

UC Berkeley

Recent Work

Title

Blaxit: Black Americans build new lives in Mexico City

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1pj875pw>

Author

Rawls, Nava Iman

Publication Date

2026-05-06

Supplemental Material

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1pj875pw#supplemental>

Blaxit: Black Americans build new lives in Mexico City

Abstract:

The U.S. The Department of State estimates that around 800,000 Americans currently live in Mexico, making the nation the number one country worldwide for American Expats. Many Americans make the move due to the reduced cost of living compared to the states, but for racial minorities, namely African Americans, the culture of Mexico presents a newfound freedom from racism and discrimination. There is no specific data in the U.S. on the racial breakdown of Black expats in Mexico, but numerous [trend](#) pieces from Black outlets and social media groups suggest that more and more Black Americans are building new lives in Mexico, with the perhaps biggest community being in Mexico City. This act of Black Americans leaving the U.S. to find better lives abroad is nothing new. Black artists such as James Baldwin, Richard Wright, and Josephine Baker famously went to live in Europe, and Audre Lorde even spent a year living in Mexico City specifically. However, moving abroad isn't always perfect, and racism, classism, and xenophobia still exist throughout the globe. My piece examines how Black Americans in Mexico City are grappling with identity, and how they choose to see themselves in their newfound social position.

Additionally, with the rise of these expat communities, there has also been some contention with the Mexican people who had already been living there. The New York Times recently [published a piece](#) about increased gentrification and rising costs in the city, thanks to American travelers, and there have been increased protests and conflict with the "gringos" taking up space. This is a complicated situation for the Black Americans, who historically have faced the same kind of gentrification in their communities, and aren't traditionally seen as "gringos." In order to move to Mexico, all of the Black Americans I talked to had some financial privilege that made the move possible. Most of the sources I spoke with earned money in USD rather than pesos, making them considerably richer than the Mexicans whose neighborhoods they're moving into. It's a complicated situation, especially when American slavery is the reason many of our ancestors ended up in the U.S. in the first place. As a Black American, it's also something I personally reflected on through my reporting. My piece delves into the lives of Black expats in Mexico city and how their community is impacting the landscape of the city, and investigates if the "racial freedom" they seek is really possible to achieve.

Source List

Interviews:

- Ozy Aloziem
- Adalia Aborisade
- Nubia Younge
- Isaac Keith
- Derrick Morgan Jr.
- Lani Moran
- Lucille Renwick
- Atiyah Mcknight

Music:

- The Hairdresser by Blue Dot Sessions
- Spunker by Blue Dot Sessions

Clips

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bzLhLVvWbc&pp=ygUibWV4aWNvIGNpdHkgZ2Vu dHJpZmljYXRpb24gcHJvdGVzdA%3D%3D>
- <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C3D4WSbgHol/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/@MelaninManTravels>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/DWPIpxgE3e1/>

Script:

Blaxit: Black Americans build new lives in Mexico City

Host Intro: Since the pandemic, there's been an uptick of Black people from the U.S. moving to the capital of Mexico to live more affordable lives with less discrimination. But when protests against gentrifiers erupted in the city last summer,

(Tape of protests from newscast)

Host Intro: The growing Black community in CDMX has been forced to confront the ways their class status may hurt their new neighbors.

Nava Rawls reports.

(ACT I: WHAT'S WITH ALL THESE BLACK FOLKS IN MEXICO CITY?)

Nava: It's Caribbean night at IMBISS, a late night kitchen and bar in the Juarez neighborhood of Mexico City. Despite it being a Tuesday evening, the space is filled with a diverse crowd of people that overflows into the street. I recognize several faces from the night before, with the addition of a lot more Black people.

(scene tape)

Nava: The bar, which was filled with dancehall beats and a menu of really good fried chicken, reminded me a lot of the nights out I've spent in Oakland or Atlanta. But I was miles away from either of those places.

(Fade out tape)

Nava: The bar is owned in partnership with Derrick Morgan Jr., a Black American who was featured in [00:01:00] CNBC's "Millennial Money" series last summer.

(Clip from CNBC)

Derrick: My name is Derek Morgan Jr. I'm 34 years old and live in Mexico City. I'm on track to make more than \$350,000 a year in 2025.

Nava: That's right, \$350,000 a year working remotely in Mexico City. He has a few businesses and decided to invest in IMBISS last year.

Derrick: All the owners besides me are Mexican. I'm the only American owner. So just kind of new blood and just kind of helping out, bringing different crowds to the restaurant to help it grow.

Nava: Derrick's story was typical to others I'd heard. Originally from Illinois, he moved here at the start of the COVID pandemic in 2021.

Derrick: I was doing pro bono legal work for people that were wrongfully arrested, um, during the George Floyd protest and I was just looking at the state of the U.S. and I was like, this really is not it.

Nava: Mexico city offered warmer weather, a reduced cost of living, and some relief from the racial tensions back at home. He didn't think he would end up living in Mexico full-time, but he quickly fell in love with the city. Other Black Americans I talked to had a similar experience.

Ozy: When I moved here, I don't know that I really thought that I was moving here.

Nava: That was Ozy, a 32-year-old teacher from Denver, Colorado. In 2022, she decided to help out a friend in Mexico City who needed to sublet his apartment for a couple of months.

Ozy: I came here to take a break from the U.S., so I was like, I'm gonna go and catch my breath and heal and then maybe go to Nigeria, which is where my family is from.

Nava: Ozy did equity, diversity, and inclusion work in the U.S., much of which had been defunded since her initial move to Mexico. This pushed her to make her stay more permanent.

25-year-old Atiya Mcknight moved to CDMX from Dallas, Texas, to work as an au pair.

Atiya: I think American propaganda has done a incredible job at convincing people that they should fear what Mexico is as a country.

Nava: Atiya told me she feels much safer in Mexico City than she ever did in Dallas.

Atiya: I'm not worried about getting shot here, like I would not walk around in Dallas by myself or at nighttime.

Nava: I also spoke with Adalia Aborisade, a 50-year-old from Houston, Texas.

Adalia: I did not like living in a place where we were having debates about whether healthcare was a right or a privilege.

Nava: Even before moving to Mexico City was trendy, she felt like leaving the United States was the best choice for her quality of life. She knew her new home wouldn't be perfect, but it provided a sense of comfort.

Adalia: The reality is I am not safe anywhere because I am a woman and because I'm a black woman. But when I say I feel safer here, one thing I do not worry about is state sanctioned violence against me.

Nava: These sentiments are nothing new. Black Americans have had a long history of leaving the United States to live out their lives in countries with less racial burden. James Baldwin, Richard Wright, and Josephine Baker famously built lives in Europe to escape American racism. Audre Lourde lived in Mexico City for a year, where she described finding a profound sense of freedom. This act of expatriating is also known as "Blaxit," and it's become a popular term used by Black travel influencers on social media.

(Tape of youtube influencers talking about Blaxit)

Kevin: Hey, Kevin here from Melanin Man Travels. A Blaxit is a journey towards peace.

Blaxit Woman 1: I'm Krishan Wright, the host of the Blaxit Global Podcast,

Empowering and inspiring stories of black expats who either from fear or frustration, decided to take the road less traveled

Blaxit Woman 2: I say for any member of the diaspora who feels like their heart is calling them to a land that is other than their own, go explore it.

(Music, fade under track)

Nava: During my own exploration on this trip, I felt a sense of safety that I didn't always feel in my hometown. My reporting led me to navigating the city on my own, sometimes at night, and as a young Black woman, I felt confident that I would be fine.

As I visited stores and restaurants, it was pretty easy to get around despite my lackluster Spanish skills. I was surprised to find that most of the menus came in English, and nearly all the employees I spoke to were bilingual. I was treated with such kindness and respect, especially when people noticed my American accent. Maybe they thought my U.S. dollar could be put to good use.

(Fade music out)

Nava: A few days in the city quickly showed me how making the move could be a healing experience, but not everyone came with the intention to heal. Lani Moran, a 40 year old DJ from LA, decided to leave the US almost a decade ago.

Lani: I was working at NBC at a time and I was in a secret relationship with a coworker. And one day we were like, where could we go to express our love?

Nava: Her and her NBC love interest first moved to Guatemala before taking a fateful trip to Guerrero, Mexico.

Lani: We were able to find like a five bedroom house with like four bathrooms in a gated community with a front yard, a backyard, and like security and everything for 600 USD.

Nava: A few years after that relationship ended in 2023, Lani found herself in Mexico City, where she started DJing and creating a bigger scene for American music. She promoted her events on social media.

Lani: When people come to my events, they will say, specifically, I came because of your TikTok. I didn't know that Mexico City was like that until you were showing it on TikTok.

Nava: In the years since the pandemic, groups on Instagram, Whatsapp, and Facebook have been created for Black Americans to find community and social events throughout the city. The most well-known of these groups is Lani's, Blaxican_CDMX,.

Lani: (tiktok archival) **Black events in Mexico City this week, sponsored by the network and the Blaxican group. Last week was a lot more fun than I thought.** (fades down) (talk over instagram clip)

Nava: Her Instagram page promotes Black nightlife and cultural events throughout the week.

Lani: Monday night sessions at Cato, it's hip hop. Future Beats UK garage and groove come for the food and award-winning cocktails. Stay...

(fade out)

Nava: But, not everyone in the city feels like they're winning. On July 4, 2025, hundreds in Mexico City protested against the rise of tourism and gentrification there.

(ACT 2: GENTRIFICATION)

(CLIP FROM FRANCE 24 NEWS)

News Anchor: The message from these protestors is clear. Gentrification equals displacement, not progress. After taking to the streets earlier this month, residents in Mexico City kept up their movement on Sunday. Many say they've been priced out of their neighborhoods in part due to short term rentals and an influx of people and businesses with higher purchasing power.

(Play under track)

Nava: Residents are feeling the pressure, especially in "trendy" neighborhoods like Roma, Condesa, and Coyoacan. The protest specifically targeted "Gringos," or Americans, many of whom moved to the city as digital nomads earning USD, like 48-year-old Nubia Younge.

Nubia: I live in a neighborhood called Coyoacan, it's actually home of Frida Kalo, and I watched it on the news. I literally was in Mercado, Coyocan with, um, a friend of mine and we were having tacos and we look up and we're like, what is going on?

Like, why is this happening? Um,

I understand the frustrations, but the protests went a little too far

Nava: She told me she was alarmed by what she saw... masked demonstrators breaking windows of boutiques and restaurants and threatening tourists.

Nubia: When I got to Mexico, it was so freeing and people were so welcoming. And as a traveler, a dark skinned black woman who traveled solo, I felt safe. I would say the six years that I've been living in Mexico, I don't think I've ever seen Mexicans fight. You know, they're very tranquila like, you know, very just like chill out. Yeah. But I've never seen them outwardly, you know, react to people that way.

Nava: In 2020, she found her way to Playa Del Carmen after living in Thailand, where she started an events business for people of color.

Nubia: 25 people of color came from all over and we had such a great time that they wanted to do it again. And that turned from one event to eight events a week, 52 weeks a year for five years straight.

Nava: She moved to Mexico City last year.

Nubia: Sometimes I battle, I battle with the fact — is my presence creating a problem? Right? I have created numerous jobs for people of color and Mexican people who I believe are people of color, but, prices are going up, I've seen it.

(Transition music)

Nava: Although Black Americans systemically face racial and economic disadvantages in the U.S. all of the Black Americans I spoke to had the financial ability to move to Mexico. In their new home, they enjoy class privilege and an economic freedom - they didn't have back home.

As I called Ubers and purchased food around the city, my US dollar could stretch in ways I had never experienced. And as more and more Black Americans make their way to Mexico's capital, they're having to grapple with the ways their newfound privilege impacts local residents.

(Fade out music)

Nava: One of the newest members of the community is Isaac Keith, a 48-year-old military veteran from Chicago. I first met him at one of the many hip-hop themed nights in the city.

Isaac: Hello?

How it's good to see you.

Oh, well we haven't met.

Oh my God. You look like Nita.

Nita,

the dj. Oh, okay. I'm sorry. It's okay. I'm Nava

Nava: He's only been in CDMX for two months, but it seems like he kind of knew everybody, including me. Isaac stands at around 6'5, has long, thick grey hair, and is extremely friendly.

Isaac: I was actually kind of on a world tour trying to find exactly what I found here was, uh, the community more than anything else. The architecture is beautiful. The, uh, as many trees in the middle of the city, everything is beautiful, but I didn't want to have to travel any further because I found really good people and an amazingly friendly community full of...full of just real people.

Nava: Isaac wasn't yet in the city at the time when the protests started, but he's aware of the controversy and is doing his best to immerse himself in the culture and language. Plus, he's thought a lot about the ways that he identifies himself.

Isaac: I do not use the word expat. That's not in my vocabulary anymore.

Nava: There's been a big contention in the Blaxit online space over the word "expat." It's a word commonly used to describe someone who's moved out of their native country for a temporary period of time, often to do work and make money. Immigrants, on the other hand, are people who move to build their lives in a new place. Being an immigrant often comes with many more challenges. When I reached out to people for this story I originally used the term "expat," and received a lot of pushback.

Isaac: Literally. I am an immigrant to this country and I am trying to live here, and I'm using all the resources that I gained in this community, in this space.

Nava: But when I asked Isaac where he saw himself living in the future, he said

Isaac: I got a bunch of family that's moving to Rwanda too. And yeah, and I've seen photos and, the what's available for the amount of money that we could spend, what you

can get out of it is unbelievable over there. Mansion living at, you know, two grand a month, you know what I mean?

Nava: Rwanda. A country where he could live large, with little money, and even hire servants, he added. I wondered, how would doing this in Africa be any different than gentrification in Mexico? Or anywhere else? As someone who loves to travel and could envision living abroad one day, it's a question I reflected on as the self described "immigrants" I interviewed talked their plans for the future. Like Derrick, the entrepreneur who was featured on NBC.

Derrick: I might move to Africa, somewhere in Africa. Um, I'm thinking maybe South Africa, maybe Ghana or maybe somewhere in Europe.

Nava: And Aitya, the 25-year-old who worked as an au pair.

Atiya: I want to get my master's, in the next few years I suppose. So, I always plan on doing that in Europe

Nava: Ozy, the 32-year-old teacher from Denver, had a bit of a different take.

Ozy: All of my family is from Nigeria, that's where my ancestral land is. That is my home. Everywhere else, I'm a visitor on that land.

Nava: And when I asked her about the whole expat/immigrant situation, she said

Ozy: it feels like you're trying to create a hierarchy of like immigration. And so depending on like what a person's relationship to those words are, I think that shifts how I describe myself. I often say like, I'm a visitor here.

(MUSIC TRANSITION) (ACT 3: IT WASN'T ALWAYS GOOD)

Nava: As I prepared for *my* visit, I wanted to learn more about what the social landscape of Mexico City looked like before this recent "Blaxit."

Prior to the pandemic, Black people living in Mexico didn't have the same community they have now. Before there were accounts like Blaxican_CDMX to draw Black Americans to the city, some made the move for career reasons, or to raise a family. And they didn't always feel welcome.

Lucille: Was there overt racism? No. Were we always the "othered"? Absolutely.

Nava: That's Lucille Renwick, a 63-year-old communications director who lived with her husband and kids in Mexico City from 2010-2015.

Lucille: It feels like you're kind of some exhibition, but like, oh, me, Las Morenos. Las Morenos. It's like, look at the dark ones.

Nava: Lucille made the move due to her husband's job and quickly fell in love with the city, bringing up her three children with both English and Spanish. But she felt isolated at times, even dealing with racist incidents at her children's international school.

Lucille: He was coloring and the kid was like, oh, you don't need the brown crayon. You just, you just use your finger. Um, oh, you are the color of poo. Oh, you are the, um, and it hurts me to just say it out loud again.

Nava: Lucille's children are now grown adults, and her entire family is back in the United States.

Lucille: You are ready for it in this country. We live it in this country all the time, every day in small and large ways, I'm always ready for that here. I was not prepared for it there, and I was not prepared for it for a six year old, there.

Nava: Adalia, the 50-year-old from Houston, Texas, first moved to Mexico City a decade ago with her 15-year-old daughter.

Adalia: Sometimes I don't get mistreated because of the American privilege that — you're not poor. So I can be nice to you, but at the same time there are some people who... They don't care. They're like, you're darker than me.

Nava: Adalia says she hasn't experienced much racism herself, but has faced ignorance.

Adalia: Black American culture is very cool. People wanna emulate it and... but they don't know about us. They don't know the history,

Nava: She told me about an incident in a Spanish class where the topic of racism came up in class discussion. The teacher explained to Adalia that racism wasn't a problem in Mexico like it was in the U.S., and instead argued the country had a class problem.

Adalia: A lot of Mexicans. Don't realize that some of their classism is racism. They will eagerly tell you, oh yes, Mexico is classist. But what they don't often put together is. Well, you don't like them people 'cause they're poor. But did you also miss that they tend to be darker skinned, like putting those two pieces together, they miss.

Nava: Both Adalia and Lucille did acknowledge that gentrification in CDMX is a problem. Lucille watched the protests last summer from her home in the United States.

Lucille: We have to call it what it is. And look, and, and you know what? And own it. Own it.

Nava: She recently took a visit back to Mexico City with her family and was surprised by the uptick of other Black Americans she encountered. But, Lucille also knows that Black people only make up 13 percent of the U.S., and their percentages are even tinier in Mexico.

Lucille: There aren't that many of us, so we're not gentrifying in the same degree we won't, won't be able to gentrify in the same degree, um, in foreign countries.

Nava: Lucille moved back to the States years ago, but Adalia intends to live in Mexico for the rest of her life. And for other Black Americans who want to take the leap, she has some advice.

Adalia: If you wanna be here, you've got to put yourself here completely. And, and think about it in the terms of the current economy, not the one that you're coming from.

(Transition Music)

Nava: On the plane ride back home to the economy I'm coming from, I glided through customs and border control, the officer not even checking my passport as I crossed through. At the same time, thousands of Mexican immigrants are being held at detention centers. Children, separated from their families. I returned home even more confused than when I had left.

(Music)

Nava: How do you ask a group of people whose descendents were enslaved and trafficked to stay where they came from? Who gets to move freely, and how long should they stay there once they've moved?

(More music)

Nava: The one thing I'm sure of is this: Travel is a privilege. I may not have found all the answers I was seeking, but I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to look for them in the first place.

For the World, I'm Nava Rawls