole lives through infusing those lives with a force that derives ultimately from God on high, a holy force accessed chiefly through communal
ritual, a force that is called uzima in Swahili, nguya in Lingala, ashe in Yoruba, and nam in Haitian Creole (Murphy 1993; Tempels 1959; Washington 1972).

In employing the concept of salvation goods, we intend for these etymological considerations to be kept in mind. It should also be noted that the notion of religious capital as understood in the Weber-Bourdieu lineage differs markedly from the ways in which leading proponents of microeconomic theory of use the term, viewing religious capital as the personal religious know-how of the laity (e.g., Stark and Finke 2002; Iannaccone 1992). Whereas Bourdieu conceives of the “religious field” as a sociocultural arena dominated by institutions that horde religious capital, meaning that the religious field is shaped from the top down, American economists and sociologists of religion, like Laurence Iannaccone and Rodney Stark, generally portray “religious markets” as being shaped largely by consumer demand, markets in which local churches compete with one another over “consumers” and in which both the church leaders (“CEOs”) and the consumers act rationally in the religious market “so as to maximize their net benefit” (Iannaccone, 1992: 124). This differs significantly from Bourdieu’s position that religion is ultimately gerrymandered to benefit ruling classes in capitalist societies. Generally speaking, microeconomic theory of religion, “a powerful theoretical paradigm for understanding why certain faith-based organizations thrive while others stagnate and fail” (Chesnut 2003: 7), is a straightforward extension of rational choice theory, which has affected all social science disciplines, most obviously economics (popularized in the recent Freakonomics book and subsequent columns and blogs [Levitt and Dubner 2009]). In plainer words, it argues that peoples’ behaviors are rational in that they calculatingly choose what best fits their needs among a range of available alternatives.

In applying rational choice theory to religion generally and to Haitian diasporic religion particularly, we find it to be of some limited utility, notwithstanding certain compelling criticisms that some scholars have made of this approach (e.g., Bruce 2002, 1999; Chaves 1995; Sharot 2002). In particular, there is a wide range of religious congregations and worship styles in Miami from which Haitians immigrants may choose, and there are surely reasons why some are more attractive to them than others. Some individual Haitian immigrants do actively choose a
church because it may have a more engaging, emotional style of worship, although such choices are dictated at least as much by “practical sense” and inclined as much by habitus and collusio as by rational calculation (see chap. 5).

Among Haitian immigrants in Miami, the tremendous popularity of Notre Dame d’Haiti Catholic Church can be soundly explained less in terms of the choices of those who worship there than in the powerful resonance between its leadership’s ecclesiology and political vision, and the religious habitus of Catholic Haitian immigrants settling in Little Haiti (see chap, 2). Notre Dame’s founding priest, Msgr. Thomas Wenski, who is now the archbishop of Miami, combined extensive pastoral and social service work with engaged preaching that addressed political issues in Haiti while shepherding Notre Dame. At the same time, Notre Dame d’Haiti and some of Miami’s Haitian Protestant churches are so large that they incorporate a number of different worship styles and programs, and offer prayer services in different languages (Haitian Creole, English, and, to a lesser extent, French). They offer both social services and worship, and they orchestrate traditional worship and charismatic services at different times—something for everyone, as it were.

Because of this complex diversity across and within congregations, it is difficult to apply rational choice theory of religion toward developing a holistic understanding of Haitian religion in Miami. Should it focus on congregations or particular activities within congregations? Should we examine what individuals do most commonly or the look at the entire range of what they do, even if that varies considerably? Should one give priority to congregational worship or to “lived religion” (Orsi 2003)? We argue and document in the following chapters that there is some ecclesiological and sociological resonance between given congregations and the religious tastes of people in their pews or peristil (temples); while hardly surprising, this resonance is not always demonstrably “rational” because believers are themselves often unclear about their “choices” of a given congregation over all others. We demonstrate, for example, that individuals often attend a particular congregation for emotional “reasons.” To some, this might amount to an oxymoron that invalidates rational choice theory. For others, it might simply confirm a weaker version of rational choice theory in demonstrating that there is indeed a demonstrable link between motivations and religious practice.
Moreover, many people cannot articulate their reasons for attending a particular church, or they may only do so inconsistently and incompletely. Some simply state that it’s because a friend recommended it, only to later reveal that they also received advice on how to find a job, attend free language classes or health fairs, that there are occasionally visiting pastors from their home region, or that they heard rumors that a certain pastor might have magical prayers to help secure a green card, and a nearly endless number of other so-called rationalizations.

Furthermore, microeconomic theories of religion do not address what produces the market in the first place, or what forces create and maintain the choices available, and limit or even eliminate other choices. We find that some religious institutions have considerable resources that promote them and make them “obvious” choices. For example, the Roman Catholic Church had a strong, visible presence in Miami before any Haitian boat people showed up on Florida shores, and when they began arriving in large numbers in the late 1970s and early 1980s, they had practically nowhere else to turn—they had little or no choice. Some observers and advocates criticized the Church for responding slowly and inadequately to the influx of largely Catholic Haitians, but when it did respond, it created what became the largest, most influential religious institution in the Haitian diaspora, Notre Dame d’Haiti. Some emergent Haitian Protestant churches also drew upon resources from larger church bodies in the United States through denominational affiliation, like Grace United Methodist Church, but other religious institutions have been entirely on their own, as were virtually all Vodouist congregations. This means that the place of some institutions in the religious market is much less visible and that their lack of comparative “success,” as measured by size, may be more reflective of deficient material resources than of any lack of religious capital that they possess or any devaluation of the salvation goods that they have to offer.

For everything else that it might be from their own theological perspectives, for most Haitian immigrants, from a sociological perspective, religion can said to provide symbolic capital as a substitute for material capital and a springboard to obtaining material capital, and also to furnish the assurance of worthiness in a world that denies them a material sense of worthiness—a key salvation good in immigrant religion, especially for Haitians in Miami. That most Haitians suffer
material deprivation is widely documented (e.g., Fass 1988; Francisque 1986; Maternowska 2006). Most Haitians, whether in Haiti or in the diaspora, inhabit and negotiate unequal and often oppressive socio-economic worlds in which their labors are exploited or in which they turn to uncertain market enterprises in the “informal sector” (Lundhal 1992; Manigat 1997; Trouillot 1990). The present study does not cover such social conditions in Haiti, but it does consider the racial discrimination and prejudice that Haitians have been forced to confront and endeavor to overcome in South Florida, which they have largely done with admirable success. These realities should be kept in mind when considering the rather impressive statistic that nearly 90 percent of Haitian immigrants in Miami attend church at least monthly (Stepick and Portes 1986: 346). The data thus demonstrates that religion is a critical, central component of the lives of many, indeed most, Haitian immigrants in the United States, and our findings in Miami only corroborate this. We thus hypothesize that, in general, the deeper the discrimination that any given immigrant group experiences upon arrival in the United States, the greater value that salvation goods in the form of worthiness will have. This is not to propose yet another iteration of tired deprivation theories of religion; wealthy Haitians are also generally very religious people, and, although our hypothesis is based on a premise that material deprivation plays an important role in Haitian religion, it does not follow that religious practice among Haitian immigrants in Miami amounts to any form of escapism, fatalism, or “alienation,” as Marxist theory would suggest (see chap. 1). Instead, their religious practice indeed yields demonstrable material benefits.

Haitians in South Florida

Today there are roughly half a million Haitians and Haitian Americans living in Florida, more than in any other state in the country. Many of them arrived as refugees and started their new lives in Little Haiti, where almost invariably they received material assistance from local churches’ social programs and spiritual fulfillment in the form of sacraments administered by a Catholic priest, healing hands laid upon them by a Protestant pastor, or divination performed by a Vodou priestess: these are salvation goods. South Florida’s Haitian community is the
largest in the United States and the largest beyond the island of Hispaniola, where roughly 10 million people live in Haiti and another million Haitians live across the border in the Dominican Republic. But it is only relatively recently that Haitians made South Florida such a key part of their diaspora, and they did so against tremendous odds, in one of the most negative contexts of reception that America has ever created for immigrants.

Like most Caribbean islanders, Haitians have a long history of migration out of their homeland. Until the late 1950s there were almost no Haitians in the United States. However, there were a few important exceptions in the forms of the occasional migrations of groups or individuals who made their marks on earlier American history. For example, Jean Baptiste Point Du Sable (1750–1818), born in Saint Marc, Saint-Domingue, migrated as a young man to the largely unsettled Northwest, establishing a trading post on the banks of the Chicago River where it feeds into Lake Michigan. This station was thriving enough by 1776 to earn Du Sable the title of “Founder of Chicago.” The pioneering naturalist John James Audubon (1785–1851) was also born in Saint-Domingue, as Jean-Jacques Audubon, on his father’s sugar plantation in Les Cayes, and he immigrated to Philadelphia, via France, in 1803. Audubon found a thriving francophone community in Philadelphia, one with deep ties to Saint-Domingue. Meanwhile, during the Haitian Revolution, which raged intermittently between 1791 and 1804 and transformed Saint-Domingue into the Republic of Haiti, several thousand French colonists fled the conflict, many of them bringing some of their African and Creole slaves with them, and they settled in New Orleans and Philadelphia. In New Orleans, some of these Dominguean refugees contributed to the development of the American version of Vodou (“Voodoo”), for which the Big Easy is famous. Yet, these migrations were far more French than African-descended experiences and as such they did not produce an enduring Haitian community in the States.

Not until the 1960s did substantial Haitian communities begin to appear in American cities, primarily New York but also Boston and Chicago. Given that during the last quarter of the twentieth century the American government so actively deterred Haitians from arriving in South Florida, it is painfully ironic that the first major migration of Haitians to the States was abetted by the American Embassy in
Haiti during the early 1960s. François “Papa Doc” Duvalier assumed the Haitian presidency in 1957 and soon initiated a thoroughly vicious campaign of oppression against potential and perceived political enemies, driving many into exile. In response, the Kennedy administration instructed the U.S. embassy in Haiti to ease entry requirements for Haitians seeking visas, a process parallel to what was already in place in Cuba and in the neighboring Dominican Republic. Most of these early migrants from Haiti were professionals and members of their country’s mulatto elite; they were soon followed by members of the nation’s newly emergent black middle class. Changes in U.S. immigration law in 1965 allowed immigrants to sponsor relatives, and gradually the flow of émigrés from Haiti became more socioeconomically diverse, with seven thousand Haitians gaining permanent residency and twenty thousand more securing temporary visas each year by the end of the decade (Stepick 1998: 4).

At that time, Miami and all of Florida was deeply embroiled in the civil rights struggle, with segregation just beginning to be legally dismantled and with anti-black racism still widespread. The city was very much a part of the Deep South, with “whites only signs” being then “as prevalent in Miami as they were in other southern cities” (Dunne 1997: 171). Many among the early Haitian migrants were mulatto elites who had enjoyed considerable privilege in Haiti, like Morisseau-Leroy, though once settled in the United States they would be simply classified as “black” according to the informal “one-drop rule” that once dominated perceptions of race and racialized social structures. The first flows of Haitians, being fully aware of inherent racism there, thus bypassed Florida and the rest of the South; they headed to cities where they were more likely to be welcome, or at least less likely to provoke a negative reaction. New York was a first choice of black Caribbean migrants in general, some of them contributing to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s (Kasinitz 1992). In 1932, for example, Langston Hughes, one of the giants of that cultural movement, visited Haiti for several months and met the great Haitian writer Jacques Roumain, whose classic novel *Gouverneurs de la rosée* Hughes translated into English as *Masters of the Dew* (Roumain 1947).

In the wake of the dismantling of legalized segregation in the Deep South, a few Haitians from elsewhere in the United States moved to
Florida, and especially Miami, as the climate there was more similar to their homeland’s and it was much closer to Haiti than Boston, Chicago, or New York, making return trips to the native land and a transnational existence logistically easier. Yet, it was not until small boats of refugees began arriving directly from Haiti that Haitians became visible as a distinct immigrant community in South Florida. The first Haitian boat people claiming persecution in Haiti arrived in September 1963. All twenty-three on board were denied asylum and deported, however, signaling a rising swell of incipient rejection to come (Little and Newhouse al-Sahli, 2004).

Seafaring Haitian refugees, called *botpiped* in Haitian Creole (a phonetic appropriation of the English term “boat people”), were relatively few until the late 1970s. When they did begin to arrive more frequently by the end of that decade, the United States created an extremely negative context of reception, with the federal government instituting a consistent, resolute policy to keep Haitians out of South Florida. From the 1980s through the end of the twentieth century, Haitians had the highest rejection rate of political asylum petitions among all arriving national groups. Beginning in 1981, the U.S. Coast Guard began patrolling Haitian waters to intercept boats of potential refugees from Haiti, and although authorities were tasked with interviewing Haitians and reviewing their petitions for political asylum, virtually all interdicted migrants were repatriated to Haiti. As for Haitians who have managed to evade the Coast Guard and make it to Florida shores only to later be arrested, the United States routinely jails them in immigration detention centers. And this remains the case today. Contrariwise, refugees from Cuba who arrive on U.S. shores are paroled into American society and given legal papers, a contrast that we profile briefly in chapter 4.

Periodically, policies against Haitian *botpiped* have been relaxed, either under order of the federal courts or by temporary relief from the federal administration. For example, in 1980, the United States welcomed more than 125,000 Cuban migrants. Under political pressure from civil and human rights groups about disparate, racialized treatment between Cubans and Haitians, President Carter decreed that Cubans and Haitians would be treated equally. But the order applied only to those who arrived before a specific date, October 10, 1980. For quite some time, no Cuban *balseros* (rafters) arrived after that date, but
Haitian *botipel* did, and they again confronted prejudice and formidable obstacles to settling in the United States. Reportedly, an influential South Florida congressman bellowed behind closed doors at the head of what was then called the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS, now known as ICE, Immigration and Customs Enforcement), “We don’t want any more god damn black refugees in South Florida!” (Stepick 1998: 101).

Such American racism toward Haitians has a long history, which reaches to the peaks of national political power. William Jennings Bryan, President Woodrow Wilson’s secretary of state, was shocked to learn that there were actually francophone literati in Haiti, quipping in disbelief: “Imagine! Niggers speaking French!!!” One of Wilson’s military leaders of the first U.S. occupation of Haiti (1915–34), Colonel Littleton Waller was acquainted with some French-speaking Haitians and was a bit more philosophical: “These people are niggers in spite of the thin varnish of education and refinement. Down in their hearts they are just the same happy, idle, irresponsible people we know of” (in Maxwell 2004). Meanwhile, Franklin Delano Roosevelt visited Haiti in 1917 and was told by an American companion that Haiti’s minister of culture “would have brought $1,500 at auction in New Orleans in 1860 for stud purposes,” a comment that Roosevelt recounted ruefully to one of his own cabinet members when he returned to Haiti seventeen years later (Chomsky 1993: 201).

In due course, “diseased” was foregrounded among such pernicious stereotypes about Haitians, who had long been perceived of in American collective consciousness as being poor, superstitious, backwards, illiterate, and inferior. All of these stereotypes proved to be untrue of course, but the most damaging was the one that asserted Haitians were responsible for bringing AIDS into the United States. With AIDS science then in its infancy, in 1983 the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) marked Haitians as one of the special at-risk groups for carrying the communicable disease (along with homosexuals, heroin addicts, and hemophiliacs—the infamous “Four H Club”), while researchers from MIT suggested in a medical journal that the practice of “voodoo” in Haiti was in part responsible for the disease’s spread there (Farmer 1992). The CDC subsequently disavowed this list, but as so often happens, many people remembered the original news rather than the
correction, and the damage was done. In Haiti, a once-thriving tourist industry collapsed altogether, while Haitians in the United States found themselves facing new forms of racism tied to blame for allegedly bringing the dreaded disease to the country and for being themselves likely infected. Haitians were often shunned, frequently denied work, evicted, and even picketed. In high schools, the label “Haitian” became an epithet, driving many Haitian youths to deny their heritage and become “cover-ups,” with Pierres becoming Peters, Jeans becoming Johnnies, and Maries becoming Marys (Stepick 1998: 1).

Yet, the early waves of Haitian refugees in South Florida did receive some support, both locally and nationally, chiefly from civil rights organizations and churches. First to publicly advocate on behalf of Haitians were a few local African American churches. Although African Americans were generally uninterested in assisting the refugees, as Marvin Dunne (1997: 323) explains, “[a] small coalition of blacks led by the Reverend James Jenkins of Liberty City’s Friendship Missionary Baptist Church and a small group of black ministers called the Black Baptist Alliance helped to provide food, shelter, and clothing to the newcomers.” The Reverend Ray Fauntroy, the African American leader of the Miami chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Council, which had been founded by Martin Luther King Jr. in Atlanta in 1957, also “became an early and visible advocate for Haitian refugees.” Meanwhile, in 1975 the National Council of Churches (NCC) established the Christian Community Service Agency “to act as a conduit of church funds to assist Haitian refugees.” The agency would later be renamed the Haitian Refugee Center (HRC). A Haitian-born Catholic priest, Rev. Gerard Jean-Juste, became its executive director from the time he arrived in Miami from Boston in 1977 until 1990, when he left Miami for Haiti to take up a ministerial post in the national government of the newly elected president Jean Bertrand Aristide, a like-minded Catholic priest who was committed to the teachings of liberation theology.

Jean-Juste had originally left Haiti as a young man and attended seminary in Puerto Rico. In 1971, an exiled Haitian bishop in New York ordained him—the first Haitian Roman Catholic priest in the United States. After his ordination, the priest taught English to Haitians in Boston. When he moved to Miami, he criticized the local Catholic hierarchy for its failure to advocate on behalf of Haitian refugees, an
action that resulted in his being barred from saying mass in the then-Diocese of Miami, despite a dire need of Creole-speaking Catholic priests in South Florida. Throughout his time in Miami, “Pè Njeri” (Father Jerry), as he was lovingly called by botipel, relished his role as a constant reminder to the local establishment’s conscience concerning Haitians, and he was the most frequently quoted Haitian spokesmen, a charismatic leader with a keen knack for manipulating the press. His vocal opposition to the status quo eventually irked the NCC, however, such that they withdrew their funding for the HRC. The Ford Foundation stepped into the breach for the ensuing fifteen years, and the priest continued to rail against his church for failing to support immigrants.

In retrospect, Pè Njeri’s criticism is somewhat ironic in the sense that the Cuban refugee influx can be said to have created the Catholic Church in Miami. Although that is not literally true, before the arrival of Cuban refugees in Miami in the early 1960s, the Church was relatively small. The Roman Catholic Diocese, for example, was then headquartered in Palm Beach—not in Miami. Miami residents were far more likely to be Baptists (a legacy of being a southern state) or Jewish (a result of Miami’s tourism and retirement communities). But with the arrival of Cuban refugees who were fleeing a predominantly Catholic country, the Roman Catholic Church became South Florida’s first resettlement agency to be funded by the U.S. government. Whereas by Latin American standards Cubans had generally not been fervently devout in their homeland, the Catholic Church became a critical institution for them in Miami. As such, in the 1970s Haitians were not the primary social concern of local Catholic Church’s outreach ministry to immigrants. The local Catholic bishop, Msgr. Edward McCarthy, actively opposed the creation of an ethnic parish for Haitians even though he generously supported one that already existed for Cubans.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the HRC was the epicenter of political activity in Little Haiti, located on one of the neighborhood’s main commercial corridors, NE 54th Street. “Senkant Kat” (fifty-four, in Haitian Creole) became so synonymous with the HRC that many newly arriving immigrants who had no personal contacts in the city would simply seek out a Haitian cab driver (of whom there are many in Miami) and ask to be brought to Senkant Kat. When the dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier was driven out of Haiti in 1986, Haitians celebrated on Senkant Kat in
front of the HRC. When the military assumed control through repeated coups, demonstrations filled the same street each time. When Aristide campaigned for the Haitian presidency by visiting Miami in 1989, the HRC organized rallies to support him. After a coup deposed Aristide in 1991, the center organized massive marches in support of democracy. Whenever the national or local media wanted a quote concerning either Haitian refugees or politics in Haiti, they first went to the HRC.

While Jean-Juste’s and the HRC’s political activities were highly visible, the less-heralded legal services rendered by the center were more critical to the formation of Miami’s Haitian community. Much of their work involved supporting Haitian immigrants in asylum hearings through collaborations primarily with non-Haitian lawyers and Haitian legal aides. The center’s most significant efforts took the form of class-action lawsuits on behalf of Haitians’ asylum claims. These legal victories frustrated the U.S. government efforts to repress the flow of Haitians to South Florida. For example, concerning the work for HRC by a white female lawyer named Cheryl Little, one immigration official complained that “I think she should get married, get a husband, have some children, cook for him, let him support her, and help him contribute to society” (in Schmich 1991).

During the 1980s the U.S. Catholic Church, and particularly its Diocese of Miami, emerged as a forceful supporter of Haitian immigrants, offering legal services to individual Haitian immigrants and criticizing U.S. policies that discriminated against Haitians. Most of their efforts were channeled through Notre Dame d’Haiti Catholic Church and the adjoined Pierre Toussaint Haitian Catholic Center. Without the legal victories of the HRC and the criticism from the Catholic Church and others, it is likely that the U.S. government would have succeeded in its efforts and that a critical nucleus of Miami’s Haitian community never would have formed. In short, mainstream churches, namely the Roman Catholic Church and member institutions of the NCC, successfully militated against governmental efforts to keep Haitians out of, or down and out in, Miami.

As the government and advocates for *botpigel* squabbled over policies pertaining to the rights of Haitians to remain in the United States, a visible Haitian community gradually took shape in Miami, with those who managed to stave off deportation being supplemented by
secondary migrants from New York and elsewhere in the States, by new migrants coming directly from Haiti (often with relatives already settled in Miami), and by the emergence of a second generation. The densest and most visible Haitian concentration arose in what came to be known as Little Haiti, a neighborhood formerly called Lemon City, which lies within the formal municipal boundaries of City of Miami. Consisting today of a roughly 50 x 12-block inner-city zone, Little Haiti is located just north of downtown Miami, squeezed between a small, upscale, predominately white community next to Biscayne Bay on the east, the ethnically mixed and middle-class neighborhood of Miami Shores on the north, and Miami’s densest concentration of African Americans, in Liberty City, one of Miami’s poorest neighborhoods, on the west.

The Little Haiti storefronts leap out at you. Bright blues, reds, and oranges seem to vibrate to the pulsing Haitian music blaring from sidewalk speakers. The multilingual signs advertise distinctively Haitian products—rapid money-transfer to any village in Haiti, the latest Haitian music, custom-tailored French-styled fashions, and culinary delights such as lanbi nan sos (conch in Creole sauce) and griot (fried pork chunks). Murals of Haitian revolutionary heroes and Catholic saints adorn grocery stores and restaurants, and Haitian flags flutter here and there. Pedestrians abound. Places of worship pervade the neighborhood, primarily Protestant storefronts but also a few Catholic and mainstream Protestant churches and several Vodou temples in or behind botanicas or in private homes. On NE 2nd Avenue, the Caribbean Marketplace gives one a distinct feeling of actually being in a small incarnation of Port-au-Prince’s famous Iron Market.

The side streets and back alleys present a different panorama. In between a few immaculate, spruced-up houses are a majority of neglected, deteriorating dwellings. The homes are typical American Sunbelt housing from the 1940s and 1950s, mostly small, single-family, one-story bungalows on tiny lots. Many once-grassy lawns have turned to dirt, some with cars parked on them; few are in the driveways. Most blocks have a trash pile in front of at least one house. It is not too uncommon to see bullet casings, crack phials, and discarded condoms on sidewalks or curbside.

The streets of Little Haiti thus reflect some of the diversity of economic conditions for Haitians in South Florida. Many Haitians are
highly entrepreneurial and some have been quite successful in their business enterprises. But Little Haiti is a community primarily of the recently arrived and those who have not been able to move up and out of the ghetto. Haitians who live in Little Haiti are less likely than their compatriots residing elsewhere in Miami to have achieved economic prosperity. Many struggle to survive, bouncing between regular jobs in the formal sector, unemployment, and small-scale self-employment in the underground economy or the informal sector. The largest five occupational groups employing Miami-Dade Haitians are office support, building maintenance, food preparation, sales, and transportation. These are among the lowest paying occupations in the region. In fact, the five lowest-paying occupations (food preparation, farming, building maintenance, personal care, and healthcare support) employ 31 percent of Haitian workers but only 15 percent of all Miami-Dade workers.

In Miami-Dade County, the Haitian median household income is about $20,000, $16,000 less than the county’s median household income and $29,000 less than the average income of the county’s white residents. A similar disparity holds true for poverty rates. In Miami-Dade County the overall poverty rate is 18 percent, but the poverty rate for Haitians living in Miami is 37.5 percent, more than double. These figures mask the emerging diversity of Haitians and Haitian Americans in South Florida, however, particularly those Haitians immigrants who have been economically successful, some bringing much of their wealth from the homeland. The entrepreneurs and professionals who have stores or offices in Little Haiti tend to be those who have moved to other neighborhoods. Haitians and Haitian Americans in South Florida who reside outside of Little Haiti generally have more education, higher incomes, and larger homes, and they send their children to “better” schools and generally need not fear crime close to home. As more Haitians began settling in what became Little Haiti, some started moving northward to higher-income neighborhoods in communities such as Miami Springs, North Miami, and North Miami Beach, in Miami-Dade County, and Pembroke Pines, Miramar, and Wilton Manors in Broward County, which is immediately north of Miami-Dade. To the south, in Kendall and Perrine, meanwhile, a sizable middle and upper class segment of Haitian Miami has emerged, while today Palm Beach County is also home to a large Haitian community, as is the city of Orlando, much farther north, in Orange County.
By 2000, the metropolitan area that encompasses Miami-Dade County, Broward County, and Palm Beach County had become home to more than one-third of all Haitians and Haitian Americans in the United States, while the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area had just under 30 percent, with all other areas with visible Haitians populations (like Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia) each having around 5 percent, if that. Among recent Haitian immigrants, more than 70 percent enter the United States based on family relationships, while just over one-fifth arrive as refugees or asylum seekers. Moreover, more than half of Haitian-born permanent residents are eligible to become U.S. citizens, and Haitians are more likely than other immigrants to become citizens (Terrazas 2010). More Haitians than other new immigrant groups also have had some college education, and fewer Haitians than other immigrants had no high school diploma. Furthermore, Haitian immigrants today are less likely to live in poverty than other new immigrant groups. Considering the great challenges that Haitians have faced in their journeys to America, these facts are quite impressive.

Although Haitians have spread out from Little Haiti over the years, and one can find residential concentrations and Haitian businesses scattered throughout South Florida, Little Haiti remains the heart of the Haitian community. Not only is it the best place to find specifically Haitian goods and the most delicious Haitian food this side of Port-au-Prince, but it also has the densest concentration of Haitian churches in Miami. It is still the case today that, although Notre Dame remains by far Miami’s largest Haitian church, some of the most thriving Haitian religious congregations in South Florida are found outside of Little Haiti and even outside of the City of Miami, with Haitian Catholic ministries now flourishing from Homestead in the south to West Palm Beach in the north, with Protestant storefronts scattered throughout Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties, and with one of the Haitian diaspora’s most impressive Vodou temples located in the northern reaches of North Miami, several miles from Little Haiti. Our focus in this book is on Haitian religion in Miami-Dade County, with considerable material included from our field work in Haiti, necessitated because Haitian religion in Miami is so deeply transnational, such that making sense of the religious lives of Haitian immigrants requires visiting Haiti and observing religion there.
How the Book Is Organized

_Crossing the Water and Keeping the Faith_ consists of this introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion, followed by a three appendices. Chapter 1 focuses on Notre Dame d’Haiti Catholic Church in Little Haiti, which is arguably the most significant cultural institution in the Haitian diaspora, and includes coverage of relevant periods of Haitian political history in order to illustrate some of the “push” forces that led to the creation of the Haitian diaspora. Although chapter 1 focuses on the Catholic side of the Haitian religious triangle of forces in Miami, it also serves as historical background for the entire book. Chapter 2 moves beyond Notre Dame and Little Haiti to consider some of the increasingly diverse, both economically and spiritually, forms that Haitian Catholic lives are taking in Miami. Meanwhile, Chapter 3 remains on the Catholic side of the triangle, returning to Little Haiti and focusing entirely on a single week of exuberant religious celebrations at Notre Dame d’Haiti Catholic Church, which center upon the Feast of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Haiti’s patron saint.

Moving to the Vodouist side of the triangle, chapter 4 describes challenges that practitioners of Haiti’s most popular religion face in carrying on their homeland faith traditions in South Florida and the ways in which they have adapted those traditions in the diaspora. The botanica, for instance, is Vodou’s most public face in Miami, even though such stores are virtually nonexistent in Haiti, where we know of only one such business enterprise in Port-au-Prince. Because Vodou is so strongly tied to the land in Haiti, in some ways it is even more transnational than Haitian Catholicism and Haitian Protestantism, and several examples of the contours of Haitian Vodouist transnationalism are profiled in this chapter. We also discuss various ways in which the religion has found its way into Miami courtrooms, an increasingly common phenomenon.

If, as demographic statistics suggest (Woodson and Baro 1996; 1997; Houtart and Rémy 1997), Haiti’s national population is today roughly one-third Protestant, a community that has been steadily growing since World War II, we believe that the figure is even higher in the Haitian diaspora, where it may already be the case that there are as many Haitian Protestants as Catholics, and very many more Protestants than
Vodouists. Already by 1985, 40 percent of Haitian immigrants in Miami were Protestant (Stepick and Portes 1986), likely much higher than it was in Haiti at that time. Even the casual observer who tours Little Haiti cannot but be deeply impressed by how many Haitian storefront churches—nearly one hundred—are packed into the neighborhood. We have attended worship services in many of them and interviewed dozens of Haitian Protestant pastors and laypersons. We limit our focus to just two churches in an effort to illustrate more generally the place of the storefront church in Haitian life in Miami (see chap. 5).

Over the course of this book, the reader will meet several Haitian immigrant believers and a number of their most influential religious leaders. It has long been our impression that the anthropology and the sociology of religion are at their best when biography and ethnography are frequently woven into the narrative, and we have chosen to do such weaving throughout this study. We hope that our theorizing does not cloud the more important story of the place of religion in the lives of Haitian immigrants from their own perspective. If at times we sound as if we are making faith statements instead of scholarly observations, it is because we wish to reflect what is perhaps the most fundamental truth about Haitian religion in general—that it is rooted in the unshakeable faith of those who practice it, a faith that God and other spiritual beings exist and intervene in the lives of human beings, that miracles happen, and that life's ultimate meaning is religious. In other words, we are consciously following Wayne Proudfoot's (1985: 195–96) directive that in the study of religion “An emotion, practice or experience must be described in terms that can plausibly be attributed to the subject . . . terms that would be familiar to, incorporating beliefs that would be acknowledged by, the subject.” That is, we have aimed to describe Haitian religion in terms that would discursively resonate with Haitian believers themselves, though when we turn to theory and analysis, turning our efforts to explanation, as with our application of Bourdieuan or Weberian theory, this “need not be couched in terms familiar or acceptable to the subject.”

Our conclusion briefly offers some parting observations and summations of material covered in this book, driving home one of the most powerful points that one can make about Haitian immigrants in general and about their religion in particular: that what they have achieved
for themselves and for their loved ones in Haiti is nothing short of remarkable, especially in light of the extraordinary challenges that they have faced in a society that never wanted them in the first place (Stepick 1992). And, to a person, were you to ask Haitians in Miami how this has been achieved, the response would be “by the grace of God.” This answer might of course be worded in various ways depending upon individuals’ specific faith commitments, but it is nonetheless integral to the Haitian religious collusion. This achievement, furthermore, is in part responsible for the resurgence of Haitian pride that we have approvingly witnessed in recent years in Miami, where just twenty years ago it was painfully elusive, and for a decrease in the denial of Haitian identity that once plagued the first generation of bot.pipeline and their children as they sought new lives in and around Little Haiti. This is really quite an astounding and admirable testimony to the human spirit, but one that should not be so surprising coming from a people whose ancestors pulled off world history’s only successful national slave revolt. That, too, they generally attribute to God, saints, and spirits.