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# Immigrants and African Americans

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## Keywords

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## Abstract

We examine how recent immigration to the United States has affected African Americans. We first review the research on the growing diversity within the black population, driven largely by the presence of black immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa. As their children and grandchildren come of age, relations between immigrants and African Americans are complicated by the fact that a growing portion of the African American community has origins in both groups. We then review literature on both new destinations and established gateway cities to illustrate the patterns of cooperation, competition, and avoidance between immigrants of diverse races and African Americans in neighborhoods, the labor market, and politics. We explore the implications of the population's increasing racial diversity owing to immigration for policies that aim to promote racial equality but that are framed in terms of diversity. We conclude with suggestions for new areas of research.

## INTRODUCTION

The experiences of African Americans and immigrants have long provided different, and sometimes contrasting, models with which the United States has understood racial and ethnic difference. In some historical moments, blacks and immigrants have made common cause in their struggle for inclusion (Parks & Warren 2012, Telles & Ortiz 2008). More often, however, they have been rivals or competitors, viewing their interests as standing in opposition. Indeed, since the early twentieth century, African American scholars have often noted that the successful incorporation of immigrants into American society, and perhaps even their social recognition as whites, was connected to their differentiation from blacks (Du Bois 1920, Frazier 1966 [1939]).

In recent years, historians have picked up this notion, pointing to immigrants' achievement of "whiteness" in large part by distancing themselves from African Americans as a key factor in their upward mobility (Ignatiev 1995; Roediger 1994, 2005). Other observers have argued that applying this contemporary racial lens creates an oversimplified and anachronistic understanding of past immigrants' incorporation experiences (see Alba 2005, Fox & Guglielmo 2012, Jacobson 1998). Nevertheless, most would agree that immigrant progress has often come, at least in part, at the expense of African Americans. Indeed, as Foner (2000, p. 226) has suggested:

The civil rights movement paradoxically contributed to the emergence of a new racial order that benefited eastern and southern Europeans. By putting black-white issues on center stage in the national agenda, the struggle for African American civil rights reduced the salience of racial distinctions among European groups, thereby allowing Jews and Italians to "vanish into whiteness."

At the same time, the language and strategies of struggles for inclusion employed by immigrants and African Americans have often influenced each other. As early as the 1920s, Du

Bois and other black intellectuals drew parallels between their situations and those of recently arrived immigrants (Aptheker 1975 [1924]). Likewise, after the Civil Rights movement, it became more common for immigrants and other ethnic minorities to stress their similarities with African Americans when arguing for social inclusion. From the Black Panther-inspired Young Lords and Brown Berets of the late 1960s to the various NAACP-inspired Latino, Asian American, and more recently, Middle Eastern American (see Bakalian & Bozorgmehr 2009) legal defense groups, African Americans have served as role models as well as sources of strategies and tactics.

The resumption of large-scale migration in the 1960s further complicated the relationship between African Americans and immigrants. Given that the vast majority of these new immigrants have been nonwhite, the lines between immigrant and racial minorities—so important and bright in the early twentieth century—are increasingly blurry (Alba 2005). The timing of these migration flows occurred during the same period as the traditional structures of Jim Crow segregation were ending, race relations were being transformed, the black middle class was growing, and racial boundaries were shifting.

Recent immigration to the United States has affected African Americans in three major ways, which we examine in turn. First, we review the research on the growing diversity within the black population, driven largely by the presence of black immigrants from the Caribbean and Continental Africa. As their children and grandchildren come of age, relations between immigrants and African Americans are complicated by the fact that a growing portion of the African American community has origins in both groups. Second, we describe the patterns of cooperation, competition, and avoidance between immigrants of diverse races and African Americans in neighborhoods, the labor market, and politics. Third, we argue that the increasing racial diversity of the population owing to immigration means policies that aim to promote racial equality but that are framed in terms of diversity often do not address the needs of

native African Americans who, arguably, need such policies the most. We end with a discussion of needed new research that will support the design and implementation of new policy initiatives that target poor native-born African Americans.

## GROWING ETHNIC DIVERSITY AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS

Most of the 38.9 million black Americans in the United States in 2010 are descended from enslaved people brought from Africa to North America during the slave trade between 1619 and 1859.<sup>1</sup> In the late nineteenth century, Cape Verdeans became the first voluntary African migrants to the United States, leaving their island homelands off the coast of Senegal and settling in New England ports such as New Bedford (Halter 1993). The first appreciable wave of Afro-Caribbean immigrants arrived in the United States in the early part of the twentieth century, and the pre-1965 numbers of Caribbean immigrants peaked in the early 1920s, with approximately 100,000 West Indians arriving between 1900 and 1930. Although it represented less than 1% of the US black population in 1960, the foreign-born black population multiplied nearly sevenfold by 1980 (Kent 2007). By the 1990s and 2000s, new waves of immigrants from Africa had begun arriving, more than tripling the foreign-born black population by 2005. Differing considerably in terms of socioeconomic characteristics, patterns of settlement, language background, gender distributions, family type, and type of visa entry, these immigrant streams have generated a far more diverse black American population.

Capps et al. (2012) reported that, of all black immigrants in 2009, 1,081,000 were African;

<sup>1</sup>The African slave trade was outlawed in the United States in 1808, although illegal slave traders continued to smuggle a small number of enslaved people from Africa and the Caribbean into the American South for decades thereafter. The last known enslaved Africans to land in the United States were kidnapped in Benin and sold in Mobile, Alabama, in 1859. The last known American survivor of the Middle Passage died in 1935.

1,701,000 were from the Caribbean; and another 485,000 came from Canada, Europe, and Central and South America. In total, there were 3.3 million foreign-born blacks in the United States, representing 8% of all black Americans, and their 813,000 second-generation children comprised 12% of all young black children. Both figures are sizable enough to strongly influence statistical descriptions of the heterogeneous black population.<sup>2</sup>

## Caribbean Immigrants

Most black immigrants from the Caribbean come from Haiti and the English-speaking islands of the West Indies and, reflecting the shared political and cultural history of the region, call themselves West Indians (Waters 1999). Although many migrants from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean—excluding Puerto Ricans because they are American citizens—are also of partial African ancestry, few describe themselves as “Black” on the US Census. Rather, most select “Other” on the race question and choose a specific nationality on the Hispanic origin question.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, 14% of Dominican and 3% of Cuban immigrants identify as black, making the former the fifth and the latter the seventh largest sources of black immigrants from the Caribbean. Black migrants from Spanish-speaking countries tend to be poorer than their English-speaking

<sup>2</sup>Few statistical databases actually differentiate immigrant and second-generation blacks from native African Americans. The inclusion of black immigrants and their children among the black population in most descriptions may be obscuring many aspects of the situation of native African Americans.

<sup>3</sup>Although many Hispanic immigrants are also of partially African descent, most tend to describe themselves as “Hispanic” or “Other” on the US Census and other surveys and are not usually counted as “Black” immigrants. The social science convention of subtracting all Census respondents who describe themselves as “Hispanic” from whatever racial category they chose—thus creating “non-Hispanic whites,” “non-Hispanic blacks,” etc.—probably leads to a further underestimation of the numbers of black immigrants. In recent years, there has been something of a rise of “Afro-Hispanic” consciousness and a new appreciation of African ethnic origins among Latinos both in the United States and in some countries of Latin America (Flores & Román 2009).

counterparts and usually settle in different neighborhoods (Kent 2007).

The early work of Ira De A. Reid (1969 [1939]) posited that West Indians were much more likely than African Americans to be small business owners, although he presented little evidence for this claim. Glazer & Moynihan (1963, p. 35) furthered this assertion in *Beyond the Melting Pot*: “The ethos of the West Indians, in contrast to that of the Southern Negro, emphasized saving, hard work, investment, and education.” When more systematic research regarding the Caribbean population in the United States began in the 1970s, with Bryce-Laporte’s (1972) attention to “invisible immigrants,” a vigorous debate centered on whether West Indians were more successful than African Americans and whether their alleged success implied that cultural deficiencies—not racial discrimination—were holding back African Americans (see Sowell 1978).

Although this early argument regarding the role of entrepreneurship has been largely discredited (Kalmijn 1996; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Model 1991, 2008), several important studies have demonstrated that first- and second-generation West Indians are in fact more successful than African Americans. Comparing Caribbean blacks in the United States to those in Britain, Canada, and the Netherlands, Model (2008) explores the three most common hypotheses put forth to explain their success—immigrant selectivity, cultural differences, and white favoritism. Her analyses of census and survey data point to selectivity as the most likely explanation, although she acknowledges that cultural differences and white favoritism toward immigrants are probably better documented in qualitative research (Waters 1999).

Another strand of debate investigated West Indian migrants’ conceptualization of their ethnic and racial identities. Did these groups maintain an ethnic or national origin identity or did they simply “fade to black” and become African American (Kasinitz et al. 2001)? Kasinitz (1992), examining West Indian immigrants’ political lives throughout the twentieth century, found that they and their children were

more likely to identify as African American before the mass migration and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. In more recent times, however, they have claimed both an ethnic and a racial identity. Rogers (2006) found similar evidence of an increasing role for ethnic political actors within the black community.

Several studies also investigated how West Indian immigrants and their children encountered American racial categories and discrimination (Foner & Fredrickson 2004, Shaw-Taylor & Tuch 2007, Vickerman 2007, Waters 1999, Zéphir 2001). As Waters and Vickerman separately found, first-generation immigrants are worried about downward mobility for their children and find an immigrant identity to be more highly valued. They therefore have asserted an ethnic identity as West Indian or Jamaican, for example, rather than a racial identity as a black American. For their part, the second generation who grew up without telltale signs of an immigrant identity experienced a range of outcomes: Upwardly mobile, middle-class second-generation youth tended to identify with a national or regional identity, whereas poor and downwardly mobile youth were quicker to adopt a black American one (Portes & MacLeod 1996, Waters 1999, Zéphir 2001).

Portes & Rumbaut (2006) attributed the second generation’s downward mobility, especially for Haitians, to a poor context of reception, to racism, and to their inability to access public assistance. Settling in segregated neighborhoods and attending failing big-city schools, coupled with the negative peer influences of poor African Americans and the poverty and isolation of their own parents, fueled negative outcomes for Haitians in the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (Portes et al. 2005). For these and other reasons, then, some second-generation youth often hid their identities and “passed” as African American (Stepick 1998), which still resulted in negative outcomes in some cases (see Woldemikael 1989). Note, however, that these studies were conducted on adolescents, a group that Feliciano (2009) describes as likely to identify as hyphenated

Americans over time as their educational levels increase (see also Smith 2014).

Sampling the adult children of Anglophone Caribbean migrants, the New York Second-Generation Study found mixed but generally positive outcomes (Kasinitz et al. 2008). West Indians had slightly better educational and occupational outcomes than their native African American, Puerto Rican, or Dominican peers, although they did less well than whites. Their arrest rates were higher than their second-generation Asian and European immigrant counterparts, but they were significantly lower than native blacks' and essentially the same as native whites'. In her study of labor union members, Greer (2013) found that Caribbean and African immigrants are generally more optimistic than African Americans about the possibilities for economic success and social mobility in the United States. She also notes that recent immigrants are often motivated to retain ethnic identities as a way of differentiating themselves from African Americans, although over time this distancing tends to diminish as a consciousness emerges of a linked fate with that of African Americans.

### African Immigrants

In the last decade, Africans have become the fastest growing immigrant group in the country (Capps et al. 2012). The number of African migrants almost doubled to 1.1 million between 2000 and 2009, whereas the number of Caribbean blacks increased by only 19%. If this differential holds, African immigrants will outnumber Caribbeans by 2020.

The sharp increase in African immigration has resulted from the interaction of American immigration policy and changing conditions in Africa. Whereas 80% of legal black Caribbean migrants enter under family reunification visas, Africans have entered under myriad rules. For example, 30% arrived as refugees between 2000 and 2005, owing to a marked increase in the number of armed conflicts across the continent in the 1990s (Gleditsch et al. 2002). This has implications for the group's

characteristics and prospects for integration, as refugees tend to have much lower levels of education and language skills than other immigrants. Refugees are also eligible for a range of social services, have legal status, and are often connected with social-service-minded faith groups.

Another 22% entered under the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program (Kent 2007, Thomas 2012). Begun in 1990, this lottery awards visas to people from countries underrepresented in American immigration, disproportionately benefiting African immigrants (Jasso 2011). Capps et al. (2012) note the potential for continued emigration from Africa in the coming decades. The continent has a very young age structure and a large, poor population undergoing rapid economic development and urbanization, all factors that typically lead to increased emigration (Massey et al. 1999).

### Comparing African and Caribbean Black Immigrants

African and Caribbean black immigrants differ along several important dimensions. Caribbean black migrants are much more residentially concentrated than Africans, with only 10% living outside of the Northeast or Florida (Kent 2007). Africans, by contrast, are widely disbursed—with 20% living in the Midwest and 15% in the West—and their settlement decisions vary by political and linguistic indicators. For example, refugees often settle in areas with low housing costs and with small African American populations (e.g., large Somali populations are in Lewiston, Maine, and throughout Minnesota, where they represent 22% of the state's black population; see Besteman 2012), whereas English-speaking Africans tend to settle near African Americans, especially in New York and the Southeast. Even in cities where African and Caribbean blacks are both present in substantial numbers—such as New York; Washington, DC; Boston; and Atlanta—the groups generally live in different, yet nearby neighborhoods (Logan 2007, Vang 2012), with Africans living near but not in the same

Table 1 Educational attainment for adults (aged 25 and over), by race and origin (%), 2005–2009

	Less than high school	High school or GED	Some college	Four-year college degree	Postgraduate degree
Black African immigrants	13	21	28	23	15
Black Caribbean immigrants	22	32	26	13	7
Native-born black Americans	21	33	31	10	5
Total US foreign-born	32	23	18	16	11
Total US native-born	12	30	30	18	10
Total US	16	29	28	17	10

Sources: Thomas's (2012) use of the Migration Policy Institute analysis of 2005–2009 American Community Survey (ACS) pooled data, as well as authors' analysis of 2005–2009 ACS pooled data.

neighborhoods as both African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans (though see Ludwig 2014 for a notable exception).

There are also large demographic and socio-economic differences between the two groups. The Pew Research Center estimates that 21% of African and 16% of Caribbean immigrants are undocumented. Both groups have strong English-language skills, with a plurality of Africans and 78% of Afro-Caribbeans reporting that they speak English very well or fluently. This is well above the proficiency of other immigrants to the United States and is often cited as a reason for the group's high employment and income rates. **Table 1** provides both groups' educational distributions. Caribbean blacks have lower educational attainment than African migrants, but this masks differences among the groups and declining educational selectivity over time.

However, higher levels of education have not translated into higher incomes for African migrants. Africans earn 11% less on average than Afro-Caribbeans; in 2007, this meant median incomes of \$27,000 and \$30,000, respectively, even with similar rates of labor force participation. Thomas (2012) attributes this difference to Africans' younger average age and more limited time in the US labor force. Capps et al. (2012) further note that African

immigrants are significantly underemployed, with about one-third with college degrees earned abroad working in unskilled jobs.

## ENCOUNTERS AND RELATIONS BETWEEN AFRICAN AMERICANS AND IMMIGRANTS

How have migration flows shaped relations between African Americans and immigrants? In this section, we review recent research on the effects of immigration on African Americans in residential patterns, politics, the labor market, and general intergroup relations.

### Residential Patterns

Smith & Edmonston (1997) observed high levels of segregation between African Americans and immigrants, noting that one-third of blacks lived in areas where immigrants accounted for less than 2% of the population and—though 10% of the population—immigrants made up only 4.2% of the population where the average black resided. Indeed, with more than half of African Americans in the South in 2010, residential overlap between the two groups was more limited than expected (Iceland 2009). Regional changes since the research of Smith & Edmonston (1997) in both the settlement of immigrants and the internal migration of

native-born whites and blacks have affected the degree to which blacks and immigrants encounter each other.

Examining racial segregation across the United States, Parisi et al. (2011) find that neighborhood segregation accounts for, at best, half of black segregation from whites, Asians, and Hispanics; the rest is driven by macrosegregation, place-to-place segregation, or regional segregation. Furthermore, Parisi et al.'s analyses of block-level data reveal that blacks are substantially more segregated from whites than are Hispanics and Asians, groups they discover to be more segregated from blacks than from whites. But do these regional patterns reflect a reaction of native-born blacks and whites to immigration? Crowder et al. (2011), using Panel Study Income Dynamics data, argue that the growth of the immigrant population did prompt black and white outmigration and that these patterns help to maintain black segregation from Hispanics and Asians.

Additional evidence suggests the brightness of this boundary (Alba 2005). For example, half of Hispanic migrants identify as white on the Census (Foner & Alba 2010, p. 803), and intermarriage with whites is much higher among both Asians and Hispanics than among blacks (Perlmann & Waters 2004, Qian & Lichter 2011). Although residential segregation exists between nonblack immigrant groups and whites, it generally operates differently from how it does between blacks and whites. Levels of segregation for blacks are high regardless of socioeconomic status. By contrast, segregation decreases for Hispanics and Asians as their socioeconomic status increases, a pattern that more closely resembles that of the second generation of pre-1965 immigrants (Iceland 2009). These divergent experiences may suggest that the color line in the United States has shifted from one in which the greatest divide is between whites and nonwhites to one where the important divide is between blacks and nonblacks, much to the detriment of African Americans (Gans 1999, Lee & Bean 2010).

Recent research on residential segregation illuminates the conflicting trends char-

acterizing the pattern of racial distribution across neighborhoods. Logan & Zhang (2010) show that stubbornly persistent hypersegregation of blacks from whites continues in many cities. They also identify the growth of stably integrated "global neighborhoods," or census tracts where all four major racial ethnic groups—blacks, whites, Hispanics, and Asians—live side-by-side. When contrasted with these global neighborhoods, the dismal lack of progress on black-white desegregation is striking. In the nation's 20 most diverse regions, 38.2% of the total population now lives in neighborhoods where all four groups are represented in appreciable numbers. In New York, for instance, about one-third of whites live in these neighborhoods, as do 31.8% of Asians, 22.4% of blacks, and 28.5% of Hispanics. Logan & Zhang conclude that these neighborhoods demonstrate that the stable integration of different ethnic groups into white neighborhoods is possible without provoking white flight. Nevertheless, this integration may continue to obscure the segregation of native African Americans.

The growing presence of black immigrants complicates measurements of racial segregation and immigrant-black interactions, with recent studies examining differences in segregation by blacks' immigrant status. Crowder (1999) found that, although West Indians in New York City were segregated from whites in the same ways as African Americans, West Indians lived in higher-quality neighborhoods that were separate from those of native-born blacks. Denton & Massey (1989) found that black Hispanics were much more segregated than Hispanics who identified as white or "Other." Iceland (2009, pp. 66–67) examined differences among black immigrants by the amount of time spent in the United States. He found that Nigerians, Haitians, and Jamaicans had very high levels of segregation from whites in 2000, with an average index of dissimilarity of 0.789. There was some evidence that Haitians and Jamaicans had slightly lower levels of segregation with longer years of residence, but no change for Nigerians. Freeman (2002) also concluded that



there was little evidence for spatial assimilation over time for black immigrants, with those arriving in the 1980s showing similar levels of segregation as those arriving before 1970.

One additional difficulty in studies of blacks' and migrants' segregation patterns is the growth of new immigrant destinations. Whereas previous waves of immigrants settled in gateway cities such as New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, compelling evidence finds that contemporary flows are converging on new destinations in metropolitan and rural areas across the Midwest, the Northeast, the West, and the South (Massey 2008, Massey & Capoferro 2008). These areas have experienced significant demographic shifts since the 1970s (Durand et al. 2006, Marrow 2011, Odem & Lacy 2009, Schmid 2003)—driven largely by economic opportunities in industrial and agricultural sectors in rural areas and industrial and service sectors in urban ones (Bankston 2007)—and are likely to continue to do so given immigrants' reliance on social networks to guide their migration decisions (Garip & Asad 2013). Understanding the role that new destinations play in shaping group relations between immigrants and other groups—particularly African Americans—is thus a critical and understudied area of sociological research (Ellis & Almgren 2009).

On the whole, early literature examining African Americans' relations with immigrants demonstrates the former to be either accepting of, or ambivalent about, their new neighbors (Burns & Gimpel 2000, Espenshade & Calhoun 1993, Espenshade & Hempstead 1996, Harwood 1986). An increasing number of sociologists, however, have suggested that the proliferation of immigrant groups in both traditional and new destinations has manifested in tensions along political, economic, and social dimensions (Jones-Correa 2005, 2008; Jones-Correa & de Graauw 2013; Winders 2013), discussed in turn below.

## Politics

In recent years, American national politics has often been characterized by coalitions

between immigrants (and their children) and native blacks. This was seen most clearly in the 2012 reelection of Barack Obama, the first African American president—himself the son of an African migrant—with overwhelming first- and later-generation Hispanic and Asian American support. Local politics, however, has often reflected tensions between blacks and immigrants (Jones-Correa 2011). Policies originally designed for native-born minorities, such as affirmative action, have been extended to recent immigrants and their children as a matter of civil rights (Kasinitz et al. 2008). Although benefiting immigrants and their progeny in some contexts, this 1960s American “civil rights model” has proven to be a poor fit in other contexts, such as electoral politics. Indeed, the intersection of geography, demography, law, and politics has created a disjunction between the polity and the actual population, leaving large segments of the US population outside the political process.

This complex political dynamic is seen most clearly in traditional immigrant destinations, where large and increasingly well-established immigrant communities share residential and political space with African Americans and, sometimes, other long-standing native minorities (Telles et al. 2011, Waters & Kasinitz 2013). In some cases, this has benefited immigrants, with African Americans and other racial minorities serving as political “proximal hosts” (Mittleberg & Waters 1992). Political, social service, and cultural organizations have reached out to serve migrants, occasionally transforming their original missions to “immigrant aid” operations (Alex-Assensoh 2009, Ludwig 2014). Elected officials and labor union leaders, who came to power representing one group, find themselves campaigning to newcomers in response to shifting demographics (Foerster 2004, Marwell 2004). Over time, however, immigrants may grow impatient with their “proximal hosts,” and established groups—particularly African Americans—may come to feel that, once again, they are being excluded and deprived of resources at the hands of newcomers.

In 2001, Mexican American candidate Antonio Villaraigosa failed in his first bid to become mayor of Los Angeles, largely because of the strong support black voters gave his white opponent, James Hahn. Four years later, he became the city's first modern Mexican American mayor, after gaining a larger share of the black vote in 2005 (Mollenkopf & Sonenshein 2013). In New York's 2012 congressional elections, veteran congressman Charles Rangel, whose Harlem seat has been represented by an African American since 1945, came within a few hundred votes of losing his seat to a Dominican immigrant. At the same time, coalitions between immigrants and blacks have emerged, as in 2009 when a Taiwanese immigrant was elected New York City comptroller with strong African American support.

Ethnic politics and ethnic succession are an old and complex story in these gateway cities. Yet in such places the public has generally accepted it as both legitimate and inevitable. This is far less true in new destinations, where the rapid increase in the foreign-born population has had important political consequences for native-born blacks. In some cases, observers have found evidence of "zero-sum politics," or the redistribution of resources to the new arrivals at the expense of politically engaged residents (Jones-Correa 2005). Indeed, each new destination reveals differences in migrants' mobilization strategies that influence how much political representation they receive (Bada et al. 2010). As Okamoto & Ebert (2010) highlight, migrant groups' mobilization strategies allow them to take advantage of political opportunities and resources while simultaneously creating boundary markers between themselves and African Americans. Marrow (2011) reports that these relationships are particularly complex in parts of the South, where the structure of the post-Jim Crow racial order has been renegotiated with the sudden arrival of new groups. Tensions are more pronounced in majority-black regions, where African Americans may feel socioeconomically threatened by incoming immigrants but perceive little strategic need to ally with them politically. By contrast, in areas

with a smaller proportion of African Americans, there appear to be greater incentives for the two groups to come together politically, which may help to reduce feelings of tension (Marrow 2008, Morin et al. 2011). Such findings highlight the importance of governmental—in addition to social and economic—contexts of reception in shaping political dynamics (Massey 2008, Winders 2013).

In both old and new immigrant destinations, we see a growing disconnect between public policy and public opinion. As Americans have become more restrictionist in their views toward regulating immigration flows (Jones-Correa 2012, Suro 2009), the government has had difficulty following suit, chiefly because of strong lobbying on migrants' behalf (Harwood 1986, Kohut et al. 2006). Studies find that, over time, recent migrants in both traditional and new destinations have been able to achieve political incorporation (Van Hook et al. 2006), but African Americans have not always been able to make similar gains (Hochschild & Weaver 2007, Marrow 2011, Sears & Savalei 2006). Particularly in new destinations, African Americans have often viewed immigrant groups' gains unfavorably (Ha 2010), resenting recent arrivals who take advantage of Civil Rights-era policies such as affirmative action (Massey 2008).

Ironically, at a time when African Americans' political participation—despite high levels of felony disenfranchisement (Manza & Uggen 2006)—has finally approached whites', immigrants remain underrepresented. Legal permanent residents and the more than 11 million undocumented immigrants now constitute the *largest effectively disenfranchised population in the country*. The relative youth of the immigrant population further exacerbates this problem. Myers (2007) reports that, in 2000, Hispanics and Asians made up 13.7% and 3.7% of the national population, respectively, but were only 5.1% and 1.8% of the voters. By contrast, whites, although 68.2% of the US population, were 81.3% of the electorate. At that time, African Americans, 11.8% of the population, represented only 11.2% of the voters. The problem is more extreme in areas with large

concentrations of immigrants. In California, Hispanics made up 32.3% and Asians 11.1% of the population in 2000, but only 13.8% and 7.0% of the voters, respectively. Since then, both the population and the percentage of eligible Hispanic voters have grown dramatically, though most studies estimate that they still constitute only about 10% of actual voters.<sup>4</sup>

In many ways, this exclusion from democratic participation harkens back to the African American struggle for civil rights, and immigrants—particularly the young “dreamers” (undocumented young people and their supporters who are advocating for the Dream Act, to grant legalization to undocumented people who arrived as children) immersed in post-Jim Crow US culture (Gonzales 2011)—have heard these echoes. Nevertheless, these approaches are not always well suited to their particular situations. For example, the Voting Rights Act—a central provision of which the Supreme Court struck down in 2013—and other reforms that seek to redress a history of political exclusion often assume African American levels of residential concentration. Generalizing from the most extreme case (Iceland 2009, White & Glick 2009), legal efforts to create supermajority electoral districts for Latinos, given their lower levels of segregation, have had to link distant communities with no shared ethnic identity and few common interests. These districts often either have failed to elect Latinos or have not met constitutional muster. Attempts to create Asian American districts, for a group with even lower levels of residential segregation, have proven to be even more problematic. Furthermore, in places with aging and declining native white or native black populations, immigrant majorities

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<sup>4</sup>Of course, Americans do not actually vote nationally. Rather, they vote in geographically defined districts, and this greatly compounds the problem of immigrant underrepresentation. Indeed, even the much ballyhooed impact of the new immigrants on the 2012 presidential election, though appearing dramatic in national polls, is actually blunted by the fact that a large portion of the immigrant population lives in old destination states that were not electorally in play, such as California and New York.

are underrepresented due to their youth and lack of citizenship. With no obvious remedy, the voting rights model has created districts in which majority Latino populations continue to elect whites or, in polyglot majority minority districts, continue to be dominated by a declining population of native African Americans.

In extreme cases, this model has created something akin to “rotten boroughs”<sup>5</sup>—municipal, state, and congressional districts where a large portion of the population does not, or cannot, vote. This increases the electoral power of the remaining population because it takes fewer—and in some cases, far fewer—votes to win public office. The result is a sharp ethnic divide between a locale’s population and its effective polity. For example, in Compton, California, where Latinos have been a majority of the population for decades, the shrinking African American population still constitutes a narrow majority of the voting-aged US citizens (Camarillo 2004). In 2005, Compton’s mayor and entire City Council were African Americans (Myers 2007).

Mollenkopf & Sonenshein (2013) note a similar disconnect between the population and the polity in New York City and Los Angeles, which is even more complex due to the diverse ethnic landscape in both contexts. In the former, Puerto Rican politicians increasingly represent districts in which the Puerto Rican population is in decline but the Dominican, Mexican, and Ecuadorean populations are rapidly increasing. Similarly, African American politicians often represent districts with growing Latino, West Indian, and African populations. Despite New York-based Caribbeans’ long history of complaints about the difficulty of gaining district-level electoral representation (Kasinitz 1992, Rogers 2006), the Civil Rights-era language of the Voting Rights Act makes it difficult, if not impossible, to challenge districts in which a minority

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<sup>5</sup>A rotten borough was the term for a British Parliament district with a very small population, which could send a representative to Parliament. They were numerous until the Reform Act of 1832 outlawed them.

supermajority consistently elects minority representatives, even if those representatives are not members of the same minority group that dominates that district's population.

By parsing racial groups by immigration and generational status, Mollenkopf & Sonenshein (2013) provide a striking account of immigrant underrepresentation in New York City politics. In 2008, they noted that "native stock" whites, or native-born whites with native-born parents, comprised 19.3% of the city's population but cast 31.3% of the votes in that year's presidential election. Native blacks were also slightly overrepresented, with 12.5% of the population and 15.6% of the votes. By contrast, foreign-born and second-generation blacks, Latinos, and Asians all constituted a smaller portion of the voters than they did of the population.

Myers (2007, p. 123) terms this problem "political lag," implying that immigrants' share of the electorate will "catch up" to their share of the population as more immigrants naturalize and as their children come of age. However, the growth of the undocumented immigrant population since 1990 has slowed that process by creating a semipermanent, nonvoting population that can be used to create districts composed mostly of nonvoters. It is probably not realistic to expect the beneficiaries of this "rotten borough" effect to challenge this outcome. Although the eventual fate of various immigration reform proposals is unclear as of this writing, they are unlikely to change this situation very much in the short or medium term.

### Economics and the Labor Market

The question of economic impacts is perhaps the most contentious issue regarding immigrants and African Americans. Nationally, African American employment and labor force participation rates have remained consistently lower than those of whites for several decades, particularly among men. The rates are generally higher for Hispanic men (including native and foreign born) than they are for either native blacks or whites. It is thus tempting to assume that, absent large-scale immigration, African

Americans would hold many of the jobs—especially many of the unskilled jobs—now held by immigrants. Nevertheless, although some employers may be replacing native blacks with immigrant labor, the situation is more complicated than a simple zero-sum trade-off.

Most economists agree that immigration has, on the whole, been good for American economic growth (Orrenius & Zavodny 2010). More controversy remains over whether it has had negative impacts on wage and employment outcomes for poor, low-skilled workers. During the late 1980s, Card (2001) estimates, immigration reduced low-skilled workers' wages only slightly. Extending the analysis into the early 2000s, Ottaviano & Peri (2008) and Orrenius & Zavodny (2007) considered the negative effect to be even lower. By contrast, Borjas (2003) concludes immigration's effect on workers without a high school education is much stronger, though he notes little or no impact on better-educated workers.

As for specific effects on native blacks, most research has found little support for the labor market competition hypothesis (Burns & Gimpel 2000, Espenshade & Calhoun 1993). By contrast, Borjas et al. (2010) maintain that a significant portion of the decline in African American employment is due to immigrant competition, yet even they note that immigrants are "imperfect substitutes" for African Americans, and for native-born Americans generally, as they enter the labor market with different preferences, skills, and abilities. Although they insist that immigrants have had a substantial negative impact on the employment levels of low-skilled native black men, they find that rates of incarceration—which rose rapidly during the same historical period—probably had a greater impact (see also Pettit 2012, Western & Pettit 2000).

One reason to be skeptical about the negative impact of immigration on African American economic prospects is that the local labor markets with large numbers of immigrants are not generally those with the lowest native black wages or labor force participation, although this could also reflect selective outmigration

from these areas. Moreover, the negative effects of immigrant competition on African American workers are partially offset by the positive effects of immigration on the overall local economies. Crowley & Lichter (2009) find that recent influxes of Hispanic migrants in “new boomtowns” have resulted in few negative economic consequences for local populations. Using Census data, they show that poverty and unemployment rates declined throughout the 1990s for all populations, and per capita income increased for all racial groups but Hispanics.

In contrast to macro-level survey data, qualitative studies have generally emphasized the negative economic consequences associated with a growing presence of migrants in new destinations (though see Parks & Warren 2012 on hotel workers in Chicago for a notable exception). Case studies abound with examples of job replacement or displacement in various industries, including carpet-weaving, poultry, meatpacking, mushroom harvesting, and other industrial sectors (Donato et al. 2008, Kandel & Parrado 2005, Singer et al. 2008). In her study of a Minnesotan meatpacking firm, Fennelly (2008) cites how employers cut costs by closing unionized plants, only to reopen them as nonunionized and hire only immigrant workers. Similar evidence of job displacement is found in the carpet manufacturing and poultry industries (Hernández-León & Zúñiga 2000, 2002). Because hiring via workers’ social networks is more cost-effective for employers than searching for new employees themselves (Elliott 2001, Waters 1999), local-level displacement is likely to continue in new destinations (Bean et al. 2011, López-Sanders 2009). Furthermore, considerable evidence suggests that many employers prefer immigrants—including black immigrants—to African Americans in lower-skilled jobs. Whether due to simple racism, the perception that immigrants make better workers, African Americans’ less effective use of social networks, or employers’ perceptions that immigrants are more exploitable, the preference for immigrants seems quite consistent (Kirschenman & Neckerman 1991, Smith 2010, Waldinger

1996, Waldinger & Lichter 2003). The fact that African Americans may be competing with black immigrants thus may be obscuring the extent of this problem (Waters 1999).

The divergence between macro-level and case study findings may be due to compositional effects: Whereas low-skilled African Americans may indeed be bearing the brunt of competition with low-skilled immigrants, others in the same communities—including better-educated or higher-skilled African Americans—are benefiting (McDermott 2011). Immigration has contributed to the overall economic health of many localities and has stabilized or led to growth in local populations. This, in turn, leads to overall higher levels of employment, even if some workers are displaced from low-skilled jobs. Population stability and a healthy local fiscal climate are particularly important in supporting levels of public sector employment—a sector in which African Americans are often overrepresented and immigrants generally underrepresented—as many public sector jobs require English language skills, educational credentials, and in some cases American citizenship and perhaps political connections. Thus, although we suspect that high levels of immigration do have negative impacts on some part of the black community—particularly among unskilled and less highly educated workers—these effects tend to fade when looking at African Americans as a whole.

Whatever the reality, the perception that immigrants harm the economic fortunes of African Americans—or those of other poor Americans—is a powerful force in American politics. Not surprisingly, new destinations are often hotbeds of anti-immigrant sentiment. Kohut et al. (2006), drawing on Census data from five metropolitan new destinations, find that Americans are increasingly concerned about immigration. A growing number view immigrants as a burden to the country, believing that they usurp already limited housing options from native-born populations while competing with other low-income, predominantly African Americans for low-skilled jobs. Nevertheless, African Americans have generally not

embraced nativist politics. Indeed, most of the African American political leadership has been consistently pro-immigration. In addition, nonwhites are generally more supportive of immigration than are whites. By a broad racial background (i.e., whites versus nonwhites), 22% of whites and 25% of nonwhites say immigration should be increased. Among nonwhites in the same poll, 67% of blacks and 68% of Hispanics favor maintaining or increasing immigration levels (Saad 2013). Thus far, the commitment to minority inclusion and antiracism seem sufficiently embedded as a matter of first principles in the black polity to overcome any nativist tendencies in the community.

Ironically, the one group of people that are almost certainly negatively affected by high levels of immigration is the immigrants themselves. New migrants directly compete with previous waves for similar jobs in the same locales. Yet rarely do immigrant groups advocate for restricting migration flows. Bonds of solidarity, coethnicity, and a general sense of fairness often lead immigrants and their children to favor extending the opportunities they have had to others like themselves, economic consequences notwithstanding.

### Intergroup Relations and Social Outcomes

We have already seen how immigrants may complicate African Americans' pathways to economic mobility, as both groups must now compete for a limited pool of jobs, housing, and social services. As Singer (2004, p. 16) observes, this competition is "causing some degree of social conflict," although how much is a point of disagreement between quantitative and qualitative studies (Marrow 2005). Analyzing a representative survey from a pair of matched counties in North Carolina, O'Neil & Tienda (2010) find that there is evidence of competition and threat, which in turn influence natives' perceptions of foreign-born populations, but that these views become more positive with greater levels of sustained contact with migrants outside of a work environment. Drawing on the

1998–2002 General Social Surveys, Taylor & Schroeder (2010) describe a similarly complex dynamic between native blacks and immigrants. Despite finding tenuous or no associations between a growing Hispanic presence and social psychological outcomes for African Americans, the authors report that a local influx of Latinos has strained African Americans' trust in the federal government and dampened positive perceptions of Hispanics as a whole.

Qualitative studies provide a more nuanced account of intergroup relations associated with this rapid demographic shift. Winders (2013), examining the growth of the Latino population in Nashville and its implications for race relations, concludes that this immigrant group represents an intermediate position in the traditional black-white racial binary. What used to be a predominantly black-white profile is now more multiethnic. Indeed, the arrival of immigrant groups to these new contexts has led to increased rates of racial and ethnic intermarriage (Lee & Bean 2004), often seen as a litmus test of integration (Alba & Nee 2003). However, recent research finds limited evidence supporting the claim that intermarriage reduces social distance for, or increases social integration of, blacks (Song 2009). A growing body of evidence suggests that this evolving multiethnic composition may actually reify racial boundaries, creating a new black-nonblack color line (Gans 1999; Lee & Bean 2004, 2010; Yancey 2003). Lee & Bean (2007), drawing on Census data and in-depth interviews with multiracial individuals, find that Asians and Latinos exhibit much less social distance from whites than do blacks. New, nonwhite immigrants have been able to cross this boundary as well, socially distancing themselves from African Americans (Lichter & Brown 2011). In many ways, this echoes the experience of earlier European immigrants.

Identifying the potential emergence of a new racial hierarchy in the South, Marrow (2009) shows how immigrant populations in new destinations navigate this divide. In her study of rural North Carolina, she shows how African Americans are excluded from mainstream social integration (see also McDermott

2011). Recent Hispanic arrivals—including those who are dark-skinned, low-income, and undocumented—are aware of the racial division but adeptly permeate this boundary in an attempt to minimize the social distance between themselves and whites (see also Frank et al. 2010). Although this social separation between native- and foreign-born populations is rarely overtly hostile (Griffith 2008), over time, these distancing strategies may inhibit African Americans' social integration (Sears & Savalei 2006). A related strand of research suggests, however, that higher levels of immigration in new destinations can positively impact African Americans' social integration, at least at the neighborhood level. In some contexts—such as North Carolina—what used to be predominantly black neighborhoods are now composed of both Hispanic and black minorities (Cravey 2003, Deaton 2008, Mohl 2003). Such integration, however, is not without exception. In cities such as Nashville and Atlanta, Latino migrants have actively avoided African American neighborhoods, settling instead in working-class white neighborhoods and magnifying racial boundaries (Odem 2008, Winders 2013).

## FROM RACIAL JUSTICE TO DIVERSITY POLICIES

In 2004, the *New York Times* reported that black immigrants were overrepresented among African Americans at Harvard, sparking a debate about the relative success of the former in higher education. Massey et al. (2007) explored this issue with the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen, which surveyed students at highly selective colleges nationwide, finding that black students with immigrant origins were overrepresented among students in top colleges. Twenty-seven percent of black freshmen entering the study's 28 selective colleges were of immigrant origin, as were 35% entering the top ten most selective institutions. Among the Ivy League institutions in the sample, first- and second-generation blacks made up 41% of the population. Bennett

& Lutz (2009), using the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Study, show that this immigrant advantage in college attendance is concentrated in highly selective schools. Nevertheless, they find that among all high school graduates, 75.1% of immigrant blacks enrolled in college, compared with 72.5% of whites and only 60.2% of native blacks.

The pattern of differential success of first- and second-generation black immigrants relative to native-born blacks is not limited to these groups. A similar dynamic is occurring among different groups of Latinos. Youth of immigrant descent from South American countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru do better than native-born Puerto Ricans and some later-generation Mexican Americans in the Southwest (Kasinitz et al. 2008, Telles & Ortiz 2008). But our statistical conventions often render these differences invisible.

Kevin Brown, a legal scholar who has written on these issues, suggests that we need a new name for African Americans who are not the offspring of an immigrant or a recent intermarriage. He proposes the term "ascendants" to refer to African Americans who "experienced America's racially discriminatory history their entire lives or were born from parents who were generally considered black at the time that affirmative action was adopted" (Brown & Bell 2008, p. 1236). His proposal for this new category is designed to provide a way for administrators of scholarship programs and admissions officers to seek out these individuals for special consideration.

Many current policies designed to encourage diversity in education and the workforce do not recognize that, although children of immigrants have come to be categorized as members of native minority groups, this does not mean their experiences have been the same. Although they clearly do suffer much of the same modern-day prejudice and discrimination, they generally do not inherit the scars and handicaps of a long history of racial exclusion and discrimination. As the children of selected immigrants, they have some measurable and undoubtedly considerable, incommensurable

assets and strengths that native minorities do not share. They are thus poised to benefit greatly from institutions and programs dating from the Civil Rights revolution.

Many immigrants also find themselves in a position to take advantage of resources within US minority communities, as well as what Neckerman et al. (1999) called “minority cultures of upward mobility.” This is not entirely new. Although it was scarcely noticed outside the black community, historically black colleges and universities have long played a role in educating Caribbean and African immigrants. Some of the most prominent members of those communities initially came to the United States to attend these institutions, which frequently hosted African and Caribbean students and scholars who would eventually play significant roles in their homelands in the mid-twentieth century. However, until recently, the resources of US minority communities were extremely thin, and there was little reason for any immigrant who could avoid being characterized as black to seek them out. This may no longer be true. For instance, Smith (2014) describes the phenomenon of “Black Mexicans,” young Mexican New Yorkers who seek out both the Afro-centric culture of black advancement and the resources tied to it in their largely African American New York public schools.

Even for young immigrants not regarded as black, the civil rights model may have profound effects. This is true even for those with little social connection to African Americans. Most of the second-generation Asian American professionals studied by Min & Kim (2002), for example, report feeling more “comfortable” with whites than with blacks or Latinos. Yet they still report feeling “moderate levels of kinship with African Americans and Latinos,” as “these minority communities provide role models in fighting white racism” (Min & Kim 2002, p. 177).

African American (and, to a lesser extent, Mexican American and Puerto Rican) institutional structures and modes of organization

have provided new models and institutions that were not present for immigrants in earlier times. These include schools, clubs, and curricula designed to meet the cultural needs of blacks and Hispanics, Latino and Asian American studies programs, and ethnically based professional groups and associations (Vallejo 2012). For better or worse, the children of non-white immigrants have often taken up these models, representing a significant change in US society.

Although affirmative action policies in education and the workplace are being legally challenged and progressively circumscribed, diversity outreach policies are the norm in corporate America and elite educational institutions (Dobbin 2009). To some extent, these policies have hastened the incorporation of post-1965 nonwhite immigrants, although they were not designed for that purpose. Indeed, given changing demographics, it now seems clear that many elite positions traditionally held by white men will increasingly be filled by nonwhites and women. Yet there is no guarantee that this opportunity for “nonzero sum mobility” will benefit native blacks (Alba 2009). It may be that, in the future, we will decide that late-twentieth-century and early-twenty-first-century affirmative action worked best as an immigrant integration policy.

Nevertheless, the original, stated purpose of affirmative action—racial justice—may have been undermined by the inclusion of immigrants and their children in the categories eligible for special consideration. In any event, the entrenched poverty and unique problems of poor African Americans are not going to be alleviated by diversity policies now that there is a large middle-class, multiethnic African American population. New policies are needed that target the very poor communities differentially impacted by our tragic recent national experiment with mass incarceration, as well as isolated African American communities in both the rural South and inner-city ghettos. The evidence presented here demonstrates that, although immigration is not a major source of disadvantage



for poor African Americans, it may be masking continuing segregation and deprivation among native-born blacks.

Facilitating the incorporation of newcomers and addressing the persistent disadvantage

of long-standing US minorities are both worthy and important societal goals. They are not, however, the same goal. Policies that accomplish one do not necessarily accomplish the other. The challenge is to accomplish both.

### FUTURE ISSUES

1. Many of the studies identified in this review that highlight intergroup tensions use cross-sectional qualitative data. These studies may thus fail to capture changes in intergroup relations over time. Future work should seek to incorporate longitudinal qualitative studies that can help sociologists understand the processes by which group dynamics unravel. Returning to sites where previous work has been conducted is likely to be fruitful.
2. The portrait presented by quantitative data about intergroup relations in new destinations diverges from those accounts put forth by qualitative studies (Marrow 2005). Quantitative studies should attempt to take into account receiving contexts (Portes & Rumbaut 2006), as each locale can differentially affect how a group is integrated and the implications of their integration for others in the community.
3. Sociologists should seek to uncover the mechanisms through which group tensions develop in these new destinations. This important work should help to alleviate group tensions in these areas. Research suggests that group conflict is often based on stereotypes about nationality and socioeconomic status (Lee & Fiske 2006), but recent work finds that exposure to new groups over time may help to reduce prejudice and stereotyping that drive tensions (Kohut et al. 2006).
4. New research should investigate the complicated political dynamics of immigrant and African American shared representation. Current estimates of political underrepresentation often share two problems. First, the US-born second generation is generally counted as part of the native population. Though technically correct, it might be more sociologically useful to think of these individuals as part of immigrant communities (Kasinitz et al. 2008, Portes & Rumbaut 2001). Second, because many analyses are based on Census racial categories and not on nativity or ancestry data, they tend to compare all blacks to all Asians, Hispanics, or whites, without regard to immigration status. This ignores the fact that immigrants and their children now comprise a growing part of the black population.
5. Finally, social scientists should seek to collect data in ways that make it possible to differentiate between immigrants and long-settled populations among racial minorities. The uncritical acceptance of racial categories—white, black, Asian, Latino, and Native American—makes it hard to differentiate long-standing Latino, Asian, and black populations from recent immigrants. As a result, the relative success of immigrants and their children may be obscuring the continuing problems faced by members of long-standing minority populations.

### DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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