The multiple meanings of race and ethnicity: understanding the political relevance of ethnic distinctiveness and racial group interests among second-generation West Indians

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(Working paper)

Prepared for Summer Institute on International Migration, University of California at Irvine. Irvine, California. June 27th – July 1st 2005.. Special thanks to Ann Lin and Cara Wong and James Jackson. Use of the NSAL dataset is supported by the National Institute of Mental Health. This is a working paper. Please do not cite without permission of the author.

A central topic in the migration literature is how racial status will influence the incorporation experiences of second-generation Americans, specifically, the children of immigrants who arrived in the U.S. post-1965. If we consider the issue political of incorporation, one group that is often overlooked (perhaps because it is assumed they exhibit few differences from U.S. born African Americans) is second-generation immigrant Blacks. The little that we do know about this group is that race has important implications for their political incorporation because ethnic identity is less likely to be distinguished for Blacks relative to other racial and ethnic groups (Alba and Nee, 1999). Thus, the meanings second-generation Blacks attach to race and ethnicity and, further, how they respond to constraints on their ethnic identity, will likely provide some important clues about the relationships between racial identity, ethnic identity, and political incorporation patterns for this group.

In this paper, I examine one aspect of political incorporation by exploring the how second-generation West Indians articulate their relationships with the West Indian community and the African American community in the context of U.S. society[1].

The racial politics literature and the literature on ethnic distinctiveness offer two competing interpretations about how race and ethnicity matter politically for second-generation West Indians. Theories of ethnic distinctiveness suggest that ethnic ties will lead second-generation West Indians to minimize their racial identities, therefore, racial group concerns may not influence their political interests the way that they influence the political interests of African Americans (Vickerman 1999; Waters, 1999; Rogers, 2001). In contrast, theories of racial group interest suggest that race will be the primary identity

[1] I focus on the ideas and opinions that inform political interest and define predispositions towards political activity as one way to measure political incorporation among second-generation West Indians.

that defines how second-generation West Indians view themselves as members of U.S. society, specifically, that racial group concerns will have a significant impact on their political interests as well (Dawson, 1994; Tate, 1993).

Theories of racial group interest suggest that concerns about racial group status distinctly inform the political orientations of Blacks (Miller et al., 1981, Allen, Dawson, and Brown, 1989; Tate, 1993; Dawson, 1994). Defined by perceptions of shared fate and racial community, the narrative of racial group interests characterizes the African American political response to racial categorization and racial exclusion in U.S. society (Dawson, 1994). One reason why this framework is relevant to second-generation West Indians is that, similar to their U.S. born African American counterparts, the second-generation confront the social and economic contexts of racial inequality, which include concentrated poverty, racial discrimination, crime, violence, and limited employment and educational opportunities (Neckerman et al., 1999). Thus, experiences of racial categorization and racial exclusion will likely impact the salience of ethnic ties and immigrant identity to the extent that members of the second generation accept the racial ascription of the larger society.

Perceptions of ethnic distinctiveness represent an alternative response to racial categorization and racial exclusion for second-generation West Indians. By emphasizing their differences from U.S. born Blacks, the second-generation distance may themselves from accepting an African American identity in order to minimize instances of racial exclusion and to protect themselves from the injury of discrimination. Expressions of ethnic distinctiveness suggest that racial identity has a different meaning for the second-generation, as West Indian cultural norms may be the primary reference point they use to

evaluate themselves relative to other groups. The political implications of ethnic distinctiveness have been carefully documented through first-generation West Indian distancing attitudes towards African Americans (Vickerman, 1999) and political competition between West Indians and African Americans (Rogers, 2004). However, its political implications for the second generation have not been explored.

Although the experiences of the second-generation overlap with both first-generation West Indians community and African Americans, their experiences do not neatly cohere with either group. Scholars argue that second-generation West Indians express diverse racial and ethnic identities, however, the links between identity and political interests must be clarified for this group. Specifically, we need to distinguish the contexts that facilitate ethnic distinctiveness and the contexts that shape expressions of racial group interest. To piece together the relationships between race, ethnicity and political interest for second-generation West Indians, we must understand the contexts in which these identities are relevant for second-generation West Indians. In this paper, I examine the following questions:

1. What values and beliefs and experiences define ethnicity for second-generation West Indians? What are the contexts that define expressions of ethnic distinctiveness for this group?
2. What values, beliefs and experiences define race for second-generation West Indians? What are the contexts that define expressions of racial group interest for this group?

To assess the political significance of race and ethnic identity for second-generation West Indians we must identify the language, values, and beliefs that reflect

how they think race and ethnicity impact their lives, and more specifically, their opportunities as members of U.S. society.

Method

Using focus group data of second-generation West Indians and a national probability sample of West Indians, I investigate the meanings of race and ethnicity among second-generation West Indians and how these attitudes relate to politicized identities within this group. With the focus group data, I identify trends in perspectives and patterns in responses among focus group participants. Additionally, I draw upon the focus group data to consider the content behind survey measures of race and ethnic identification. Alternately, I use the survey data to generalize about patterns within the focus group data.

Conducted between 2001 and 2003, the sample of Blacks in the National Survey of American Life includes 3,000 African Americans and 1,421 West Indians, of which 263 are of the second-generation. Compared to the focus group sample, there is more variation with respect to income and education among the second-generation survey respondents, (the focus group participants are disproportionately concentrated higher education and income categories) however, generally second-generation West Indians tend to be fairly well-educated, female, and middle-class.[2]

The focus group participants for this study are from a snowball sample recruited through churches, universities, community organizations and personal referrals. Between December 2002 and December 2003, I conducted a total of seven focus groups of second-generation West Indians (five focus groups of second-generation West Indians in

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[2] However, one should note that some participants were living with relatives so the family income and some were still in school so these numbers may not necessarily reflect the personal income of these respondents

New York City metropolitan area and two focus groups of second-generation West Indians in Washington, D.C. metropolitan area)[3]. On average, there were five to six participants in each group. Within the focus group discussions, participants shared their perspectives on a range of issues relating to race and ethnic identity, common fate and racial community.

I interviewed second-generation West Indians in two different metropolitan areas because I wanted to explore whether or not these different contexts might explain variation in perspectives within this group. However, I found few notable differences between the focus group participants in New York and Washington, D.C. The demographic background of focus group participants and survey respondents is presented in table one.

TABLE ONE HERE (See Appendix I)

The paper is organized around two major themes: in part one, I discuss ethnic identity and the meaning of ethnic ties among second-generation West Indians. In part two, I discuss the meaning of racial identity and racial group interest for second-generation West Indians.

Understanding ethnic distinctiveness among second-generation West Indians

In her research on racial and ethnic identities among second-generation West Indians, Butterfield (2004) argues that second-generation West Indians do not define race and ethnicity in similar terms. Patterns of response among NSAL survey respondents also reflect this trend. In table 2, second-generation West Indians indicate that they preferred

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[3] The second-generation focus participants participated in discussion only with other second-generation West Indians. There were two criteria for eligibility in the focus groups: 1. individuals had to be of African descent, born in the United States and have at least one parent in their household from the Caribbean, or,2. individuals born outside of the U.S. could participate if they came to the U.S. before the age of fourteen.

to be called Black or Black American, yet a majority of them also exhibit an attachment to their Caribbean heritage as they indicate that having Caribbean heritage is equally important as being Black. Also on measures of closeness, eighty-four percent of second-generation West Indians indicate that they feel very close or fairly close to other Black Caribbeans.

TABLE 2 HERE (See Appendix 2)

Second-generation focus group participants' descriptions of their racial and ethnic background provide additional information about the significance of identifying as Black and identifying as Caribbean for second-generation West Indians. Within this sample of focus group participants from Washington, D.C. and New York, participants generally tend to define themselves as having both an ethnic identity and a racial identity. Participants were asked to write brief descriptions of their racial and ethnic background prior to the focus group and later shared their responses during the focus group discussion. Among the forty-four written responses to the question, a majority of second-generation focus group participants describe their race as "Black". Additionally, they describe their ethnic group membership in terms of being "hyphenated" Americans. For example, participants primarily describe themselves such as "Caribbean-American", "West Indian-American" or define themselves in connection to a specific country in the Caribbean. Ten out of the forty-four second-generation focus group participants define themselves as Black and African American only. Participants from Washington, D.C. were not less likely to claim Caribbean heritage, yet in their written responses were more likely to identify themselves only as "Black".

Although a few focus group participants define Black and African American synonymously, the majority of focus group participants in New York and Washington, D.C. perceive a distinction between calling oneself Black and calling oneself African American. They define African American as a geographically specific or "cultural" identity that does not capture adequately how they think of themselves or their Caribbean background. These sentiments are reflected in the comments of a young woman living in the Washington, D.C. area:

> "For me just the word African American it means…United States American…I say you can't be African American unless you feel that your culture is American and you are Black…[the term] Black is broader." (5.12.03, D.C.)

Based on the written responses and conversation, second-generation focus group participants prefer a term that sufficiently acknowledges their Caribbean heritage and their race. The term "Black" resonates with these second-generation participants because they can claim their racial group membership without defining themselves as African Americans, culturally.

Participants in New York and Washington, D.C. offer similar anecdotes about how their West Indian identities were cultivated and reinforced within the context of family relationships. They describe how being "raised West Indian" shaped their perceptions of distinctiveness from other groups. One important distinction participants discuss is the difference between American culture and West Indian culture. They perceive that their parents' emphasis on distinctions between American and West Indian culture, foster a sense that they are Americans by birthright, yet, as the children of West Indian immigrants, they do not fit traditional stereotypes of what it means to be

American: One participant from N.Y. elaborates upon the meaning of distinctions in the following comment:

> "In my household…[it] is very negative in my house to be American even though I myself am American and my parents are American citizens now…they also make distinctions between American and non-American. They think that Americans in general are very lazy and they don't really value education and bettering themselves and I see it myself. Like most Caribbean Americans do concentrate more on hard [work] and education …so they can better themselves from their situations [in] their original islands…." 12.12.02.

Similarly, many second-generation participants perceive that being born in America and being American are not necessarily synonymous experiences. One focus group participant describes this in terms of "moving between two cultures". From her perspective, the changing contexts of her American and West Indian identity engender the perception that "American" identity represents a simple claim to citizenship not her day-to day lived experience:

> "…I am American by default. I was born here and I reap the benefits of being an American, but I guess if I had to "choose", I'm not sure that I would pick being American…I don't think it's explicitly stated, but it's like trips to see family, staying with my father every summer. It's just that I range from being in one culture to being American at the same time. It kind of put the idea in my head that there is just something lacking about American culture that it is not fulfilling to be an American, so I try to claim my Caribbean heritage when I can." (12.12.02, NY)

Through her experiences from home this woman develops a sense that being American does not define one's culture as much as it signifies one's place of birth. Thus, distinctions paint American culture in a negative light while West Indian culture is evaluated more positively. These attitudes are also present within the written comments of focus group participants, where some describe themselves as "American-born and

raised in a West-Indian culture/environment", or in comments such as: "I am an American citizen because I was born in America. I am Trinidadian by birthright" (in written comments, 6.08.03).

Second-generation focus group participants' descriptions of their "ethnic socialization" by family members depict a process where ethnicity or West Indian identity is defined through comparisons to other social groups. As shared nationality does not equate to a common American identity for second-generation participants, this analogy also holds true for how the second-generation make sense of racial commonality between West Indians and "Black Americans". They discuss how the background and identities of U.S. born African Americans were also defined in opposition to their West Indian identities. Simply put, these oppositions teach them that being West Indian was not synonymous with being African American.

According to focus group participants, they learn to "see" distinctions between Americans and West Indians through their parents' negative evaluations of Black Americans. Through these comparisons, they learn that physical similarities do not equate to common identity and culture among Blacks.

A group of students from Maryland describe the ideas and experiences that frame West Indian culture in opposition to African American culture by their family members:

> Participant #1 (Female): Most of my friends are African American and there is a big difference I would say African Americans--they don't necessarily have a culture to embrace…like traditional values, morals, family tales that some Caribbean people have.
>
> Participant#2(Male): My parents would tell me don't follow those African Americans. So that was a clear distinction growing up. Growing up here you will pick up some of the culture, but when your parents make an effort-

> Participant #3(Female): My father is American, and I feel closer to my Mom's family than I do my father's family and it's weird you know. I don't know if this is just a Caribbean thing but when I was younger I just started to feel it was a different way of being raised. You know the whole thing of when you walk into the room you have to say "good morning", good afternoon, good evening. Growing up I had to get used to my father's side of the family they don't do that. They come in the house and my mother will be playing her reggae and stuff and then they make comments about that and comments about food...There is a difference in terms of respect, how you talk to you elders. My culture is Guyanese-American, but, because I have been here so long, I am very American. Just to still see that comparison, I know that somebody who's lived in another country and come here it's just got to be really different if I see the difference then.
> (D.C. 5.12.03)

The above participants frame difference in terms of what they think African Americans lack as a group compared to West Indians. Participants draw upon simple habits and practices that govern their most basic interactions with others to explain why they are different from African Americans. They perceive a different set of norms shape their lives relative to African Americans.

Their counterparts in New York identify similar attitudes and language that underscore the "separation" between African Americans and West Indians within the West Indian community:

> Participant #1: Well personally, on my block there's definitely a dichotomy…within the West Indian community, I see there's definitely a notion that Black Americans are "those Blacks", "those people" and they tend to be the negative reflection of everything that is. If something is going on, it's probably a Black American that's doing it on the block or you don't want to act like "those Black Americans".
>
> Participant# 6: My mother's thing is Black people in America are waiting for someone to owe them something whereas Black people from the Diaspora or wherever, come to the U.S., find opportunities and kind of make do with whatever they have, but like here because there's the social welfare system the government can help you out. She is like "They just

> need to get off that and do something for themselves instead of waiting for somebody to hand out something…"
>
> Participant #9: I feel that one of the biggest issues that I face is work ethic and just growing up in the house and just seeing what my parents do with me in comparison to some of my other friends and school. Like my father, he used to sit me down-he had a blackboard and a pointer in my house. He made sure before I went to school I knew everything, so it was just like me doing it again and I know just in terms of competitive drive, I find with a lot of Black people from the U.S. in general, competition--the want, the drive to be first, to be the best in your class, I feel like that was instilled in me and looking at my other friends of Caribbean or West Indian descent I see that much more than some of my other friends. (12.12.02, NY)

These focus group participants highlight differences between West Indians and African Americans through specific attitudes and behaviors related to achievement and work. With other West Indians, African Americans are negatively characterized as lazy and ill-behaved, while West Indians are represented as hard-working and achievement-oriented. Although, some focus group participants agree with these characterizations of African Americans and West Indians, others do not. However, most perceive that distinctions between African Americans and West Indians are often framed in this manner within the West community.

Second-generation focus group participants illustrate how African American culture is often painted in a stereotypically negative fashion in the family and in the immigrant community. Focus group participants routinely cite disparities in orientations towards achievement and work ethic in the U.S. as a distinguishing factor among West Indians and African Americans, substantiating similar claims in scholarship on the second-generation Waters (1999) and Butterfield (2004). Thus, the terminology, ideas, beliefs, and attitudes second-generation focus group participants utilize to define race and ethnicity as members of an immigrant community suggest that culture defines what is

"ethnic" (or different) about their lives relative to other groups, particularly Black Americans.

The survey data and focus group data suggest that second-generation West Indians do not treat race and ethnicity in a similar fashion. Notions of identity, geography, family, and culture are some of the factors that second-generation West Indians use to explain differences between themselves and other groups, including African Americans. Although not all second-generation West Indians support negative stereotypes of African Americans, they do assert there are ways that they are distinct from this group.

The focus group data show that perceptions of ethnic distinctiveness are informed by context; specifically, we see second-generation West Indians articulate their differences from African Americans in relation to their experiences within the immigrant community. The perspectives of second-generation participants suggest that in the context of the West Indian community, second-generation West Indians define race in terms of phenotype and shared ancestry, while cultural similarities define ethnicity and perceptions of community. Given these trends, we might expect this sense of distinctiveness to influence political interest and political incorporation patterns among second-generation West Indians. However, the data suggest that this is not the case. As we will see, how the second-generation make sense of racial context is a pivotal factor for understanding expressions of racial group interest for this group.

Understanding racial group interest among second-generation West Indians

Focus group participants in Washington, D.C. and N.Y. often emphasize their ethnic identities in the context of family upbringing and relationships within the

immigrant community. However, focus group participants also spend a significant amount of time discussing what it means to be "just black" in society (Butterfield, 2004). In this section, we will examine the significance of this specific context for the second-generation West Indians.

Although many second-generation West Indians unequivocally see themselves as culturally distinct from African Americans, they also perceive that they are virtually indistinguishable from other Blacks to people outside of their community. Thus, in the broader context of U.S. society, the second-generation believe that race (or what it means to be Black) is defined by the idea that diversity among Blacks is invisible to others.

Second-generation West Indian focus group participants in Washington, D.C. share the belief that their West Indian background is wholly irrelevant to others outside the immigrant community. They perceive that will experience life similarly to African Americans in that their lives will be shaped by how others respond to their race. Two participants from Maryland capture these sentiments in the following exchange:

> Participant #1(Male): The society looks at us as just black. That's it…So what applies for African Americans will apply to Caribbean Americans and sometimes Latinos too… When they are looking at you they are not going to decipher all that, you are black.
>
> Participant #2 (Female): If you are a minority, you will pretty much be affected if it's black or African American. If you are African American or a minority you will be classified like that.
>
> Question: So how do you know this?
>
> Participant #1 (Male): They don't distinguish between African American this or Caribbean that. When I meet with West Indians they start asking what country are you from? There is an instant bond. Other people ask me, I'll be like my parents are from Jamaica and there will be no more conversation. I just get the impression. They don't make distinctions. We do (5.12.03).

The male and female focus group participants above express a shared awareness that ethnicity is visible and recognizable to those within the West Indian immigrant community, yet beyond this context, they perceive that the are acknowledged only as Black by others. These participants experience a sense of denial when others minimize or ignore their Caribbean heritage. Their comments highlight how the meaning of race shifts for second-generation West Indians depending on the context in which they find themselves. In the immigrant community race does not incorporate the restrictions on identity that they experience in the larger society.

Similar to his counterparts, in Washington, D.C., a Guyanese-American college student from Long Island relays expectations that his daily experiences will shaped by others' stereotypes about his race and phenotype:

> The minute I sit down, I walk in the class, before I say a word, they see I'm Black…they already have these preconceived notions about me. And that's something I have to just face every time I walk into a room, every time I meet somebody… because I'm Black there's things…you think you know about me…Whenever I meet you, you're going to have this perception of me…You're going to see stuff on TV, hear something on the radio… and it has nothing to do with me. But because it's about Black people and I'm Black, from that I step right into that, whether I want to or not. (12.08.02, NY)

This focus group participant captures a shared sentiment among focus group participants that being perceived solely Black is about being defined within a homogenous social category in U.S society. His comment also highlights that being "just Black" means that he is limited in his abilities to circumvent situations where a singular "Black" identity (an identity rooted in negative societal stereotypes about Blacks) is projected or imposed upon him by others.

The language and ideas that participants use to describe the relationship between race and their experiences in U.S. society look very different from the language they use to describe their experiences within the immigrant community. In the context of the wider society, participants define race through common experiences of racial exclusion--experiences that they believe have serious personal, social and economic implications in their lives.

A Jamaican-American male offers a simple, yet powerful example of how he understands the relationship between negative stereotypes of Blacks and experiences of racial exclusion among Blacks: "You're pulled over at two in the morning in Alabama or you're pulled over on the streets of Brooklyn at 4:30 in the morning, you have dark skin-doesn't matter if you're African, doesn't matter if you're Caribbean, doesn't matter if you were born in Washington, D.C., you're Black…." (2.15.03, N.Y.) This participant highlights the problem of racial profiling of Blacks to illustrate how common experiences of mistreatment will likely shape one's experiences so long as one is categorized as Black in the U.S. Ethnicity, (or being West Indian) offers no protection from the injury of discrimination.

While first-generation West Indians are frequently characterized as distancing themselves from having minority status or must "acquire" a new understanding of what it means to be Black in the U.S. (Vickerman, 1999), second-generation West Indians clearly articulate how they understand the relationships between racial group membership, minority status and their opportunities in society. Specifically, participants exhibit the shared perspective that racial inequality uniquely defines their "predicament" as members of U.S. society.

> Participant #1 (Male) I do believe that...overall the majority.... of the government run by white people they feel that there something...you know, they have against black people. Just a simple thing like being bothered in a grocery store or shopping. I think it is a common feeling...that...that...there's a type of discrimination or some type of racism.
>
> Question: What do you guys think about that?
>
> Participant #2 (Female): I agree.
>
> Participant #3 (Female): I think black people on the whole, deal with the struggle. If it's like... out of money...bringing their kids, everything is a struggle. Nothing is really given to you. Even if you do have money and you're up there, whatever, you still struggle to compete. The majority of black people, we all have to struggle whether we're poor or rich.
> (1.25.03, NY)

Like the participants above, second-generation focus group participants express the common sentiment that experiences of racism cuts across experiences for all Blacks, regardless of background differences. "Struggle" for second-generation participants incorporates the sense that they must work twice as hard or that they prove themselves to others so that they may enjoy a moderate level of economic and social progress in society. They perceive that opportunities are widely available for all Americans; yet, they also believe that the paths to success are thornier for Blacks compared to other racial and ethnic groups, particularly whites.

Through the common language of struggle, these second-generation West Indians articulate a unique bond with other Blacks in the U.S. These attitudes are also reflected in the survey data, which show that 70% of second-generation West Indians believe that what happens to Blacks in this country will have an impact on their lives. The attitudes of focus group participants suggest that common experiences of injustice bring them closer to other Blacks rather than creating a distance from them. This is distinctly

reflected in how they use the African American experience to articulate the significance of race and minority status for Blacks in the U.S.

The African American experience serves as the primary point of reference for second-generation focus participants' beliefs about race, minority status and opportunity in the context of U.S. society. Focus group participants rely upon their knowledge of African American history to highlight the connection between racial exclusion and the "Black experience" in U.S. society, to explain the implications of discrimination for Blacks, and to identify appropriate strategies for responding to discrimination within the Black community. The following response by focus group participants in Maryland typifies how second-generation focus group participants characterize their connection to the African American community**:**

> Question: Do you feel that the history of African Americans is also your history? Do you feel close to it?
>
> Participant #1(Male): Yeah, me personally, I identify with it as much as my Jamaican culture. I can't say that one wins out more than the other.
>
> Participant #2(Female): Me too.
>
> Participant #3(Male): Reading history textbooks, and how black people were being lynched and Jim Crow laws, I got mad. I'm not really African American, but just to be black and to say that, I feel what they went through, I still feel it.
>
> Participant #4(Male): I think we feel it so much because we feel its effects…but yeah like we said you can still walk into a store and get watched. You can still feel its effects, so that ties the past to the future together whether you want to deny it or not.
>
> Participant #(Female): I want to say that I definitely feel a closeness to you know, the lynching and all that, all the oppression that African Americans have faced in America. One thing-if you look at people who suffered you say that could have been me-that person looks like me. If I was here earlier, that could have been me. You feel closeness to that." (5.12.03, D. C.)

Participants use the African Americans experience as a heuristic, a reference for understanding contexts of racial inequality and personal experiences of discrimination. Through their identification with the African American experience, the second-generation distinguish themselves from the first-generation whose attitudes about discrimination are mediated by their attachment to Caribbean social norms. Further, the way that focus group participants articulate their connection to African Americans demonstrates a consciousness that ethnic distinctiveness represents a limited strategy for confronting discrimination. Thus, second-generation West Indians are aware that racial exclusion is not "culturally specific" to African Americans, rather, race and racial exclusion represent a shared experience among people recognized as having African ancestry in the U.S.

This sample of second-generation participants are very concerned about how race impacts their opportunities in U.S. society and thus, emphasize "group-centered" strategies for confronting systematic racial inequality. They perceive that finding ways to support the interests of Blacks represents an effective remedy for minimizing the impact of discrimination on the Black community. The "group strategy" that focus group participants refer most to most frequently is that supporting racial unity and community action. The language they use to define racial community map neatly onto more traditional theories of racial unity and political solidarity among African Americans (Dawson, 1994).

The language of racial unity is defined through visions of racial progress and a desire to see an improvement in the lives and opportunities of Blacks. For second-generation focus group participants, racial progress represents the central outcome of

collective solutions and group action. Participants talk about finding ways to minimize community divisions and develop common agendas around problems of race. They use the language of "responsibility" and "obligation" to articulate their interest in racial progress:

> I just believe that we are in charge of turning around our communities. If you don't like what your community is today, well fine! Do something about it…contribute something. Even if it's just playing a bigger part in a child's life, it should come down to the fact that we are the minority, that we are in the struggle so hard, and we should identify with each other…That's the obligation…to make life easier for somebody else. (Jamaican female, NY, 1.25.03)

Other focus group participants express visions of racial progress and racial unity through more extreme examples of group action within the Black community. A Jamaican American male draws upon notions of Black self-reliance, to articulate his vision of racial community and racial progress for blacks in the U.S.:

> In a perfect world race shouldn't matter…but unfortunately in this world everyone has taken a side and they're generally siding with their own, and as Black people we cannot go out to play a team sport individually. We have to be on our own team, if we are going to get somewhere. The whites are with the whites and then you have Black people who just want to scatter. It doesn't make sense and it's not going to get you anywhere… My sense of it [unity] is supporting Black business, living in the Black community. The Black community will not get anywhere if as soon as you get a job, [you] go to the suburbs. (2.15.03, N.Y.)

While participants emphasize different group strategies with different levels of intensity, most subscribe to the idea that group cohesiveness among all Blacks, regardless of background, is crucial to the continued protection of rights and opportunities for Blacks in the larger society. These second-generation West Indians believe they have a stake in status of Blacks in the wider society.

The perspective of second-generation focus group participants provide insight into the knowledge, experiences and attitudes that help second-generation West Indians

navigate the complicated racial norms of U.S. society beyond the immigrant community. The attitudes of focus group participants suggest that second-generation West Indians do not find the first-generation's perspectives about discrimination adequate for confronting problems of race in U.S. society. Participants mention being told not to "rock the boat", or "to deal with things as they come", or "to work harder" to circumvent discrimination. Others directly distance themselves through critiques of what they believe to be the first generation's ideology about race and opportunity in U.S. society. A young woman captures this type of conflict between the second-generation and the first-generation as she describes why she and her mother disagree about affirmative action:

> I try to separate myself from the things that my parents do. One thing that my mother is against is affirmative action and I am for it and I could completely understand why she is against it, but, she comes from a predominantly Black country where everyone is on the same playing level. When she came here for college, I know she did not take African American history and they surely did not teach it where she is from so she doesn't really know what the experience ….the hardships [of] people that were living in America…That's why she probably sees it as people being lazy and affirmative action being some handout. We have long conversations about me trying to explain to her that it's not the fact that people are lazy; it's just the fact that people weren't given the advantages that other people in America were given and that they do need to help. I don't think I'll ever win that battle with my mother, I don't think she'll ever believe that affirmative action is the way to go, but that I think that's one thing I can take from me being American and living here…(12.12.02, NY)

Using the issue of affirmative action (and perhaps more broadly the context of opportunity for Blacks) this participant identifies an important distinction in how she and her mother interpret and respond to the issue of discrimination. This young woman supports a societal remedy to correct racial injustices towards Blacks; yet, her mother supports the idea that individual action and individual success among Blacks can undo the legacies of discrimination. The differing perspectives about race and opportunity

between this participant and her mother reveal how the contexts of race and ethnicity may be experienced and interpreted differently between the first-generation and second-generation. While the second-generation may perceive there are limits to using he Caribbean as point of reference when it comes to dealing with race in U.S., perhaps, the first-generation do not see these limits as easily. This participant distinctly emphasizes her U.S. reference point to distinguish her perspectives from her mother's perspective. Like this participant, other second-generation participants believe that emphasizing ethnic distinctions in the context of a racially discriminatory society does not represent a suitable strategy, for addressing the consequences of racial inequality among Blacks.

Conclusion

Scholars have documented how competing attitudes about racial community among African Americans and West Indians are a potential impediment to racial unity and common action for West Indians and African Americans (Rogers, 2004; Kasinitz, 1992). In an effort to distance themselves from African Americans and perhaps to avoid problems of race, many first-generation West Indians emphasize their ethnic distinctiveness over racial commonalities regardless of context. Similarly, many African Americans define the boundaries of community around whether or not other Blacks follow a specific agenda of racial progress. The perspectives of focus group participants suggest that perceptions of ethnic distinctiveness do not present minimize perceptions of racial group interest for second-generation West Indians.

Second-generation West Indians reveal their unique perspectives in how they artfully distinguish between contexts of ethnic distinctiveness and racial group interest. For the second-generation, ethnicity (or ethnic identity) defines their Caribbean heritage

and their unique membership within the West Indian community; on the other hand, race defines their status in the larger society. Thus, many second-generation West Indians hold a strong attachment to their Caribbean heritage, and acknowledge their cultural differences from African Americans. However, second-generation West Indians also believe they will experience life as members of a racial minority, and thus, identify with the common experiences of race they share with African Americans and other Blacks. The perspectives of focus group participants suggest that second-generation West Indians do not treat their race and ethnicity as competing identities where they must downplay one in order maintain the other. Rather, the second-generation perceive that West Indian identity and Black identity have different meanings and different consequences depending on the contexts in which they find themselves.

The panethnic[4] language of group interest and group cohesiveness that second-generation West Indians draw upon to articulate the meaning of ethnic and racial identity in the wider context of U.S. society, connect to values and beliefs about race and racial group status that define politicized identities among African Americans. The perspectives of focus group participants suggest that second-generation focus group participants exhibit a collective wisdom that within contexts of mainstream society, all Blacks confront a common problem of racial inequality; furthermore, this problem signifies a bond more powerful than cultural differences between West Indians and African Americans. Consequently, these second-generation West Indians are genuinely concerned

[4] Espiritu uses the term panethnicity to explain how communities of diverse language, culture and origin mobilize around a common identity. This term is often used to refer to the collective identities of Latinos and Asian Americans. I draw upon her concept of panethnicity to evaluate the perceptions of racial group interest among second-generation West Indians.

about the life chances of Blacks and support the racial community and group action as important solutions for confronting problems of racial exclusion.

While my data suggest that there is important overlap between second-generation West Indians' perceptions of racial group interest and scholarly accounts of African American political interests, we cannot assume that the second-generation mirror African Americans in their attitudes, preferences and behavior. We need to delve further into the issue of context to understand how expressions of racial group interest relate to political action and political attitudes (i.e. political ideology and policy perspectives) among second-generation West Indians. Further research is needed to explore the relationship between racial group interest and specific political outcomes for this group.

Appendix I

Table 1. Comparison of demographic background of focus group participants and survey respondents

	Focus Group	**NSAL**
Mean Age		
	26.28 years	30.04 years
Gender		
Male	38.6%	39.92%
Female	61.4%	60.08%
Education		
Some high school	0	20%
High school diploma	4.5%	24.2%
Some college	34.1%	40.1%
College or more	61.4%	15.7%
Income		
Less than $15,000	4.5%	17.87%
$15,000-$29,999	6.8%	21.6 %
$30,000-$49,999	15.9%	27.76 %
$50,000 +	65.8%	32.70%
Total N	44	263

Appendix II

TABLE 2.
PATTERNS OF ETHNIC GROUP IDENTITY AMONG SECOND-GENERATION WEST INDIANS

What is more important –being Black or being from your country in the Caribbean?		
Black	38.1%	
Country in Caribbean	4.3%	
Both equally	54.6%	
Other	3%	
Total N		**263**
How close to Blacks?		
Very Close	54.7 %	125
Fairly Close	34 %	113
Not too Close	10.7%	18
Not Close at All	.6%	4
Total N		**260**
How Close to Black Caribbeans?		
Very Close	52 %	139
Fairly Close	32%	96
Not too Close	13.5%	22
Not Close at All	2.5%	4
Total N		**261**

Source: 2001 National Survey of American Life

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