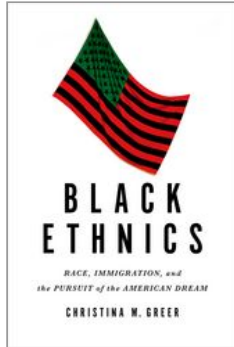


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Black Ethnics: Race, Immigration, and the Pursuit of the American Dream

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Conclusion

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Abstract and Keywords

The conclusion summarizes the contributions of this project to the field of political science and the theoretical literature on race, immigration, and labor. It also offers concluding remarks regarding black ethnicity and the future of black political representation and collective participatory engagement. In addition, this chapter also addresses the study's implications for the current immigration debates. In particular, it considers the growing complexities of racial classification, and informs more general policy and methodological recommendations for future studies of race and ethnicity in the United States.

Keywords: Black Groups, Populations, Racial Groups, Political, Ethnics

Much has changed in the past fifty years. The entry of black ethnic opinions into the discourse of American politics, and more specifically black politics, has increased greatly within the past few decades, even if documentation of this change within the political science literature has been relatively sparse. The rise of black immigrant visibility on the local and even national levels presents the duality of melding their immigrant status with their American status, thus creating what appears to be a unifying effect on an interracial level. However, distinct ethnic attitudes, needs, and desires emerge on an intraracial level, depending on the issue presented. The question for future scholars, activists, and members of the polity is “How exactly can blacks achieve not just linked fate, but actual coalition building?” How can blacks use their shared racial identity and distinct ethnicities to create long-lasting policy that decreases competition for scarce and/or seemingly scarce resources?

How do blacks in America negotiate the American Dream, and how do they see traditional forms of politics as avenues for the fulfillment of those dreams when the boundaries of race are drawn and largely predetermined before voluntary black immigrants arrive in the United States? The shared phenotype for blacks living in the United States has created not only an amalgam of shared resources, but also competition and a creation of multiple overlapping and even sometimes mutually exclusive communities. The decision to maintain both one’s race and ethnicity once in the United States rests, to a certain extent, on how people view their prospects for upward mobility, integration, and ultimately assimilation.

Sociologists and economists have analyzed the ethnic differences among black populations in America in order to discern the significance of race, place, and prosperity for newly arrived black populations. This book examines the opinion differences and similarities that exist among black ethnic populations (p.138) in order to demonstrate the significance of race and a specific ethnic identity on ones political beliefs and behaviors. Furthermore, this research explains how increased migration of black immigrants affects electoral group policy choices and ethnic identification when the definition and the actual makeup of the black population have changed so significantly since the 1960s. This book provides empirical evidence for what has largely existed as a theoretical and largely qualitative discussion among sociologists,¹ showing how blacks in America conceptualize intraracial interactions and competitions, and the extent to which their shared racial categorization determines how they behave politically, how the government should allocate resources, and what they believe their

prospects for success may be. The ultimate goal of this book has been to assess whether native-born and foreign-born populations can forge a significant black coalition that amalgamates the linked fate of racial identity and the maintenance of distinct ethnic identities. The answer is yes, under certain conditions.

For blacks in the United States, at times their racial attachment is their primary identification, such as when events or circumstances affect black people largely due to the color of their skin. And at other times, ethnic attachments take precedence. The shared phenotype of black ethnic populations in the United States, of both native-born and foreign-born groups, contributes to a shared racial identity when assessing their treatment in the United States. However, the shared black phenotype has its limits. As the data show, when specific questions are asked which push respondents to define themselves ethnically, very clear ethnic attachments are evident. The relevance of ethnic identity is directly linked to the strength of one's identity in evaluating other black ethnic groups and contributes to how they negotiate future possibilities for success and advancement in the American polity.

Black ethnic groups in America have been negotiating multiple identities, that of being immigrants, phenotypically black, and American. The permanent "black" modifier is what distinguishes black immigrants from other nonblack immigrant populations, thus the significance of race for phenotypically black populations living in the United States is solidified not necessarily in place of, but rather in addition to, their ethnic identification. Many black immigrants have not given much thought to being "black" before migrating to the United States. However, on arrival, they have been confronted with the reality of being black in America, of their treatment in the United States compared to white populations, and of becoming "American with a modifier." Full inclusion in the American polity for black immigrants is not the same as previous assimilations of white ethnics. Nor is it the same as the integration of Latino and Asian immigrants. If black ethnics are to be fully included in American society, scholars argue, they will not attempt to shed their immigrant status and identities in order to become "American." This contrasts with preexisting theories pertaining to the histories (p.139) of white ethnic populations. Previously, "white" ethnic groups attempted to rid themselves of their immigrant status in order to more easily assimilate and integrate into American society. Instead, in today's America, many black immigrants work to maintain their ethnic identities.

The rationale behind the maintenance of an immigrant or ethnic identity stems from black immigrant populations' inability to assimilate into the American polity without the permanent modifier "black." Black immigrants seek to maintain their ethnic identity so as to distinguish themselves from black American populations. In addition, black ethnics do recognize their linked fate with other phenotypically black populations once in the United States. So the combination of lack of full assimilation for black immigrants, a permanent black modifier attached to their newly minted American status and a sense of linked fate with other phenotypically black peoples has led to a sense of shared identity, on the one hand, and a sense of an elevated minority status, on the other—that is, perceived by whites, nonwhites, and even black Americans as slightly "better" than native-born blacks, but not quite viewed as having the same potential and assimilation prospects as other nonblack immigrant and racial groups. The ways in which the black American, Afro-Caribbean, and Africans negotiate their racial and ethnic identities presents a wealth of questions for the study and future of black politics.

The dominant group, that is to say certain facets of white America, distinguishes black foreign-born populations from native-born blacks at times, yet amalgamates foreign- and native-born populations at other times. Subsequently, a tenuous "in-group of the out-group" status for non-native-born blacks has been created. Because of the racial identification placed upon newly arrived blacks by the dominant group, new black populations are racially classified with black Americans, given a modifier to their American status, and situated in the "out-group." However, because of the elevated minority status bestowed upon non-native-born blacks, their position as a member of the "out-group" with preferential status from the "in-group" creates a dual status for foreign-blacks and therefore further solidifies foreign-born blacks as elevated minorities. The multifaceted identity for many new immigrants has influenced their decision to keep ties with their home country; and for many African and Afro-Caribbean immigrants, the United States is seen as a destination in which to live, but not to die (Rogers 2006). Several African SSEU Local 371 members interviewed indicated that the United States is a destination to fulfill economic goals, but that they fully plan to return to their home countries. Whether or not they will in fact return to their home countries is still unclear. However, the intention to return is stated in abundance.

This project is timely and beneficial to scholars, politicians, and policy makers for several reasons. First, the increasing numbers of blacks in the population (p.140) has risen from 26.5 million in 1980 to roughly

38.9 million in 2010 (US Census 2010), remaining 12 to 13 percent of the United States population for roughly thirty years. However, the composition of black ethnic groups within that percentage has changed considerably over the past thirty years. Second, this project addresses the geographic, national origin, and ethnic diversity of the black population. According to the 2010 census, Afro-Caribbean and African persons now comprise roughly 10 percent of the black US population.² And Africans are among the fastest-growing immigrant groups in the United States, surpassing Afro-Caribbean rates of migration to the United States (Capps, McCabe, and Fix 2011). Historically, when scholars and politicians referred to “African American” or “black American” populations, they were directly or indirectly referring to individuals who were descendants of US slavery. Today, however, the increased diversity of black populations is visible in electoral districts, candidates running for office, emerging policy debates that focus on pressing international issues, and growing differences in views toward domestic policies and programs that have historically assisted black American populations. There is now a significant growth in populations of Haitians in Miami, Jamaicans in New York City, and Ethiopian and Nigerian populations in Washington, DC, to name just a few of the urban centers. Diverse African and Afro-Caribbean groups have also begun to migrate to budding suburban and smaller urban centers such as Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Madison.

Post-Civil Rights and Real-World Politics: Is a Black Ethnic Coalition Possible?

Black ethnics are also making their presence known in the political arena. Increased activism and mobilization of black immigrant groups has contributed to increased numbers of black ethnic elected officials on the local and now national levels. In New York, Florida, and Illinois, there are electoral districts now represented by Jamaican and Haitian individuals. This growth in black ethnic diversity demonstrates the effects of majority-minority districts as well as the increases in viable black ethnic candidates who are able to amass significant voting base populations (Epstein and O'Halloran 1999).

Because the number of black immigrants in the United States continues to grow, analyses of black ethnic populations have evolved from purely social and cultural interests into political discourse and debate. Let us consider the role of Yvette Clarke, the Brooklyn, New York, congresswoman of Jamaican descent who was elected in a Caribbean and black American district in 2006. Her election to New York's Eleventh District in the US Congress left her city council seat empty and multiple candidates vying for her former position. During the election season (p.141) there were candidates of Caribbean descent, and a large portion of preliminary candidates were of Haitian descent or Haitian immigrants. Haitian immigrants have been a large presence in the district for years, but due to in-fighting, they could never seem to elect a Haitian candidate due to the numerous Haitian individuals competing for the same seat. For this open election, Haitian leaders united to support one candidate instead of having ten Haitian candidates fracture the vote. National newspapers included articles pertaining to the ethnic diversity of candidates running for city council in New York City and to the power negotiations between black American, old black immigrant, and newly arrived black immigrant populations. Therefore, in 2006, a district in Brooklyn, New York, found itself thinking about the rise of Haitian immigrant candidates in traditionally black American and Jamaican neighborhoods and districts, the prospect of a biracial white and Kenyan presidential candidate who views himself as African American, and the diverse needs and desires of black immigrants in districts represented by traditional black American candidates. This one district illustrated the necessity of an evolved understanding of black politics. In addition, districts in other parts of New York; Washington, DC; Miami; Atlanta; and even Boston were grappling with these same new questions.

Increased numbers of African and Afro-Caribbean candidates have been running and winning electoral offices throughout the country. This growing phenomenon begs the question "Will black immigrant

populations emulate black American patterns of political advancement?" As Afro-Caribbean and African candidates make political strides, intraracial tensions are illuminated due to some black American political figures viewing black immigrants as "cousins," but clearly not immediate members of the family. Several black American political leaders from the civil rights movement are now respected elected officials in various levels of government and have called into question black ethnic candidates' racial "authenticity" and attachments to the black race. They argue that these populations have not paid their dues or properly formed the necessary foundations for an evolved political understanding of the black political experience (Harris 2012; Tesler and Sears 2010). For example, as Barack Obama became the first African American president of the United States, his ability to build racial and ethnic coalitions and his overall understandings of the black political experience were evident. He has been able to form descriptive and substantive coalitions having utilized more than the traditional post-civil rights formulas. Black diversity now extends beyond class and region and thus calls the theories of black political leadership, participation and incorporation into question (Dawson 2001).

The steady and current influx of black immigrants in the latter part of the twentieth century and now into the twenty-first has created a new set of questions pertaining to what it means to be "African American," what the future of black political participation will look like, and what similarities and distinctions (p.142) now exist among the various groups comprising the American black diaspora. Politicians, social critics, and scholars of immigration have become more interested in and aware of the opinions, attitudes, and concerns of individuals migrating from the Caribbean and Africa. Scholars have begun to dissect many questions surrounding black immigrant populations, including these three: How incorporated are black ethnics into American society? What distinguishes them from black American populations? And will these "new blacks" participate in the electoral process in the same or similar ways as black Americans? There are still a multitude of questions for social scientists to unfold: For the purposes of future coalition building, is it beneficial to make ethnic distinctions among black immigrants, or will traditional racial classifications suffice? Will this growth in the black immigrant population and the globalization of America provide for a politically unifying moment for blacks in America?—that is, a unifying moment that extends beyond similar voting patterns and addresses racialized policy issues that affect groups as "blacks" as well as their specific ethnic communities? How does the migration of Afro-Caribbean and African groups to the United States parallel black American migration to Africa and the Caribbean? Because of the

emergence of “new” blacks to the United States, the ways in which foreign-born blacks view native-born blacks and also their newfound black American status and, similarly, the ways native-born black Americans view their newly arrived black immigrant counterparts are indicative of a much larger puzzle.

So, yes, coalitions are possible. However, they will take unique forms depending on the geographic locale, the number of black intraracial groups involved, the political stakes, and external racial interactions. Scholars have contended that the formation of coalitions among minority groups is possible if two groups are of the same status and class (Giles 1985). When there is an imbalance in size or power, the larger group often prevails. Therefore, less-well-positioned groups are less eager to form coalitions (Deutsch 1985; Meier and Stewart 1991; Sonenshein 1986; C. L. Warren, Stack, and Corbett 1986; Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984), and the smaller, seemingly less powerful group may attempt to form coalitions with whites. The smaller group may also become attractive to white populations, thus laying the foundation for “interminority” competition (Segura and Rodrigues 2006) for white support. Group size, intraracial perceptions, and interracial opinions contribute to a complex negotiation of racial and ethnic identity for all black groups involved on local and national levels.³

What the Local 371 Results Indicate

While the national origin and ethnic diversity of blacks in America continues to increase, ethnic diversity does not automatically translate into diversity (p.143) of attitudes and opinions of groups classified as black in the United States. By exploring black attitudes and opinions pertaining to intra and interracial identity, participation, and perceptions of government incorporation, through a systematic evaluation of race, ethnicity, and identity for blacks at this moment in American history, this research (1) determines the participation rates of union members within Local 371 as compared to national data, (2) identifies the intraracial perceptions native-born and foreign-born blacks have of one another, (3) evaluates how policy preferences differ among foreign-born and native-born populations who are members of a highly socially and politically active labor union, and (4) observes whether perceptions of incorporation, inclusions, and success lead to increased linked fate, belief in the American Dream, and ultimately the possibility for coalition building among black populations living in the United States. By focusing on a unique black labor population in New York, I provide a more nuanced conception of black attitudes and

political participation. These attitudes and behaviors are critical to our appreciation of race and immigration politics and to our understanding of participation, policy making, representation, and, ultimately, coalition politics.

Overall, Afro-Caribbeans expressed the greatest level of pessimism toward the American polity, equal life chances, and opportunities for black groups, which begs the question of whether or not, with time, this population will begin to adopt black American interpretations of the possibilities for success in America, where there is a recognition of the racial inequities that persist, yet a willingness to remain within the system and utilize political, partisan, and participatory resources in order to bring about change. There were several institutional mechanisms within the union, which contributed to the high levels of participation and Democratic partisanship. They have had the benefit of consistent leadership that has promoted varying forms of political participation. When compared to national populations, including black immigrant populations, Local 371 members were highly participatory. These results are congruent with previous theories which posited that immigrant populations need institutions to assist in incorporating them into the American polity and essentially serve as catalysts for political capital.

Local 371 union members were also educated regarding political issues by union leaders. Issue education within the union worked. If issue education worked for union members—native-born, foreign-born, highly educated professionals—what could be the effects of issue education in a more professionally diverse setting? The policy areas where labor leaders utilized the internal union political structures to introduce, inform, and educate its members about public education, Social Security, and health care yielded consistent and uniform attitudes of Local 371 members. However, for policy areas in which there was limited education by union leaders or for issues defined as “racialized” spending, in which members needed to negotiate racial and spending attitudes, member (p.144) opinions, especially black ethnic attitudes, were divided, with black Americans exhibiting opinions different from those of Afro-Caribbean and African members. In short, the combination of race, ethnicity, occupation, and the significance of issue education raise substantive questions for future analyses of racial and ethnic politics.

Social scientists define group identification as having two components: a self-awareness component, which is one’s membership in the group, and a psychological component, which is the sense of attachment to the

group. They argue that it is inaccurate to assume that identification with a group yields a sense of psychological attachment (Miller et al. 1981; Conover 1984).

The Local 371 survey data, in conjunction with national data, point to racial identification that has led to distinctive patterns of perception and evaluation, which in turn have translated into a sense of group solidarity and shared interests (Carmines and Stimson 1982; Conover 1984) and an organization of thoughts and ideas around “visible social groupings” (Converse 1972), however racially motivated they may be.

The Future of Black Ethnic Politics

For some, the election of President Obama, the gains of blacks in the United States over the past twenty to thirty years, and what many continue to define as a “postracial” America have shifted the focus away from the institutional mechanisms of racism that continue to affect native-born and foreign-born black populations and have tended to focus on the overall gains of blacks in the United States. Although black ethnic groups in the United States have made significant gains, there are still several areas of research that can be explored further by scholars of race, ethnicity, immigration, identity, electoral politics, political sociology, urban politics, and related facets of comparative politics, to name a few.

A more clearly defined and continued nuanced interpretation and understanding of black intraracial attitudes and opinions have the potential to shape and structure the debates surrounding black politics, racial and ethnic politics, immigration politics, and the overall understanding of groups in the electorate. Intraracial group attitudes directly affect the ways in which black politics are viewed henceforth. For scholars of electoral politics, observing the differences among black groups who participate in the electorate, how they view government policies, interpret the potential for full incorporation, and express opinions about black ethnics living in the United States all have direct implications for the future of black politics. In the area of urban politics, several scholars have written about the changing face of American cities, the increase of urbanization, and the migration patterns of blacks from the South to urban centers such as New York City, Chicago, Detroit, and (p.145) Washington, DC (Shaw 2009; Thompson 2005; Katznelson 1981). The increase in black urbanization has spawned what some have coined as “white flight,” that is, white city residents moving in droves to the suburbs.⁴ However, with the arrival of new black groups to suburban areas has gradually increased and now reflects a new set of population characteristics (Jackson, Gerber, and Cain 1994).⁵ Recent studies have argued that blacks are now less residentially segregated, but largely due to migration to suburban communities (Glaeser and Vigdor 2012). Therefore, the question of whether black immigrants will follow the same or even similar residential assimilation in and out of cities in the future is fertile ground for scholars of racial, ethnic, and urban politics.

This book was largely motivated by the dearth of literature within the field of political science, which has historically analyzed black populations as a ethnically homogeneous and one-dimensional population of study. Appreciating political behaviors of emerging populations, such as Afro-Caribbean and African groups, is critical to

broadening our understanding of race in New York City and throughout the United States. By examining the opinions of union members through an institutional framework, the role of labor unions in shaping opinions and actions is evident, as is the role of labor unions as immigrants' entree into a more secure class and income status.

It is my hope that I have shed light onto the evolution of foreign-born black political behavior. Black ethnic populations have distinct political histories, and this project has ascertained their intragroup perceptions, policy stances, and perceptions of the American Dream. More specifically, the ways in which black groups view the work ethics and feelings toward other black ethnics, how these groups have the greatest levels of cohesive opinions when policies are presented as a "black versus white" and not a black ethnic frame, and how their ethnic identity and generational status affect their belief in the fulfillment of the American Dream. The aim was to treat black populations as heterogeneous political actors and to highlight the historical and cultural diversity flourishing within the US electoral system. Within union organizations, ethnically diverse black political actors are unique populations of study, and this book has examined the richness of a particular New York City labor community and has described the dynamic attitudes and participation tendencies of these and other black populations within the American political system. (p.146)

