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Social Research: An International Quarterly, Volume 77, Number 1,  
Spring 2010, pp. 101-132 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: 10.1353/sor.2010.0040



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# Mary C. Waters and Philip Kasinitz

## **Discrimination, Race Relations, and the Second Generation**

AMONG THE MANY THEMES RUNNING THROUGH THE WORK OF Aristide Zolberg is the contingent and dynamic nature of ethnic and racial groups (Zolberg and Woon 1999). The questions of how groups are created and crystalized, how boundaries are established, maintained, and how they sometimes shift; and the role of politics and the state in the making and unmaking of ethnic groups, can be seen from Zolberg's early work on postcolonial Africa up to his recent analysis of American immigration policy. (Zolberg 1969, 2006). In this paper we will take up this theme as it relates to the children of immigrants—the “second generation”—in the contemporary United States. We will examine the experience of race—and specifically the experience of racial discrimination—as it contributes to the making and unmaking of ethnic groups in the United States. Discrimination, we will argue, has too often been discussed as if it is a singular experience. Ideas about the effects of discrimination that come from the experience of some groups are often applied uncritically to others. In an increasingly diverse America, this singular view of discrimination seems to us increasingly out of date. Drawing on our recent study<sup>1</sup> of the young adult children of immigrants in New York, we will argue that, while the experience of racial discrimination is common to many Americans, the nature and

impact of that experience varies widely among the increasingly diverse people that are now often lumped together as “minorities” in the popular imagination.

Since the resumption of mass immigration in the late 1960s, the United States has incorporated tens of millions of new immigrants, the large majority of whom are non-European. Today about one American in five has a foreign-born parent, including the man who was elected president in 2008. The vast majority of today’s immigrants and their children, including President Barack Obama, are “nonwhite,” at least according to the ways race has traditionally been thought about in the United States. Thus, their experiences challenge us to examine the changing nature of American racial definitions as well as the question of how nonwhite immigrants and their descendants will be incorporated into society, both as members of racial categories and as the descendants of immigrants.

The legal scholar David Wilkins asks, “Is the moral significance of racial identity the same for all those groups that are recognized as ‘races’ in American society?” (1996: 21) This is an especially potent question for the new second generation. Is being nonwhite the same as being a “racial minority?” Is the African American experience or the European immigrant experience the best model of what will happen to the descendants of the new immigration? As George Fredrickson posed the question, “Can a model of multiculturalism work both for non-European immigrants who have come recently and voluntarily and also for those who were brought much earlier in chains for forced labor?” (1998: 40) When members of the second generation encounters unequal treatment, do they develop anger and hostility toward mainstream American society or a desire to overcome the barriers they experience? The experiences of second generation nonwhite immigrants raise the question of the shape of the color line in the twenty-first century.

Our examination of the experience of discrimination suggests some partial answers to these questions. We argue that race is not experienced the same way by all of our “nonwhite” respondents. African Americans, and those who “look like” or could be confused with African Americans

(such as West Indians and dark-skinned Latinos) have different kinds of experiences than other nonwhite groups. They face more systematic and “brighter” racial boundaries than do Asians and light-skinned Latinos (Alba 2005). This, we argue, creates more formidable obstacles for those defined as black, as opposed to those who are just “nonwhite,” to full incorporation into American society (see also Hattam 2007).

Yet, even for those who are defined as black, race is far from the monolithic barrier it was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While racial prejudice is alive and well in twenty-first-century New York, there are many spheres of life in which it has lost its potent punch. Most previous works on the second generation have seen being a racial minority as a distinct disadvantage in the United States, and they often do face serious racial barriers. At the same time at least some members of the second generation, precisely because they have been defined as “nonwhite,” have also benefited from the institutions, political strategies, and notions of rights developed in the aftermath of the civil rights movement. Ironically, affirmative action and other policies designed to redress long-standing American racial inequities turn out to work better for immigrants and their children than they do for the native minorities for whom they were designed (Skrentny 2001; Graham 2001).

In the balance of this paper we will draw on data from our study of second-generation immigrants in the New York City metropolitan area.<sup>2</sup> The study drew representative samples of young adults (ages 18-32) from five ethnic groups: Dominicans, South Americans, West Indians; Chinese, and Jews from the former Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> We also interviewed samples of African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and whites with native-born parents. Altogether we completed telephone interviews with 3,415 respondents and did further in-person, in-depth interviews with a subsample of approximately 10 percent (for a more complete overview of the study, see Kasinitz et al. 2008).

## **ANTICIPATING DISCRIMINATION**

Racism and other forms of ethnocentrism are, of course, more than just instances of discrimination. Nevertheless, when most contemporary

Americans think of the role that racism plays in their lives and the lives of people around them, it is usually discrimination that they are thinking about. Conversely, “equality” in American discourse usually means equality of *opportunity*—and the lack of discrimination—not actual equality of conditions. However partial its victories, the heroic model of the African American civil rights movement enshrined the ideal of a society in which individuals are judged “not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” Nevertheless, numerous recent studies make clear that discrimination continues to be a fact of American life, particularly for African Americans, but also for immigrants as well as other groups, such as former convicts (see Pager 2007; Western and Pettit 2005).

Discrimination need not actually be experienced to play a role in ethnic and racial identity. There is a large literature arguing that the anticipation of discrimination and racism can have its own effects, creating what Claude Steele described as “stereotype threat” (Steele 1997; Steele and Aronson 1994, 1998). This literature is based largely on African Americans, a group for whom the anticipation of discrimination is often a part of socialization into what it means to be black. What is less well established is how the children of immigrants of color learn to anticipate and cope with discrimination (for an important exception, see Deaux 2006).

This issue is complicated by the fact that different immigrant groups had very different premigration histories when it comes to race, and thus the parents of our second-generation respondents differed from both black Americans and from each other in terms of their own understandings of race and the ideas they sought to impart to their children. West Indians, the group socially and phenotypically closest to African Americans, hail from societies with a heritage of African slavery, a long history of racial stratification, and in many cases had considerable knowledge of the African American civil rights movement before emigrating (Kasinitz, 1992; Vickerman 1998; Waters 1999; Model 2008). At the same time most come from societies in which people of African descent are the majority and in which it has been common for blacks to occupy positions of wealth and power for generations. South Americans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans all hail from racially stratified

societies—but ones where the rules of racial definition are far different than in the United States (Harris 1964; Rodriguez 1991; Itzigsohn 2009). Most of the parents of our Chinese respondents came from a relatively racially homogeneous society in which they were part of the majority group. This is not to say race did not matter, but that it was generally bound up with ideas about national identity and anticolonial struggles, and less with everyday interactions. These differences affect how each immigrant group talks to its second-generation children about what being a person of color means in the United States.

Racial socialization starts young. Immigrant parents' ideas about race and its role in the United States begin to shape the experiences of the second generation when they are children. We asked our respondents a battery of questions about what their parents might have taught them about race, prejudice, and discrimination as well as about their own experiences with discrimination and prejudice. We asked whether their parents, or the people who raised them, had ever talked with them about prejudice or discrimination against their group; about whether their parents had ever told them not to trust white Americans, or not to trust black Americans, or any other particular group; whether parents had ever told them they had to be better than white Americans to get as far as white Americans in life; and whether their parents had ever told them they had to be better than “other people” in general to get as far as “other people” in life.

Not surprisingly, native blacks are by far the most likely to report that their parents talked to them about discrimination. Native-born blacks report parents talking about discrimination against their group at a significantly higher rate than West Indians (78 percent vs. 56 percent). Explicit racial socialization was the norm in many African American households. Some African Americans told us their parents told them to expect racism and not to let it get them down:

They said people might try to discourage you from doing what you want to do; it's up to you to make up your mind to do what you want to do.

Similar numbers of West Indian and native black parents told them not to trust white Americans, and they were much more likely to get that message than respondents in other groups. West Indian parents are well aware of racism and discrimination in the United States and attempt to prepare their children to face it. At the same time, they are often wary of imposing a “minority” consciousness on their children. Many believed that African Americans—the group to which they most often compare themselves—have been hurt by awareness of their stigmatized status as well as by the real fact of pervasive discrimination. They want to protect their children from as much of this as they can.

Interestingly, Chinese respondents were more than twice as likely than most of the other groups to have been told by their parents not to trust *black* Americans. Chinese and West Indian parents were also far more likely than Latino parents to tell their children that they needed to be better than white Americans to get as far in life. Much of the often celebrated “drive to succeed” among these groups is in fact linked to a real fear of discrimination, awareness of minority status and a belief that they will have to perform better than whites to achieve equal levels of success. Dominican and South American young people also report getting indirect messages from their parents that whites are in control in U.S. society:

They didn’t say it, but they insinuated it. Like they wouldn’t say it—maybe they would say stuff like, “white men got the good positions.” They would point out that all the supervisors or bosses were white.

For some young people, the message that they would have to be better than others was a burden:

(My parents) said that but they just let me know to watch, just the fact that I was a minority or Dominican, things would be harder for me. So I would have to work harder.

But young people did not simply absorb their parents' messages without reflecting on their own experience. The second generation is well aware that their world is very different from that of their parents. While the West Indian second generation often thought their parents had underestimated the degree of racism they face, many members of other groups actually felt their parents were more fearful of racism than they needed to be, at least in multicultural New York. Some made a point to tell us that their parents' racial views were not their own. As one 27-year-old Chinese woman notes:

My dad thinks you have to work a lot harder because you have a lot of competition out there. In a way, saying you really have to prove yourself more than someone else. . . . I don't think it has to do with me being Chinese. I think everyone has to prove themselves.

The survey data show that Chinese parents are likely to talk with their children about discrimination but that in most domains, with the exception of school, Chinese are far less likely to actually experience discrimination. This is evident in the interview data, when Chinese respondents told us that their parents expected trouble in the United States, but many of them seemed skeptical that their parents knew what they were talking about.

When I was younger, my parents told me, "don't start trouble with white people." . . . When I was a kid I actually listened to them, but now . . . it sounds like they're afraid. They are just passive and they try to make the kids passive too.

Discrimination and unequal treatment are tricky things because often one is not sure whether he or she is being treated unfairly because of their race or whether they have just run up against a barrier that is there for everyone. This 22-year-old Chinese man was angry with his



parents because they did not believe he would be chosen to play baseball for the New York Mets. While most parents would probably try to diminish the hopes of their son that he would be chosen by the Mets (the odds are very long), he was furious that his parents thought he would not be chosen because he is Chinese:

When I was seventeen I tried out for the Mets at Shea Stadium and they said, "You would never be able to make it, because you're short." They said, "You don't run fast, you don't know how to play ball and you're Chinese."

For West Indian, Dominican, South American, and Chinese respondents, becoming "American" meant, in effect becoming minority—that is becoming black, Latino, or Asian Americans. For one group, however, the Russian Jews, becoming American meant joining the racial majority, literally becoming white. Interestingly, Russian Jewish respondents also reported that their parents had told them to expect people to discriminate against them because they are Jews. Indeed, only African Americans were more likely to have discussed discrimination with their parents. This is understandable given that many of their parents fled the former Soviet Union because of anti-Semitism. Yet members of the second generation perceive very little anti-Semitism in the United States and they often try to explain to their parents how different the United States is. This 25-year-old woman explains how she changed her middle name back to a Yiddish one, and how much fear it caused her mother.

The quick story is that my mother had wanted to name me Brina, after my great-grandmother but in Russia she said, "Well, it's Yiddish, it's going to give her all these problems and let's not do that. Brina, Ina, Anna. Let's call her Anna. It's close enough." . . . So I decided to add Brina as a middle name . . . and this made her [my mother] nervous. "Well, this is going to go on your diploma. . . . It's going to hang in your office and what if that hurts you professionally?"

In the former Soviet Union, “Jewish” was as much a “racial” as a cultural or religious identity. Few of our respondent’s parents were practicing Jews there, although some became observant in New York. For the Russian-Jewish second generation, whose parents grew up as members of a racialized minority group but who are themselves *coming of age in a country in which they are part of the racial majority*, immigration has quite literally meant “becoming white.” As one young woman noted, “In Russia we were different. We *looked* different.” In New York she does not perceive this to be the case. Although she felt a strong cultural connection to being Jewish, this ethnic identity was not seen in conflict with being part of the racial majority (in New York, why should it?). She has thus become “deracialized” in the New York context—the opposite experience from that of most West Indians and Dominicans. Like African American parents, Russian-Jewish parents frequently spoke to their children about discrimination. Like African American parents, they tried to prepare the children to face discrimination and to fight for their rights in the face of it, all the while worried that it might crush their spirits. Yet unlike African Americans, the Russian-Jewish second generation rarely actually experienced it. Members of this generation thus entered adult life psychologically prepared and emotionally armored for a battle that, as it turned out, they almost never actually had to fight.

## **EXPERIENCING DISCRIMINATION**

Many Americans of all racial groups feel they have been the victims of “discrimination” and “prejudice” at one time or another. A national survey of Americans in 1995-1996 found that 33 percent of the total population reported exposure to major incidents of discrimination, and 61 percent reported exposure to day-to-day, low-level discrimination (Kessler, Mikelson, and Williams 1999: 208). While the experience was more common among those with disadvantaged social status (women, nonwhites, low education, low income), there was still a large number of relatively advantaged people who had experienced some type of discrimination. Not surprisingly, 49

**Table 1: Experience of Prejudice by Group (Percent Experiencing Prejudice)**

	At work	Shops/ Restaurants	From Police	At School	Looking for Work
South American	20	41	22	17	17
Dominican	19	37	25	14	20
Puerto Rican	26	40	22	15	22
West Indian	30	57	35	17	26
Black	35	55	34	15	33
Chinese	14	41	13	25	12
Russian Jew	8	12	8	11	9
White	14	15	6	9	6

Source: Second Generation Study

percent of blacks reported having experienced at least one major discrimination experience, defined as not being hired for a job, not being given a promotion, denied or refused service, discouraged by a teacher from seeking higher education, being “hassled” by the police, being prevented from renting/buying a home, being denied a scholarship, being denied medical care, forced to leave a neighborhood. Yet, it should be noted that 31 percent of *whites* reported having similar experiences. One of the ironic consequences of the civil rights movement is that today we live in a world in which almost any unequal or unfair treatment is subjectively experienced and described as “prejudice” or “discrimination.” The widespread use of these terms raises questions about whether survey questions about prejudice and discrimination mean the same thing to different groups of people.

In our study we asked our respondents about their own experiences with discrimination: “Within the past year, did you feel like someone was showing prejudice toward you or discriminating against you?”

(For native whites, we added the phrase “because of your ethnicity.”) This question is inclusive of experiencing both negative actions (discrimination) and negative attitudes (prejudice). We then asked whether the respondent had experienced this prejudice or discrimination at work, when buying something in a store or waiting for a table at a restaurant, by the police, at school, or when looking for work. The pattern of responses is presented in Table 1.

The general pattern is that native-born blacks and West Indians report the most prejudice and discrimination, followed by the Hispanic groups, then the Chinese, and then the whites and Russian Jews. This suggests a predictable hierarchy based on skin color. Groups clearly of African descent (and most likely to be seen as “like” African Americans) experience the most discrimination, followed by Latinos, then Asians, with whites reporting the least discrimination.

However, qualitative interviews suggest that the way the color is experienced is not so simple. We also asked respondents whether other people ever mistake them for members of another racial or ethnic group. This shows how fluid the color line actually is. Light-skinned respondents “of color” are often mistaken for other groups, as is this light skinned Jamaican:

I: Do other people sometimes think you’re a different race or ethnicity?

R: Oh yeah. All the time. [They think I’m] Jewish. They think I’m Spanish. I’ve been told Mexican. Puerto Rican, Dominican. Every kind of thing. Indian. Everything. . . . This summer . . . they asked me, “where did I come from?” “Jamaica.” . . . The whole time they thought I was Spanish because when the Spanish girls talked I could understand them.

The South Americans often report that they are most often mistaken to be Italian, Greek, or Portuguese. While South Americans and light-skinned Puerto Ricans are “misidentified” onto the white

side of the color line, dark-skinned Puerto Ricans and Dominicans are “misidentified” onto the black side:

I: Do people sometimes think that you're a different race or ethnicity?

R: They think I'm black. I have to speak Spanish in order for people to know. If I don't speak they won't notice. Maybe it's my complexion, maybe it's the way I dress. I don't know.

Even other Hispanics may misidentify their own members as African American if they do not hear a dark-skinned person speaking Spanish, as this Dominican woman describes in the following incident:

I: Can you recall the last time somebody commented on your racial or ethnic background.

R: Yeah, the guy in Blimpies. He thought that I was black, like, African American. . . . I asked the girl how much the pickle and she said twenty-five cents, and he said in Spanish, “*No, cobra a ella cinquenta.*” (No, charge her fifty cents). . . . Why? Because I look, and I'm saying in English, “Is it because I look black? Let me tell you something. I am Dominican. I am proud and I know what you just said.”

Dominican males are much more likely than South American and Puerto Rican males to report problems with the police (in all groups, problems with the police were far more common for men than for women). Indeed the Dominican males are closer to the African American and the West Indian males in their perceived levels of prejudice from the police. It is worth noting that among native white males the number reporting having experienced “prejudice or discrimination by the police” is actually far *lower* than the number that have actually been *arrested*. We also asked a question about whether respondents

thought that the police favor whites in New York City. Most respondents in every group agreed with that statement although West Indians and native blacks were most likely to agree. There were no significant gender differences in any group except for the Dominicans, where more males than females thought the police favored whites (79 percent vs. 61 percent).

The locations where respondents are most likely to have encountered discrimination also vary by group, as indicated in table 1. Shopping and dining out are the most common places where every group experiences discrimination, ranging from 11 percent of Russian Jews who report such problems to 58 percent of West Indians. But among the Chinese, discrimination while shopping was followed by discrimination in school (25 percent), which is striking, given that the group was generally the most successful in educational attainment. The Chinese report much lower levels of discrimination happened while looking for work or from the police—around 13 percent. For West Indians, being “hassled” by the police was the next most likely arena (35 percent), followed by work (31 percent), looking for work (27 percent), and in school (17 percent).

Respondents clarified these survey patterns in our in-depth interviews. Often different ethnic groups are referring to different phenomena when they answer the questions on discrimination and prejudice. When the Chinese discuss discrimination at school, it turned out they were discussing discrimination from peers, primarily black and Hispanic students in their schools who teased or bullied them. They also experienced what might be seen as “positive discrimination”: fellow students who tried to copy from their papers in school because they were assumed to be very smart, or teachers who put them in the hardest math class just because they were Chinese.

The “discrimination” that the Hispanic and black respondents were thinking of was much more likely to come from white teachers or administrators who assumed that they were not smart. They described being put in bilingual education classes when they did not need them and being criticized for not speaking English correctly. They described

sometimes blatant racism from white teachers as well as guidance counselors who steered kids into non-college-track courses. Those who went on to college described discrimination from white peers—one Dominican woman told us that when she was moving into her dorm room, her roommate insisted on being present so that she would not steal anything. They also complained about white professors who had low expectations of their nonwhite students. Teachers who express low expectations or negative racial stereotypes are particularly hurtful to these students:

There was one teacher who I actually admired a lot the way he was, in terms of a teacher, but as a person I was upset by many things he would say to me. Like since I was the only Hispanic in the program, every time he referred to me, he'd say the Puerto Rican. I'd say "I'm not Puerto Rican," and it's like the same shit.

There was also a disconnect between the way Chinese and native white respondents described their problems with discrimination from the police and the way blacks, West Indians, and Dominicans did. Young and dark-skinned males are the most likely to describe tense and sometimes violent encounters with the police. It is so common and so expected that very often they do not mention it right away in the interviews. For example, this 22-year-old African American male with dreadlocks at first answers a question about race and discrimination by saying he had never experienced anything:

R: I mean, it was nothing obvious. So, I really couldn't say I've been really discriminated against.

I: Any kind of police harassment?

R: All the time! Often, often. Today, since I'm wearing, you know, my regular attire, no, I won't get harassed but if I was just running to the store and I had my fatigue jacket on, automatically I fit every description from every precinct so I have had my problems, yes.

This dark-skinned Colombian man also answers the question about discrimination by reporting none but then remembers numerous negative experiences with the police:

R: I've always been looked upon as an individual and not necessarily because of my race, you know what I can bring to the table. Hopefully I've never encountered—or if I have encountered it, I don't think I've ever picked up on it.

I: Has there ever been a time when you experienced any problem or difficulty from being Colombian?

R: Oh, your normal harassment by—I don't know why this popped into my head now, 'cause I thought about the question. . . . You get stopped because you're in a nice car. . . . Because you're Hispanic. Is this car stolen, whatever. So yeah, that happened. It's not that often, but it has happened enough times that it bothers you. I guess that's why I thought about it now.

Many black and Hispanic young men described being stopped by the police on the street or on the subway or if they were “driving while black”:

R: It was a party in a house and we were partying and someone had done something. I knew nothing about it. I came outside and then all of a sudden they thought it was me and they just took me and slammed me against the wall, put me in handcuffs. Then they were like “Oh, okay, sorry” and they let me go.

I: Has anyone ever stopped you walking in the street?

R: Twice they stopped and they just, they were, “Can we talk to you for a second?” . . . They start asking me questions and they start getting a little stupid. They start touching and checking me and all that. They're not supposed to do that, you know. . . . They put me in handcuffs and asked me



a whole bunch of questions. Just because somebody around the neighborhood did something and I fit the description.

Encounters with the police seem to have a particularly deep and long-lasting effect on young people, particularly young men. Part of this may be because, no matter how unfairly one is treated, it is generally imprudent, or actually dangerous to argue back. This inability to respond leaves one with a bitter sense of frustration. Further, it is hard to dismiss a police officer who treats one badly as simply “ignorant” or a lout, as one could with a peer. The police are armed representatives of the state. Negative treatment by them, in some way, represents negative treatment by the larger society. And if a group, such as African Americans, already has ample reason to feel excluded and stigmatized, repeated negative encounters with the police can reinforce this perception in ways they may not for whites.

Finally, anonymous encounters with shopkeepers, security guards, and particularly with the police in public spaces are powerful because they are so purely “racial.” One need only think of the emotions stirred in the 2008 confrontation between Professor Henry Louis Gates and the Cambridge, Massachusetts, police. In this case a well-known and well-respected black man believed that, at least in the moment of the anonymous encounter, his hard-earned social status made frustratingly little difference to the man empowered to arrest him. In such a confrontation class differences do not count—as the frequent, bitter complaints of middle-class African Americans make clear (Feagin 1991; Cose 1993). Nor do ethnic differences. Many of the victims of some of New York’s most notorious police brutality cases have been black immigrants. A police officer rarely has a basis for knowing if a young man on a public street is African American or West Indian, middle class or poor. If the police officer discriminates, it is on the basis of race alone.

By contrast, many respondents from many groups reported hearing racial slurs on the street or on subways. Unlike encounters with the police, these incidents were described as hurtful but not overly

dramatic, perhaps because the victim had more power to respond. Indeed, some young men responded to these events by threatening or actually engaging in physical violence. These incidents contributed to a sense that other people were identifying them racially and ethnically and that they had to stand up for themselves. But most people remembered them as a regrettable aspect of dealing with other “ignorant kids,” and in contrast to encounters with the police, these incidents generally did not leave lasting scars or deep anger.

Another commonly reported type of discrimination occurs while shopping or in a restaurant. Respondents report that shopkeepers follow them to make sure they do not shoplift, or actually confront them and ask them if they will be buying something. The respondents believe that the shopkeepers have made a decision that because of their race or ethnicity they will not have enough money to buy products for sale in the stores.

Me, my friend—he’s Haitian—and his sister. And my sister. All four of us walking together. We went into this store and they followed us around saying, “If you don’t buy something you’ll have to leave.” And this is hard to believe but it was a bigger group of whites in there and they weren’t doing anything. Neither were we but we got picked on so we just left.

Restaurants are another arena in which people feel they are discriminated against. One respondent told us that his family always used a “white name” to get a reservation because they thought they would get a better table than if they were identifiably Chinese. Others described waiting for a table and seeing other white people who came in after them get seated first, leading them to conclude that it was because they were Chinese that they were being made to wait longer. Respondents from many different groups were sure that when they went to fancy restaurants they were given undesirable tables near the kitchen because of their race.

Discrimination in stores and restaurants was often interpreted as being due to race, but some people were not so sure. Most respondents said that they dealt with such discrimination by being sure to signal to the store or restaurant employees that they did have money and were not criminals. Sometimes they did this by taking care to dress nicely or prominently display their credit cards or the key ring that showed they owned an expensive car. But sometimes respondents were uncertain whether it was their race that was causing the bad treatment or assumptions about their class status instead. One young Dominican woman suspected it was her numerous body tattoos and piercings that caused people to discriminate against her. Others were quick to point out that this bad behavior only happened when they wore sweatpants or cheap clothes. Of course, that leaves open the question of whether whites who were dressed similarly would also be discriminated against. Yet the employees who perform this discrimination are not all whites—often respondents are perceiving discrimination from clerks or waiters who are themselves members of nonwhite groups. Racism in post-civil rights America is real, but also quite complicated.

People reported more discrimination in applying for jobs than they did once they were actually on the job. When you are applying for a job, particularly a low-wage job, the prospective employer does not know much about you except for your race or ethnicity. Young people applying for such jobs often have little work experience, and educational credentials are generally not very important. This means employers have little useful information and few rational criteria on which to select employees, a situation ripe with potential for racial and ethnic discrimination. Often respondents report that when they first speak to interviewers on the phone, the interviewers are very encouraging and interested, and then when they come in person the interviewer seems uninterested in hiring them, because, the respondents surmise, of their race or ethnicity.

R: I went in there for an interview and I think the person must have thought I was white and they kept on saying

“Rigo?” so they must have thought my last name was Italian or something. . . . I get there and they didn’t even interview me no more than three minutes.

The workplaces of the second generation are generally diverse, and when different respondents discussed the discrimination or prejudice that they felt on the job, they were describing different phenomena. Some described classic structural racism (Waters 1999) in which they observed a hierarchy at work where they believed that whites were keeping all the good positions at the top for themselves. West Indians were particularly attuned to this inequality:

I: How do you think Afro-Americans are seen in the United States?

R: Not good. We don’t get the opportunities. They see us as niggers and if you look the word nigger, it means wild type of person. . . . Even in the Army, you can see it in the Army too. They’ll give you rank but you wouldn’t see a lot of generals and three stars or four star generals all that black. They are all white.

Other respondents described specific actions taken against them that they interpreted as being due to racism. In retail, for instance, they describe being kept out of direct contact with customers:

As soon as they saw me as a Puerto Rican, they limited my job. Yeah, they didn’t want me helping out the other electronics or some of the other whites because . . . they thought less of me. They thought I didn’t know nothing.

The variety of people present in these worksites means that very often when people report instances of discrimination, they are actu-

ally talking about intergroup tensions. The power relations reflected in the incidents recounted by our respondents matter a great deal in the nature and long-term consequences of the discrimination. If the discriminator is white and reflects the majority group in American society (if not the majority group in their immediate surroundings), and if the discrimination is by an agent in authority—a teacher, an employer, or most importantly a police officer—the consequences for the target of the discrimination are much more severe than if an equal from another minority group exhibits tensions or resentments

This West Indian woman describes how different supervisors can make different shifts at her job uncomfortable for different types of people:

The morning shift is mostly Latinos. . . . The supervisor is Latino, so mostly new people are hired, he tends to prefer Latinos to come to his shift. If you're a girl, and you look ok, you qualify also. And then the second shift is very mixed, which is the shift I work on. It's black, Asian, and white. And the last shift, which is the night one, is all black people, so according to which shift you work on, you're gonna get treated differently.

Other times casual statements from coworkers bring home to the respondents that their race is something their coworkers are thinking about. A Chinese man said

My handwriting isn't that great and one of my coworkers . . . said something about, "Yeah, I was working with this Oriental guy before and it took me a while to get used to his handwriting too." . . . She didn't mean to be offensive, it's just one of those things that came up.

Chinese respondents also mentioned that their race was a factor on their jobs, but once again the consequences of racial awareness was differ-

ent than what was experienced by blacks and Hispanics. While blacks and Hispanics struggle to overcome negative stereotypes; many Chinese respondents mentioned that other non-Chinese had a stereotype about them as smart and discussed how that helped them at work. A Chinese woman:

It's a plus and minus being Asian American. They assume you're smart and then again they don't joke with you as much because they tend to see you as more serious.

Many people responded specifically to the idea of workplace discrimination by saying they needed to work harder than others to get as far. Said one 27-year-old native black woman:

I think as time went on, like in college, I knew that I had to work harder . . . if I was going to have the same opportunities to get that other white people might have.

The cumulative weight of a particular kind of discrimination can lead to the kind of anger and reactive ethnicity described by Portes and Rumbaut (2001). This 31-year-old West Indian describes the toll of racism:

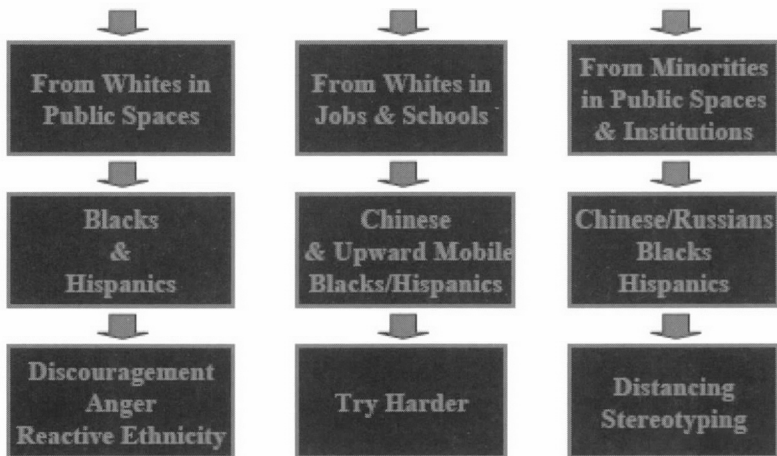
Being a black man—it's the hardest role that you can wear, to me, in this society. I've seen big corporations, you'll see black alongside the Hispanic man in mail rooms. If they want to stay there for the rest of their lives, they probably will. From a black man's perspective, every time I walk out the door, I feel I'm pretty much judged every conceivable angle. Some of the judgments are very harsh but unfortunately we have a lot of black brothers out there who don't know who the hell they are and they give power to whatever perceptions there are of them. . . . And when I try to do something for me, and shatter this image, it's so much pressure on you to succeed. It's just not easy.

## **DIFFERENT FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES**

It is clear that discrimination occurs in different realms, from different people and with different consequences for the people who experience it. We live in a time of racial talk and racial labeling. But this widespread “race talk” means that the same terms and language are used to describe very different phenomena. People who believe they have been treated unfairly frequently use the language of race, discrimination, and racism to describe their experiences. But some of them are describing being the object of stereotypes, some are describing ethnic rivalries, some are describing peer tensions such as workplace disputes among coworkers that take on an ethnic or racial tone. A white worker who took offense that his coworkers spoke in Tagalog used the language of discrimination as did the Chinese woman who was upset that people at work assumed she was smart—but that is very different from the experience of the dark-skinned Dominican woman who received a wonderful reception when she inquired about a job on the phone and yet felt she was denied the job when they saw her in person. The former is rough-and-tumble ethnic group tension; the latter is employment discrimination that can have far-reaching negative consequences for its victims. Blacks and other groups with dark skin experience the same stereotyping, peer tensions, and fights, but they also experience discrimination and unequal treatment from authority figures who have real power over their lives—teachers and employers. Perhaps the worst experiences they have are anonymous encounters in public spaces like subways, parks, and city streets—arenas in which race counts the most and other traits, including ethnicity, count much less.

The model presented in figure 1 captures the differences in the experiences and consequences of different types of discrimination across the groups in our study. Not all “nonwhites” are alike. The “closer” you are perceived to be to African American, the more serious the discrimination. So after African Americans, West Indians face the most discrimination, followed by Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans. South

# Prejudice/Discrimination



**Figure 1**

Americans experience much less. Chinese experience discrimination even less than that and Russians—as whites—even less than that.

A first set of racial incidents (experienced by Dominicans, West Indians, Puerto Ricans, and blacks especially on the streets, in stores and from the police) does not leave much control to the nonwhite victim and thus leads to discouragement and confrontation with whites. These respondents try to avoid racial discrimination by avoiding white neighborhoods so they will not be targeted, or try to dress nicely so that cabs will stop for them or restaurants will give them good service. They may try to signal their middle-class status to differentiate themselves from the “ghetto poor” or, in the case of Dominicans, West Indians, and Puerto Ricans, they may also try to signal their ethnic difference from African Americans. But in impersonal encounters on the street or in job applications, often the only thing whites know about them is their race, and such techniques cannot always prevent racist treatment.

A second set of racially discriminatory incidents (more common among Chinese, Russians, South Americans and upwardly mobile



blacks, Dominicans and Puerto Ricans ) leads less to discouragement and more to increased efforts to overcome racial stereotypes. When discrimination by whites occurs in an institutional setting where the nonwhite victim perceives some degree of control over it, such discrimination is experienced as a challenge—a need to try harder to succeed. So workplace discrimination is often interpreted not as a reason to give up, but as reason to show how good one can be, to show that one is better than all the other workers so that individual characteristics can end up trumping racial stereotypes.

These kinds of incidents require integrated institutions such as schools, workplaces, and churches in order even to be exposed to whites' discriminatory practices up close. As a result poor African Americans, West Indians, and Dominicans do not usually experience as much of this sort of discrimination as do middle- and upper-middle-class members of these groups because the poor spend so much time in segregated neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. Ironically, it is better-off blacks and Hispanics, who are more likely to be in integrated schools, workplaces, and other settings, and thus have the “opportunity” to be the victim of this sort of discrimination (see also Hochschild 1995; Patterson 1997; Vickerman 1998).

Finally, the third set of racially discriminatory encounters, inter-group tensions, is quite common in multiethnic New York. The different ethnic and racial groups compete for resources at work, in schools, in neighborhoods. The immense diversity in New York City means there is a great deal of complexity in who is discriminating against whom. Often in-group favoritism, such as black supervisors wanting to hire black workers, is perceived as racism by other nonwhite employees who are vying for the same jobs. This sort of ethnic rivalry accounts for a great deal of the reported discrimination among all groups, and it certainly makes young people highly conscious of ethnic differences. Yet the vast number of crosscutting rivalries also means that while there may be clear ethnic hierarchies among nonwhites, they are less associated with any permanent or systemic sense of inferiority or superiority than rivalries between whites and nonwhites.

**Table 2: Percent Experiencing Prejudice/Discrimination by Group by Level of Education**

Group	School		Looking for Work		Work		Store/ Restaurant		Police	
	Low	Hi	Low	Hi	Low	Hi	Low	Hi	Low	Hi
Puerto Rican	14	20	24	14	26	24	39	47	24	15
Native Black	14	19	34	31	35	37	51	70	35	31
Dominican	12	20	24	12	21	14	36	42	27	22
West Indian	15	22	26	25	28	34	54	62	37	31
South American	17	18	19	13	21	18	37	47	24	20
Chinese	33	22	17	11	13	13	41	41	20	11
Russian	10	11	15	7	10	7	15	10	13	6
Native White	12	7	7	5	15	13	20	12	10	3

Low education = Less than a B.A. High education = B.A. or above.

The use of similar racial talk for many different types of phenomena can also mask social progress. The more integrated one's life is, the more likely he or she is to experience discrimination in a number of spheres. Chinese, our most successful second-generation group, are also the group most likely to be in integrated schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods where they are in the minority among other groups. In contrast, black and Latino respondents are more likely to be in segregated schools and neighborhoods, especially during their earliest years of education, where they tend to comprise part of the majority group. For those who are upwardly mobile it is often not until college and the workplace that they finally have enough contact with other groups, and particularly with whites, to have much opportunity to be discriminated against. This pattern of differential experiences of discrimination is clearer if we look at class differences within groups.

There are no significant differences by education in terms of experiencing discrimination at work, although less-educated Dominicans,

Puerto Ricans, and Russians report significantly more discrimination in looking for work than those with more education. The differences by education in discrimination while shopping go in different directions. For South Americans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, West Indians, and native blacks, the more educated people report *more* discrimination. For Chinese it is exactly equal, and for whites and Russians the less educated report more discrimination. The only two differences that are statistically significant, though, are those among native blacks and native whites; 70 percent of blacks with a BA report discrimination while shopping, compared to 51 percent of those without one, and 12 percent of whites with a BA report discrimination, while 20 percent of those without one.

This could be simply a matter of perception, since better-educated African Americans are more likely to perceive discrimination than the less educated. However, since better-educated African Americans are more likely to be shopping in higher-priced stores, patronizing higher-priced restaurants, working in more integrated work settings, and generally having more contact with whites, the explanation is probably that they have a greater number of opportunities to be treated badly by whites!

Ironically, the black poor, who are more likely to experience what from the outside we might see as manifestations of “structural racism,” such as segregation in housing, schools, and jobs, are also less likely to have face-to-face encounters with whites (except, and this is the key exception, for the police). Thus, in many arenas, they may perceive less discrimination or interpersonal racism than do higher-class African Americans. In terms of discrimination at school, better-educated Dominicans and West Indians are more likely to report discrimination, whereas among the Chinese it is the less well educated who are more likely to report discrimination. (For the other groups, education makes no significant difference).

## **UNDERSTANDING DISCRIMINATION**

The data we have presented indicates that the term “discrimination” is being used to describe all kinds of perceived unfairness. African

Americans' experiences, however, are the benchmark against which we can compare the experiences of all groups. African Americans are most likely to report discrimination when looking for work and being at work. They, along with West Indians, report the highest levels of discrimination while shopping and from the police. And the discrimination they experience while shopping is very different than what is reported by other groups—it is not due to social class. Better-educated African Americans are *more* likely than the less well educated to report discrimination, the opposite of what occurs among native whites. Indeed, upward mobility in terms of class status may actually expose African Americans to more rather than less discrimination in their everyday lives. Such situations are often understood as one in which “race,” an ascribed and immutable characteristic, is trumping class, which most Americans see as an achieved characteristic. Needless to say, this is the sort of discrimination that is the most frustrating for its victims, since there is so little that the victim can do about it.

Our data show that different types of discrimination produce different reactions. When it is possible to demonstrate one's individuality in school or at work, our respondents tended to respond by trying to “outshine” those who doubt them. It is in impersonal instances, such as when a police officer or storekeeper who knows nothing about someone except his or her race treats that person poorly, that discrimination wreaks its most debilitating and anger-inducing effects. This, we argue, is the specific kind of racism that could lead to what Portes and Rumbaut call “reactive ethnicity” (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). While Chinese, South Americans, and Russians Jews are also sometimes treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity, their experiences are qualitatively and quantitatively different from the experiences of people with dark skin.

Thus, the fact that children of immigrants have come to be categorized as members of native “minority groups” does not mean their experience has been the same as that of the native minorities. They clearly do suffer much of the same prejudice and discrimination, but they do not inherit the scars and handicaps of a long history of racial

exclusion. Nor, for them, are everyday incidents of discrimination likely to be seen as connected to deep and pervasive power asymmetries. Such incidents are not trivial, but they can be challenged and they do not engender hopelessness.

Finally, even if the children of immigrants are coming to be seen (and to see themselves) as members of a “minority,” we must ask, at this historical juncture, whether that is always a bad thing. Too often, social scientists have assumed that being “racialized” as black or Latino can only have negative consequences for the children of immigrants, a view often shared with immigrant parents. They are partially right. Pervasive racism can indeed be soul-crushing, and the nihilism of the American ghetto can lead young people down many a self destructive path. However, African American communities have always been more complex than this view implies, maintaining their own institutions and paths of upward mobility (Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999). In post-civil rights America, the heritage of the African American struggle for racial justice has given young people new strategies, vocabularies and resources for upward mobility (see Massey et al. 2007).

This may partially explain the pervasiveness of the notion of “discrimination” among this generation of second-generation and native white young adults. If the African American experience of discrimination has been more harsh than that of other groups, the African American civil rights struggle has also provided a heroic model for opposing discrimination. Today’s children of immigrants are quick to take up this model even when, ironically, they are better positioned to make use of it than are African Americans. While their immigrant parents are often willing to quietly accept unfair treatment, the second-generation children are far more willing to challenge discrimination whenever they see it. In the post-civil rights era, this is one of the ways in which they are becoming American.

## NOTES

1. We are two of the three principal investigators of the Second Generation in Metropolitan New York Study, along with John H.

Mollenkopf. The study was funded by the Russell Sage, Mellon, Rockefeller, and Ford Foundations, the UJA Federation of Greater New York and the NIH (Grants 5R03HD044598-2 and 990-0173). Parts of this article have previously appeared in a book written by the three principal investigators along with Jennifer Holdaway (Kasinitz et al. 2008). However, responsibility for this article is ours.

2. The sample included the four boroughs of Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx but excluded Staten Island because it had a much lower concentration of immigrants and their children. It also included the close suburbs of Long Island, Westchester, New Jersey, and Connecticut. See Kasinitz et al. (2008) for more details.
3. We interviewed about 400 from each background and oversampled Chinese to learn both about those whose parents came from the mainland and those from Taiwan or Hong Kong. Our Russian sample was restricted to about 300.

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