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Ethnic Identity on Display: West Indian Youth and the Creation of Ethnic Boundaries in High School

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Introduction

The primary objective of this paper is to provide a deeper understanding of how demographic changes in New York City have created new ethnic identity options for contemporary second-generation West Indian[1] youth. During the 1980s and 1990s, children of West Indian immigrants, those from working-class backgrounds in particular, preferred to identify as African-Americans in order to be accepted by their American peers (Kasinitz, Battle, and Miyares 2001; Waters 2001; Zephir 2001; Stepick et al. 2003). However, the black immigrant population in New York City has grown exponentially since 1990, and West Indians now compose the majority of the black population in several neighborhoods. I examine how this ethnic density manifests in schools, and how it influences ethnic identity formation among second-generation West Indians.

The analysis is based on twenty-four interviews and eight months of participant observation in two Brooklyn high schools from 2003–04. In both schools, Caribbean island identities were a 'cool' commodity within peer groups. Although it was important to express pride in one's island specific identity, there was an equally strong tendency to blur these national-origin boundaries by drawing on Jamaican popular culture in publicly projecting and performing a unified 'West Indian identity.' Consistent with previous research, I found evidence of anti-Haitian prejudice in both schools. However, I also found evidence of a de-stigmatization of Haitianness as a way to incorporate this group as cultural insiders into the larger Caribbean collective.

Finally, although students assigned a high symbolic value to expressing pride in their ethnic origins, they nonetheless acknowledged kinship with African-Americans as fellow blacks. In the sections that follow, I review the literature on ethnic identity formation among second-generation West Indians, outline the theoretical framework that guides the analysis, describe the methodology, and present the findings.

Ethnic Identification among Second-Generation Youth

In the immigration literature, second-generation West Indians are typically presented as cultural minorities within African-American neighborhoods and schools (Kasinitz, Battle, and Miyares 2001; Waters 2001; Zephir 2001; Stepick et al. 2003). These studies often highlight the stigma associated with an island identity in these social milieus, the attempts of many of these young people to 'pass' as African-Americans to avoid social ostracism, and the conflict that sometimes ensues between African-American and West Indian youth as a result. The pressure to identify 'racially' or as black Americans has been particularly salient among Haitians and working-class West Indians. In *Black Identities,* one of the most commonly cited books on this topic, Waters (2001) reports that only 17 per cent of her working-class and poor respondents identified ethnically owing to immense pressure in predominantly black schools to fit in with their African-American peers (see also Kasinitz 1992). In contrast, 57 per cent of her middle-class respondents identified ethnically based on the national origins of their parents, in part because they attended schools where they were more likely to interact with co-ethnic peers as well as their greater access to transnational ties (Vickerman 2001). The general

consensus within this body of literature, however, is that racial discrimination will eventually persuade middle-class youth to follow the path of their working-class peers.

According to Stepick and his coauthors (2001), no other immigrant group in the United States has suffered more prejudice and discrimination than Haitians. They note, for example, that in the 1980s, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control identified Haitians as a primary carrier of the AIDS virus, and refused to accept blood from Haitians even after they were removed from this list. Zephir's (2001) study of second-generation Haitian youth in Brooklyn and Queens yields similar results. She identifies a continuum between those who exhibit a 'stronger' and 'weaker' form of 'Haitianness'. On the weaker end of the continuum is a group she labels as 'undercover Haitians'. This group was motivated by the desire to distance themselves from their Haitian ethnic origins because of the strong xenophobia toward Haitian immigrants in the United States. As a result, American-born Haitians often tried to pass as African-Americans. Similarly, those with identifiable accents tried to pass as different national origin group such as Jamaicans, or emphasized their connection with a known host, such as Canada, of the Haitian diaspora. Much of this literature, however, is based on the experiences of West Indian youth who came of age in the 1980s and 1990s and does not take into account the population changes that have created communities in which West Indians either constitute a critical mass or even a majority of the black population.

By 2000, Caribbean immigrants and their children composed 54 per cent of the black population in New York City (Butterfield 2004). A report published by the New York City Department of City Planning (NYC-DCP 2004) indicates that, in that same year, Jamaica and Guyana ranked as the third and fourth largest foreign-born group in

New York City, while Haiti and Trinidad and Tobago ranked as the seventh and eighth among twenty countries.[1] Since 1990, the population from these countries alone grew by 54.1 percent among Jamaicans, 71.6 per cent among Guyanese, 90.1 per cent among Haitians, and 32.9 per cent among Trinidad and Tobagoans. Further, Crowder and Tedrow (2001) have identified a number of predominantly West Indian neighborhoods in Brooklyn, the borough with the highest concentration of West Indian immigrants outside of the Caribbean islands (Sutton 1987). The NYC-DCP report corroborates this, indicating that 41 per cent of Jamaicans, 36 per cent of Guyanese, 64 per cent of Haitians, and 59 per cent of Trinidad and Tobagoans in New York City live in Brooklyn.

[Insert table 1 here]

Butterfield (2004) addresses a gap in the literature on West Indian immigrant youth by focusing on the role of social context in the construction of ethnic identity. In a comparative analyses of young adults raised in Brooklyn and Queens, she finds that the young people from Brooklyn were more likely to develop island-specific identities because they often interacted in a predominantly West Indian social world. In contrast, those who grew up in Queens, a more multiethnic borough, were more likely to develop pan-Caribbean identities. My work contributes to this literature by building and expanding on Butterfield's research in two ways. First, the evidence presented here updates these findings by at least ten years, which is important given the significant demographic changes described above. Second, my research combines the depth of

interviews with participant observations, which allows me to capture the micro-level decision-making strategies and performances that constitute the identity formation process as it unfolds.

The Expansion of Ethnic Options and the Boundary-Making Approach

The ease with which ethnic identification has become normative among second-generation West Indians in Brooklyn today is as much about location as it is about the current historical moment, when it is now acceptable to emphasize one's ethnic distinctiveness without compromising one's American nationality. For instance, in *Ethnic Options*, Waters (1990) describes the emergence of 'symbolic ethnicity' among the grandchildren and great grandchildren of European immigrants, long after these groups had made it into the American mainstream. Without the fear of discrimination, these individuals can pick and choose which ancestral ties or cultural practices they will embrace and when to do so. She concludes that the children of black immigrants will not have this option owing to their phenotypical similarity to African-Americans and the pervasiveness of anti-black racism in the United States.

Like Waters, most immigration scholars take for granted that ethnic identification among West Indians and other black immigrants is unlikely to survive the iron fist of racial stratification in the United States. For example, Portes and Zhou's (1993) segmented assimilation theory assumes that racial discrimination automatically bars black, Latino, and Asian immigrants from integrating into the white mainstream of American society. Instead, the theory identifies two additional pathways for nonwhite immigrants: the ethnic enclave and the African-American underclass. The third

pathway—the black underclass—exemplifies the black immigrant experience, and the underclass thus becomes immigrants' primary frame of reference for what it means to be American. In doing so, not only does the segmented assimilation perspective fail to address class differentiation within the African-American and Afro-Caribbean communities (Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999), but it also fails to address how variation in social context might influence the process of assimilation for black immigrant youth. In particular, we know very little about how this process unfolds in environments in which African-Americans are not a majority.

In their critique of the segmented assimilation perspective, Alba and Nee (2005) assert that the U.S. system of racial stratification is undergoing changes that will make it possible for Asians and Latinos to eventually enter and reconfigure the American mainstream. As evidence, they point to the high rates of intermarriage with whites among Asians and Latinos, as well as the decline in residential segregation among these groups. When it comes to the fate of black immigrants, however, Alba and Nee conclude that their life chances and experiences would most likely be linked to the fate of African-Americans more so than any other group. Given this shared assumption, it is therefore not surprising that the expansion of ethnic options for people of African descent has not been adequately theorized by either of the two dominant paradigms in the immigration literature: segmented assimilation theory or Alba and Nee's new assimilation theory.

In contrast, Bonilla Silva (2004) proposes that the United States is evolving into a tri-modal system of racial stratification similar to many Latin American countries. He suggests that this new system will likely be composed of whites, 'honorary' whites, and

a 'collective black' group that includes African-Americans, black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean, and economically disadvantaged Asian and Hispanic immigrant groups. Bonilla Silva further asserts that because black immigrants come to the United States with strong ethnic and national identities, black identity as currently conceived is likely to be reconfigured. His position is bolstered by a growing body of research since the 1990s that has highlighted how multiracial individuals are resisting this binary black/white system of racial classification (Roquemore and Brunsma 2002; Kilson 2001; Khanna and Johnson 2010). As such, it is likely that these changes will open up more ethnic options for other nonwhite groups such as West Indians, but it is unclear what these options are, and how they are created within the context of everyday life.

I use Bonilla Silva's work and the boundary-making approach described below to examine the types of identity work that emerge among second-generation West Indian youth in social contexts where the black population is predominantly West Indian. As Alba and Nee (2003) note, boundary construction is an integral part of the assimilation process, but little is known within the social sciences about the mechanisms that solidify or weaken social boundaries. Drawing on earlier work by Baübock (1994) and Zoldberg and Long (1999), Alba and Nee distinguish between three boundary-related social processes: boundary crossing, boundary blurring, and boundary shifting. Boundary crossing takes place when an individual moves from one group to another, but the boundary remains in place. It is exemplified by African-Americans in the Jim Crow era who successfully passed as white. Boundary blurring occurs when the social distinctions between different groups become unclear and

decline in salience over time. For example, boundary blurring between Asians and whites in American society is facilitated though high rates of intermarriage and less residential segregation. Boundary shifting occurs when the dominant group accepts groups that were once considered outsiders. This process is exemplified by the acceptance and full incorporation of Jews by white Protestants (Brodkin 1998). I find evidence of boundary blurring across the national origin groups that identify themselves collectively as West Indians, as well as evidence of boundary shifting to incorporate Haitians into this collective identity.

The boundary-making approach is implicit in the literature on West Indian immigrants reviewed earlier. It is evident from this literature that the first generation tried to solidify the boundary between themselves and African-Americans (Kasinitz 1992), but that boundary crossing was the dominant strategy used by second generation West Indians to fit in with African-America peers (Waters 2001). However, the boundary making approach typically assumes that assimilation is taking place between a relatively weaker immigrant minority and a more powerful mainstream majority (Alba and Nee 2003; Alba 2005; Wimmer 2009). In the case of West Indians, however, assimilation has meant integrating into an existing minority group with equal power and status within the society as a whole, and where the boundary between these groups has typically been blurred. Here, I apply the boundary-making approach outside of the minority-majority context to examine how this process unfolds in a local context in which the immigrant is the majority, but where the native-born group (African-Americans) remain as a frame of reference at the societal level.

Methodology

Data Collection

The current paper is based on data collected as part of a larger project that explored how schools shaped the relationship between ethnic identity and academic engagement. The study relied on participant observation in two Brooklyn high schools, Mayfield, and Farmdale, from September 2003 to May 2004. The schools varied by race and ethnic composition, average socioeconomic status of students, school selectivity, and school organization. I focus on the racial-ethnic composition. Mayfield was a diverse school with a student body that was 37 per cent black, 35 per cent white, 8.4 per cent Hispanic and 20 per cent Asian. Farmdale was 70 per cent black, 8 per cent white, 21 per cent Hispanic and 3 per cent Asian.

I acquired most of the information about these two schools from the New York City Board of Education website and selected them after carefully reviewing all of the schools listed in the borough of Brooklyn. This website rarely reports the percentage of students with immigrant backgrounds except for the foreign–born. Therefore, I interviewed residents in the area to confirm that each school had, at minimum, a critical mass of West Indian students to make the study viable.

I conducted twenty-four interviews (twelve males and twelve females) with second-generation West Indian tenth graders whom I also shadowed at various times during the data collection period. Most of these young people lived in neighborhoods that were predominantly black and where, on average, forty per cent of the residents were foreign-born.

[insert table 2 here]

Most of my interviews took place after school in empty classrooms or at students'

homes, depending on their preferences. Each interview lasted approximately one and a

half hours. All students submitted a consent form signed by themselves and their

parents before I shadowed or interviewed them. To avoid biasing the sample toward

more ethnic-identified adolescents, I recruited students by asking them whether or not

their parents were from the Caribbean, as opposed to asking whether they themselves

'were' West Indian, Haitian, Jamaican, and so forth.

Data Analysis

I used both manual and computer-based approaches to data analysis, using a multi-stage

process whereby coding of data became more focused over time. I used QSR NUDIST

to initially sort all interview data related to ethnic identity. I read all the narratives and

took notes that both summarized and interpreted this data. Based on these side notes, I

was able to further sort the data on ethnic identity into three categories: ethnic

identification, ethnic identity as a process, and 'the social value of ethnic identity'.

Under the category 'ethnic identification', I included information related to the

emerging patterns and meaning students attached to their ethnic identities. In 'ethnic

identity as a process', I included any information related to changes in ethnic identity

over time and the factors that influenced this process. In 'social value of ethnic

identity', I included information pointing to the importance or significance that young

people associated with identifying ethnically. Later in the process, I developed

additional codes from these three areas related to influence of the family, the role of schools, and the distinctiveness of the Haitian experience overall.

Findings

The analyses provide evidence of the rising social value of the West Indian ethnic identity within peer groups.

Ethnic Identity as a 'Cool' Commodity within Peer Groups

In the marketplace of youth, where young people are seeking validation from their peers, 'coolness' itself is a valued commodity; and in the two schools where I conducted my research, one could earn a significant number of 'cool points' by claiming a non-American ethnic identity. I found this similarity despite differences in the organizational structures and race and ethnic composition of each school. For, although Mayfield was racially and ethnically diverse, the majority of the black/West Indian students were concentrated in the 'collegiate' program. As a result these students interacted primarily with other black/West Indian students to the same extent as their counterparts at Farmdale, a predominantly black/West Indian school.

The cool commodity was embodied in part through Jamaican popular culture, which students used as a common terrain for collectively constructing an ethnic 'script' for themselves as West Indians, one that set them apart from African-Americans. Similar to the progeny of European immigrants described by Waters (1990), however, this pride in their ethnic origins has emerged precisely because it does not come at a

social cost. In fact, students at Mayfield and Farmdale pointed to a recent shift toward acceptance of Caribbean music and culture.

> I notice that reggae music is taking the mainstream, the
>
> mainstream and I think its kinda cool. Because you know a few
>
> years ago, you know, you never saw like a dance hall video but
>
> now [you see] Sean Paul …videos.   But look at that! (St. Lucian-
>
> Mayfield).

The growing popularity of Jamaican dancehall music reinforced the idea among my respondents that being a West Indian ethnic was something that made them all special. However, relative to other nationality groups, it also helped to define Jamaican culture as the most worthy of emulation.

> Well, people like reggae, and reggae is mostly Jamaican… and
>
> then people like to do the dance. And this Haitian in my class,
>
> like today, in lab, he was doing Jamaican stuff, and curses. And
>
> I'm like, well, "ain't you a Haitian?" And he's like, "yeah." And
>
> I'm like, "why are you tryin' to be Jamaican?" So I'm like, I
>
> don't know what's going on. And then my friend is Puerto Rican,
>
> but she's kind of, like, black, whatever. She's not black[2],
>
> whatever, but, um, sometimes she's starting to talk Jamaican. I'm
>
> like, "huh?" And then she's like, she just want to talk it, 'cause it
>
> sounds nice. (Guyanese-Mayfield)

Similarly, at Farmdale some African-American students identified as West Indian ethnics to fit in with their peers.

> They … always have to lie and say "Oh my father's Jamaican." Anytime they have a conversation you know, just to be cool and to build clout. [Because] everybody likes Jamaicans they want to feel like, you know, in the box. [Why is that?] I don't know. ...Maybe because most of the black kids are West Indian and they want to fit in.
>
> (Naomi, Haitian-American, Farmdale)

I did not personally speak with any African-American students who admitted to trying to 'pass' as West Indian, and I was reluctant to ask the West Indian students to 'out' their African-American friends in order to do so. Therefore, I cannot say whether this was a widespread practice. Regardless, it suggests a reversal of the undercover phenomenon earlier attributed to Haitians and is consistent with the evidence suggesting that the majority of the black students in both schools were West Indians.

Fashion was a second arena where I saw a growing acceptance of Jamaican culture specifically and West Indian culture more generally. Students who migrated to the United States in junior high school reported that they were teased in school when they initially failed to conform to American standards of dress. Therefore, even as youngsters, students' incorporation into American culture was closely linked to their style of dress. In high school, fashion took on even greater importance, and everyone was affected by these new standards.

 Like in junior high school you could get away with that not matching and all that. High school, I remember one day I came—ninth grade— I came to school not matching. People actually got on me like, "Why you not matching? Them colors don't match". I'm like "shut up", you know? But after a while I'm like really trying to match, you know. I want to fit in. Everything is about fitting in.   (Wayne, Mayfield, Jamaican)

Eventually, greater acceptance and validation of West Indian culture was evident in the expanding dress codes to include a West Indian aesthetic derived from Jamaican popular culture.

Jennifer: But like a certain way how Jamaicans dress, like they call them shotta. Almost everybody tryna dress like that now. Like, they will wear, their jeans will be tight and… they wear like Diesel and those. The shoes that they wear, it doesn't cost that much money, but they look nice and neat. They just have a certain way and everybody is trying to dress like that.

Interviewer: Oh I thought that it was the baggy thing that's in.

Jennifer: Everybody's trying to come out of that now.

Interviewer: Oh. Since when was that the in thing?

Jennifer: That started like last year. Like 2000, summer of 2001 that started coming out. Everybody just started to dress like a shotta. At first they used to be like, "they gay for dressing like

that," but now everybody is into it. It's just different from

everybody else so everybody tryna get into it. (Farmale-

Jamaican)

This greater acceptance of West Indian (Jamaican) culture made it possible for new

immigrants, teenage boys in particular, to be 'cool' and accepted without the pressure to

change their island-based sense of style. Equally important, this new aesthetic placed

less emphasis on expensive brands, making 'coolness' more of a possibility for

working-class youth. Given the relative infancy of this particular trend, the majority of

second-generation West Indian boys still remained loyal to the established dress code

among urban African-American males. Nevertheless, students at both schools pointed

out this new trend using practically the same language and imagery:

> **Wayne:** Shotta, that's like fresh out of Jamaica with these tight
>
> pants and a Diesel hat. That's what it is right there. That's like
>
> that look that's in, so if you're coming from Jamaica and you a
>
> boy and you got the tight pants and the Diesel going, you're
>
> fitting in.
>
> **Interviewer:** What is Diesel?
>
> **Wayne:** It's like shoes, but all my cousins from Jamaica, they be
>
> busting that and tight pants and all that.
>
> **Interviewer**: Where does that look come from?
>
> **Wayne:** I don't know, it's some yaadie look yo, that's just
>
> [CHUCKLE] I don't even know. Fresh out of Jamaica. I don't

know. Movies! That's definitely from the movies….You ever

see that movie "Shottas"? (Mayfield, Jamaican).

Jamaican culture is likely even more appealing to teenage boys because of the role that "shottas" play in Jamaica popular culture. 'Shotta', translated literally as 'shooter', is Jamaican slang for a thug or gangster. The shotta kills to make a living as a thief, drug dealer, a contract killer, or to commit extortion. He also kills to protect his turf, to eliminate police 'informers', to earn or maintain respect. It is also a commonly held view that shottas perform the dirty work of corrupt politicians who use them to ensure the allegiance of their respective voting constituencies. Thus, shottas are feared but appear to be fearless; respected, yet show deference to no one.

Dance hall[3] artists have introduced the shotta to Afro-Caribbean youth in the United States more broadly. Some merely give voice to the poverty and unemployment that make life as a shotta appealing for some young men, while others glorify this lifestyle in their lyrics. As the Mayfield student above and others noted, the recent Jamaican film 'Shottas' depicted a lifestyle of organized crime in Kingston and Miami. In essence, the 'shotta' is an exotic version of the hiphop thug, and thus embodies an alternative thug narrative and model of masculinity for Brooklyn's Afro-Caribbean teenage boys. Similarly, it is the tough image of the shotta that makes 'Jamaicanness' so appealing to non-West Indian boys. I found no female correlate to the shotta image among West Indian girls. This gender difference emerges at least in part because, like rap, dancehall music is male-centered and male-dominated. Overall, the diffusion of the shotta as a representation of Jamaican popular culture functioned as a boundary blurring

mechanism that made it possible for West Indian youth to think of themselves as one separate cultural entity in relation to African-Americans.

Racial Barriers and Ethnic Boundaries: (Not) Black Enough to be West Indian?

Although second-generation West Indians saw themselves as ethnically distinct from African-Americans, they nonetheless acknowledged kinship ties based on racial group membership.   In fact, these young people saw no contradiction in identifying strongly as West Indian ethnics even as they took ownership of certain aspects of African-American culture that they used to construct a racial identity as black. For example, at Mayfield, the Black Heritage Alliance's annual spring show featured dance reflecting the cultural backgrounds of the students, including Reggae and Soca music, which has its roots in Trinidad and Tobago. At the same time, black entertainers such as Will Smith, Oprah Winfrey, and Stedman Graham inspired the material for the skits and comedy routines. Students also practiced a step routine, which is associated with African-American Greek organizations. Interviews suggest that Afro-Caribbean students participated in traditionally African-American cultural forms without any sense of conflict because they perceived these activities as belonging to all black people.

Caribbean cultural practices also dominated the social landscape of Farmdale. At three school-wide extracurricular activities, each featured reggae music. In addition, the foods at informal school potlucks were always West Indian dishes. In addition, each day entire tables teamed up to compete in dominoes, a game prevalent in the Caribbean. A small but visible group of African-Americans co-existed within this predominantly Caribbean social environment. At the same time, though, students at Farmdale

minimized any sharp distinctions between themselves and African-Americans. For

example, as Henri (Haitian-American) informed me: 'We consider ourselves, all of us

are black, [all of us are] cool'. Similarly, Jennifer (Jamaican) informed me that

'everybody just hang together. My friends are from all over. I have an American

[friend]. My best friend is Panamanian. My boyfriend, he's from Guyana'. Terry Ann

(American)[4] acknowledged that some African-American peers might feel left out, but

that it was not a particularly serious issue: 'Sometimes you would feel left out because

you're not from the Caribbean and everybody says, "oh yeah I'm from this island, I'm

from this island. Where are you from?" "Oh, I'm from America". But I don't think

they feel like really, really, really bad or anything like that'.

Except for observations in the Black Heritage Society at Mayfield, most of the

conversations with students related more to issues of cultural identity than race. At first

glance, the relative invisibility of race lends support to the general assumption that the

children of black immigrants from the Caribbean who identify 'ethnically' are not as

race conscious as those who identify 'racially' or as Americans. Yet, race remains an

integral dimension of their social identities. It operates as an ever-present subtext that

informs how these young people defined 'West Indianness' and how they relate to one

another. This becomes evident when racial meanings and assumptions are challenged;

such challenges were more likely to rise to the surface at Mayfield because of the

school's overall racial and ethnic diversity.

On my first official day at Mayfield high school, Mr. Monroe took me to the

Dean's office to get an identification card so that I could enter and leave the building

freely. While I waited, 'babygirl', (a shortened version of her rap name), volunteered to

give me a tour of the school. She told me she was West Indian, Cuban, and Jamaican. Eventually, she revealed that her mother was white and Jewish, and admitted that she is often hesitant to share this information.

Several months later, I overheard a conversation between babygirl and her classmate, Tanya, that helped to clarify babygirl's reluctance to reveal her biracial background. In class one day, babygirl told Tanya that the lotion she was carrying in her bag was for her god-sister. 'Is she white?' asked Tanya. 'No, she's Puerto Rican', babygirl told her. Although there was no overt sign of disapproval from Tanya, it is likely that each time a member of her peer group inquired about her biracial background, they remind her that having one white parent potentially calls into question the authenticity of her claim to a shared African-Caribbean heritage. For this reason, babygirl prefers to emphasize her Cuban-Jamaican ancestry in order to fit in with her peers, most of whom are Black and have roots in the Caribbean.

Similarly, at a Black Heritage Society meeting, Jerome, was being teased about being too light-Skinned to be Jamaican. Sarah, one of the girls in the group, speculates that he must be a Puerto Rican, and that Jerome is too good-looking to be Jamaican. Although he appeared not to be defensive, soon thereafter he and his Haitian friend started to banter back and forth, punctuating each sentence by swearing in Jamaican patois. Babygirl's and Jerome's experiences are further evidence that within the peer group it mattered whether one had some link to the Caribbean even if it was only through one parent. What the exchanges reveal is the high symbolic value that students assigned to identifying as West Indian ethnics and the privileged position of Jamaican culture at the top of their 'coolness' hierarchy. Further, within this predominately Caribbean social

milieu, blackness was the canvas upon which youth constructed a West Indian ethnic identity. As a result, when one's racial identity as black was questioned, so too was one's authenticity as a West Indian ethnic.

Haitian Pride and Prejudice

Consistent with the academic literature, I found evidence across both schools that some Haitian students felt stigmatized because of their national origin. Naomi, for example, downplayed her Haitian background to avoid being ridiculed by her classmates.

> Yeah Ms. Talia she made the comment about, um, is there anybody that's Haitian in the class, and I didn't raise my hand and this Dominican girl was like "Naomi, aren't you?" and I was like [nonverbal cue to tell the other girl not to say anything]. You know why right? Because, before she even asked that question, this one kid said "Haiti, that country's so poor." He said that country is so poor and this other kid said 'Haitians they can't even eat, or feed themselves'. They were saying like mean, mean things so if I raised my hand they would have all come together and pressured me. So they were like, "Oh, you're Haitian. I never knew you were Haitian. I just thought you were black". Well, that's why I didn't raise my hand. (Farmdale-Haitian-American)

 Even so, I also found evidence of the gradual attenuation of this stigma. At Mayfield in particular, where Haitians composed the largest Afro-Caribbean nationality group, it had evolved into a generalized slur used to poke fun at anyone who did not conform to acceptable standards of dress or behavior established by the peer group. At Mayfield, it had become acceptable for Haitian students to publicly identify as Haitian without being ridiculed, as long as they distanced themselves from the stigmatized behaviors associated with Haitianness.

The attenuation of Haitian prejudice is certainly linked to the significant growth in this population since 1990, and this is evident in the explanations that students gave for why Haitian students were becoming more accepted than they had been in the past.

> This girl, this Haitian girl named Charlene, she fit the whole
> [Haitian stereotype]… Naps in her hair, [and] never matching…
> but she changed. She really changed for the better… Like she
> started acting different and I seen her, like, when people ask her
> if she's Haitian or not, sometimes she'll definitely hesitate. So
> all these Haitian people started coming up and started really, you
> know? It's like everybody that's Haitian, they don't care no
> more. Because there's so much Haitians out there so it's like
> they fit in. Like it's crazy. You see so much of them. Like half
> of Mayfield—I could say like 70 per cent of Mayfield [in the
> collegiate program] is Haitian. (Wayne, Mayfield, Jamaican)

The attenuation of Haitian prejudice is also likely a result of the convergence of two complementary processes. First, in response to years of teasing and harassment

that they experienced in elementary or junior high, some Haitian students used high school as an opportunity to re-invent themselves. Second, the students found a social environment in high school where all second-generation youth were expected to proudly identify with their ethnic origins. Eventually, some Haitian students began to publicly express pride in their Haitian background, and their increasing visibility influenced others to do the same.

At Farmdale this explanation is equally valid, though Haitian students were not a majority there. For example, Barrington, a Haitian male, informed me that his friend Henri did not initially reveal his Haitian ethnic origins until after they became friends. Similarly, Charmaine and Naomi reported that they felt more comfortable acknowledging their Haitian ancestry once they got to high school, and like the students at Mayfield, found that their peers were much more accepting of them than was the case in their younger years.

The destigmatization of Haitianness is further evidence not only of the value that second-generation West Indians associated with identifying as West Indian ethnics, but also the growing acceptance of Haitians as cultural insiders within the larger Caribbean collective.   As Janet suggests, some students at Mayfield had begun to disapprove of those who pretended to be Jamaican simply to improve their status within the peer group. In the past, this 'passing' behavior was rewarded with acceptance into African-American peer groups. But as Janet reveals, it is now better to express pride in one's ethnic origins, at least at Mayfield.

My friend, she's Haitian, but…[but] she's all into

Jamaican stuff. She says she could sing all of the reggae

songs, everything. And she even got her nails [painted]

with the Jamaican flag, and people are upset about that,

'cause why would you do that, when you're Haitian? It

not only offended the Haitian people, but the Jamaicans

too. It's not only Jamaicans, it's people in general. They

were mad at her. (Janet, Jamaican, Mayfield)

At Farmdale, the incorporation of Haitians into the larger Caribbean collective is best illustrated by an incident in a Global History class when Cory, an African-American student, directed an insensitive question toward two Haitian students in the class. The two Haitian students were visibly embarrassed but remained silent. Damian, who identified as Jamaican defended the Haitian students. He then asked Cory, 'What are you?' 'I'm American' Cory told him. Damian admonished him to 'stop talking about Haitians', then mumbled under his breath, but loud enough for the class to hear: 'fuckin Americans'. This particular incident is consistent with evidence from both schools that West Indian students thought of Haitians as part of the larger Caribbean family of nations, which is why Damian felt the need to defend his classmates even though they were not necessarily friends.

Discussion

The experiences of second-generation West Indians in New York City are quite different today from those who were high school students in the 1980s and 1990s (Author 2009), where many felt pressured to identify as Americans in order to fit in with their African-American peers (Kasinitz, Battle, and Miyares 2001; Waters 2001;

Zephir 2001; Stepick et al. 2003). The evidence from this study indicates that second-generation West Indians feel no such pressure, in large part because the majority of the black students in both schools have roots in the Caribbean. In fact, it has now become 'cool' to identify as a West Indian ethnic and to express pride in one's ethnic origin. Evidence of this transformation is reflected in the prominence of Jamaican popular culture among black students in both schools, and particularly the gradual acceptance of the Jamaican shotta as a fashion icon, even though it deviates significantly from the styles typically worn by urban African-American males. This change is also reflected in the decline of Haitian prejudice, and the shifting of ethnic boundaries in order to incorporate them as cultural insiders within the larger Caribbean collective. This change is also reflected in student reports that some African-American students feel pressured to claim West Indian ancestry in order to fit in with their Afro-Caribbean peers. More generally, these students are more likely to publicly validate their West Indian roots, particularly in peer groups at school. As a result, it is possible that some of the African-American students might feel out of place in these schools. Even so, I have no evidence to suggest that those who identify as African-Americans are rejected by their Caribbean peers.

My argument is consistent with census data reported by the New York Department of City Planning that show significant growth among the four largest Afro-Caribbean groups in New York City (Jamaicans, Haitians, Guyanese, and Trinidad and Tobagoans), and that these groups tend to settle primarily in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. Further, the data help to explain why Haitians and Jamaicans figure so prominently in my analyses. Jamaicans are the third largest national-origin group in

New York City and the largest Caribbean immigrant group. In addition, their culture is the most visible within American society as a whole. As such, although pride in one's ethnic origins is encouraged within peer groups, Jamaican popular culture also functions as a boundary-blurring mechanism that unifies students from different islands into a single West Indian collective, marking them as ethnically distinct from African-Americans. The destigmatization of Haitians can also be linked to these demographic shifts because the Haitian population in New York City has grown at a faster rate than any of the other three West Indian national origin groups identified in this paper. Further, Haitians are even more concentrated in Brooklyn where I conducted my research.

The evidence presented here builds and expands on *Becoming New Yorkers* (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters 2006), which suggests that ethnic identification is more salient among second-generation immigrants from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. It also resonates with Portes and Stepick's argument (1994) that because the power structure, civic institutions, and cultural life in Miami is increasingly dominated by Cuban immigrants, economic mobility is no longer dependent on acculturation into a (white) American mainstream society. Instead, these circumstances produce 'acculturation in reverse—a process by which foreign customs and institutions…are diffused within the native population' (Portes and Stepick 1994, p. 8). Although no single immigrant group dominates the social and economic institutions, New York City is similar to Miami in being a majority minority city where biculturalism, rather than full assimilation, has become the norm for new immigrants and their children. Consistent with previous research (Butterfield 2004), evidence from

the case studies presented here also points to the possibility of 'acculturation in reverse' among African-Americans and Afro-West Indians. However, this is an issue that is ripe for future research.

These findings complicate the assumptions of segmented assimilation theory, which assumes that, for black immigrants, assimilation takes place in predominantly African-American social contexts. While this is a fair assumption to make, the majority of West Indians are concentrated in New York City. Further, in Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and West Palm Beach, West Indian immigrants compose a critical mass within the black population (34.4 per cent, 43.4 per cent, and 30.3 per cent, respectively), (Logan and Deane, 2003). In addition, the Afro-Caribbean immigrant population has practically doubled in cities such as Newark, Orlando, and Atlanta, even though they compose a much lower percentage of the black population in these locations (Logan and Deane 2003). Thus, the West Indian immigrant population is expanding into locations outside of the typical areas of settlement.

Further, these demographic changes are taking place as the American system of racial stratification is in flux, redefining the mainstream in ways that make it possible for Asian and Hispanic groups to eventually attain 'whiteness' just as early twentieth century European immigrants did. It is unlikely that West Indians and other immigrants of African descent will have this option in the near or distant future, and so, consistent with segmented assimilation theory, it is quite logical that they will assimilate into American society as 'blacks'. However, this study provides evidence of the ease with which second-generation West Indians manage multiple identities simultaneously and without conflict, including identities based on national origin as well as racial group

membership (Author 2009; Butterfield 2004). If in fact the black/white racial

dichotomy is becoming a relic of the past in the United States (Bonilla Silva 2004),

then, a potential consequence of the growth of the West Indian (and African) immigrant

presence could be a challenge to the practice of conflating race with ethnicity where

people of African descent are concerned.

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Endnotes

[1] To put these rankings in perspective, take into consideration that China, which ranked second on this list, is also the second largest contributor to the foreign-born population in the United States as a whole. Jamaicans also outnumber Mexicans in New York City, though Mexicans are the largest foreign-born group in the United States.

[2] From the students' perspectives black can mean two things, it can refer to an individual of African descent regardless of ethnicity or it is synonymous with 'African-American'. So the student essentially means that her Puerto Rican friend is a person of African descent in the first instance, and that she is not African-American in the second instance.

[3] Dance Hall is a genre of Jamaican music that became popular in the 1980s [see Sanneth, K. (2005, September 8). "Reggae's New Old Sound, Led by a Marley, in The New York Times.] Unlike the traditional 'roots' reggae popularized by Bob Marley, dance hall artists feel no special obligation toward the spiritual and cultural 'uplift' of people of African descent. Its primary objective is to entertain. Jamaican dancehall music is credited with playing an influential role in the creation of American rap music.   The two have roots in disenfranchised, inner-city communities where they give voice to disaffected youth, reflecting their voices of protest.   For more on this history see Raquel Z Rivera, *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone* (Palgrave Macmillan: 2003).

[4] Terry Ann is the only student whom I interviewed that identified as American.