Black Ethnicity and the Persistence of Ethnogenesis

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Some scholars assume a radical discontinuity between the experiences of blacks in the United States and the experiences of immigrant ethnic groups in American cities. There is a tendency to see the situation of blacks in racial rather than in ethnic terms and to emphasize the conditions of racial oppression and exploitation as exclusive sources of black sociocultural characteristics. This emphasis obscures the important role of migration, urbanization, and intergroup conflict in promoting a distinctive black ethnicity. Indeed, a review of the urban history of black populations in northern cities suggests that the phenomenon of black ethnogenesis was inspired by essentially the same structural conditions as the development of ethnic identities and communities among white ethnic populations in American cities.

Traditional perspectives on ethnicity in American sociology have come under increasing criticism in recent years (Metzger 1971; Greeley 1974; Yancey, Erickson, and Juliani 1976). Much of this criticism has focused on problems in the assimilationist and pluralist perspectives on ethnicity. Attention has been called to the static, nonprocessual character of these orientations (Vander Zanden 1973); to the narrow focus on culture and tradition as defining characteristics of ethnicity (Hechter 1971); and to the a priori assumption that ethnically based ascriptive relationships inevitably give way to class distinctions and cleavages in modern industrial societies (Blauner 1972; Enloe 1973). While traditional perspectives focus on the survival and transformation of European-derived ethnic cultures in America, the process whereby ethnic groups come into being (i.e., the phenomenon of "ethnogenesis") has been largely ignored (Barth 1969; Greeley 1974). Similarly, the emphasis on culture as an explanatory variable has tended to obscure the contribution of structural conditions to the emergence and persistence of ethnicity (van den Berghe 1967; Yancey et al. 1976). There are suggestions (e.g., Cohen 1969; Doornbos 1972; Hechter 1974) that while ethnicity may involve cultural referents, its development and persistence depend on certain structural conditions. Thus, the expectation that class or functional cleavages should come to predominate over ascriptive solidarities in modern society is said to be unjustified.

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in view of the persistence of these structural factors (Mayhew 1968; Bell 1975).

While recent attempts to reassess ethnicity have revised conventional theoretical frameworks (Schermherhorn 1970; Cohen 1974; Greeley 1974), the implications of the reformulations as they relate to the contemporary status of black Americans have yet to be explored systematically. This may be due in part to the prevailing and largely unexamined assumption that the status of blacks in American society is “inherently and fundamentally different from that of white ethnic groups and that any attempt to treat it comparatively with the others under the same general analytical scheme [is] inherently illegitimate” (Parsons 1975, p. 72).\(^2\) There are indications, however, that such presumed differences may be more apparent than real. If, as Yancey et al. maintain, ethnicity is best understood as an emergent phenomenon which has its origin in the “exigencies of survival and the structure of opportunity in this country” (1976, p. 400) and becomes crystallized under conditions which reinforce common occupational status, residential segregation, and dependence on common local institutions and services, then the historical as well as the contemporary status of black Americans and the black community may be more profitably considered in ethnic than in racial terms.\(^3\)

To be sure, sociologists have frequently recognized the relevance of the ethnic perspective to the contemporary status of the black minority. For instance, in assessing the legacy of the Civil Rights movement and the racial crisis of the sixties, Killian (1975) argues, à la Singer (1962), that blacks are in the process of becoming an ethnic group. But he views this development as a recent occurrence symbolized by the emergence of the “black power” slogan and qualitatively different from the “historic pluralism of other American ethnic groups.” Writing earlier, Glazer and Moynihan ([1963] 1970) characterized blacks as an ethnic group rather than as a racial category. In their view, black ethnicity is rooted in common interest and shared social problems rather than in communal social struc-

\(^2\) It should be noted that Parsons is summarizing the conventional view with which he disagrees.

\(^3\) Although the “internal colonialism” perspective has emerged in recent years as a significant alternative to traditional sociological perspectives on race and racial stratification in America, its emphasis on oppression and control as major operative forces behind black-white relations tends to encourage a more “reactive” than “proactive” image and interpretation of black behavioral, cultural, and institutional development than available evidence would appear to suggest (see Gutman 1976). As a consequence, this perspective provides an incomplete model of the dynamic forces inherent in the emergent phenomenon of black ethnogenesis. Blauner, the chief proponent of this perspective, apparently recognizes this weakness: “The colonial perspective cannot by itself provide the theoretical framework necessary to grasp the complexities of race relations and social change in America” (1972, p. 13).
ture and a collective ethos. Likewise, Enloe (1973) asserts that, because of continuing discrimination, exclusion, and deprivation, blacks have been "involuntarily ethnicized." What these accounts share is the assumption that black ethnicity is largely a recent, externally imposed phenomenon instead of a historical development. Although sociologists acknowledge contemporary external forces giving rise to black ethnicity, they have generally failed to identify the internal forces of the black community which have contributed to this emergent phenomenon.

The present discussion represents a preliminary attempt to elucidate the process of black ethnogenesis, emphasizing the interplay between black sociocultural characteristics and American social structure. The paper is divided into four sections. The first reviews some of the major sociological arguments which purport to explain the nature of black communities. The second examines black ethnogenesis in the context of those urban structural conditions which have been shown to be associated with its rise and development. Section three considers the development and internal dynamics of black urban communities. The final section analyzes the contemporary bases of black ethnicity. Although black ethnicity should not be seen as limited to northern urban areas, there is reason to assume that ethnic identification has been more relevant to social organization and solidarity in those areas than in others (Warner and Davis 1939; Glazer 1971). Accordingly, this discussion considers black ethnogenesis in the northern urban environment.

THE ETHNIC PERSPECTIVE AND BLACK AMERICANS

The study of black ethnogenesis has been hampered by the conceptual ambiguity of "ethnicity." Ethnicity has been conceptualized in both cultural and structural terms (Barth 1969; Cohen 1974); it has been used to refer to the primary ties that bind individuals into solidary groups by virtue of a shared cultural history and common symbols (Hechter 1974; Parsons 1975); and to any structural differentiation based on race, nationality, language, or religion (Gordon 1964; Schermerhorn 1970; Greeley 1974). While the latter usage recognizes racial distinctiveness as a basis of ethnic identification, the term "ethnicity" has usually been re-

\footnote{Lacking the cultural diversity brought to northern and midwestern regions of the United States by massive foreign immigration, the South, with its color-caste system of social stratification, has not experienced the development of ethnically based ascriptive relationships. Consequently, neither southern whites nor blacks have typically conceived of themselves in ethnic terms. But, as Killian (1970) has shown, migration to northern and midwestern cities has frequently generated a recognition of cultural and social distinctiveness on the part of southern whites and the formation of relatively cohesive "hillbilly" communities in these areas. There is no reason to expect that black migrants have not reacted similarly.}
served to describe the sociocultural characteristics of European and Asian immigrants.

The social science model of European immigration sees immigrants entering the American social process with an articulated set of values and beliefs which serve as principles of social organization and personal identity (Handlin 1959b; Schooler 1976). Thus national cultural patterns assimilated by the diverse immigrant minorities are said to be refracted through the prisms of their cultural heritages (Gordon 1964) and thus produce "new social forms" in the United States (Glazer and Moynihan [1963] 1970). In contrast, it is presumed that the extreme "deculturation" of blacks during their enslavement left them without an authentic, viable cultural heritage with which to sustain ethnic identity and communal life (Myrdal [1944] 1964; Frazier [1949] 1957; Glazer and Moynihan [1963] 1970; Gordon 1964). While the existence of distinctive social attributes and cultural patterns has been acknowledged (Rainwater 1970b; Myrdal [1944] 1964), black communality is seen essentially as a "counterformation"—a reaction to exclusion from mainstream social processes. Thus it is to the sociology of prejudice and discrimination, to economic exploitation and racial oppression, that social scientists have frequently turned to explain black sociocultural characteristics. Much of the conventional wisdom regarding the contemporary status of black Americans has been summed up by Glazer and Moynihan in their often quoted assertion that "it is not possible for Negroes to view themselves as other ethnic groups viewed themselves . . . because the Negro is only an American, and nothing else. He has no values and culture to guard and protect" ([1963] 1970, p. 52).

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to review the literature challenging such interpretations (e.g., Valentine 1972; Blauner 1970; Gutman 1976), at least two observations should be made. First, the bulk of sociological studies on black communities, including the works cited above, has been static or synchronic, more concerned with the problem of "detailing black disadvantages and documenting the 'tangle of pathology'" (Vander Zanden 1973, p. 40) than with assessing how the sociocultural characteristics of black communities evolved. To be sure, there have been important political and ideological reasons for this emphasis. For example, sociologists have feared that attention to subcultural characteristics would have negative policy implications if it suggested that obstacles to assimilation and integration were endemic to the black community rather than a function of exclusion and subordination (Hannerz 1969; Berger 1970; Glazer 1971). Yet the dominant emphasis has done more to encourage than to refute such allegations. Second, social science research has been notably ethnocentric in its treatment of black ethnicity (Williams 1964; Valentine
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1968; Metzger 1971). The emphasis has been largely on the etiquette of intergroup relations and on the attitudes and behavior of whites toward blacks, with little attention given to black-black relationships (Szwed 1969). Moreover, the one-dimensionality and ahistorical bias of much of this work has tended to obscure the political history of black Americans. As Blauner has noted, "it is through their continuing struggle to surmount and change a racist social system, that black Americans have created a political history" (1970, p. 355). And it is in the context of this political history that black ethnicity began to take form (Gosnell 1935; Singer 1962; Killian 1975).

In addition to its political dimension, black ethnicity must be viewed in relation to urbanization, internal migration, and structured inequality (Hershberg 1973). For members of subordinate immigrant populations, there is evidence of a direct relationship between urbanism and increased awareness of and attachment to ethnic identity (Eisenstadt 1954). Fischer has demonstrated how ethnic identities and subcultural developments are intensified by urbanism, as distinguishable in-migrant populations to urban areas reach a "critical mass," enabling them to create and sustain a variety of specialized institutions and services which "structure, envelop, protect and foster their subcultures" (1975, p. 1326) and by increasing cultural conflicts occasioned by competition and coresidence of diverse urban populations. Similarly, Yancey et al. have shown how the coincidence of occupational concentration, residential segregation, and dependence on local institutions and services promoted the crystallization of ethnic identities and communities in American cities. Consequently, they argue that "ethnicity may have relatively little to do with Europe, Asia and Africa, but much more to do with the exigencies of survival and the structure of opportunity in this country" (1976, p. 400).

In much the same way, black ethnicity may be seen as deriving from the conditions giving rise to ethnic solidarities and communities among white ethnic populations in American cities. With an emphasis on urbanization, internal migration, and structural discrimination as the principal antecedent conditions, the role of African heritage or cultural "survivals" becomes largely irrelevant for an understanding of the collective and emergent character of black ethnicity (Mintz and Price 1976; Gutman 1976). Thus study of the ethnic experience of black Americans should take the urban ghetto instead of the African village as the point of departure (cf. Yancey et al. [1976, p. 397] re other ethnic groups). What is necessary is to show how blacks, within an urban context of structured inequality, have sought not only to develop and sustain group cohesiveness and identity but also to establish social networks and communication patterns as the bases of their institutional and communal life.

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BLACK ETHNOGENESIS AND THE URBAN CONTEXT

The problems of black migrants to northern cities during the early 20th century were much like those experienced by European immigrants from 1830 to 1920 (Stephenson 1926; Handlin 1959b; Fried 1969). A variety of evidence (Hutchenson 1956; Handlin 1959a; Schooler 1976) suggests that the majority of European immigrants were no better prepared to cope with urban society than were the more recent black migrants. In his review of the literature on black and European migrations, Fried concludes: “In spite of the real discrepancy in the status achievements associated with these two great rural to urban migrations and the more striking discrepancies in other forms of discrimination and inequality, the similarities are considerable and portentous: a modern history of servile status and recent emancipation that created an opportunity to migrate more readily than it provided a basis for economic and social freedom at home; rural origins in pre-industrial communities; the absence of any grounds for hope . . . .” (1969, p. 149).

While it is not clear whether opportunities for education, employment, and economic mobility were greater for the earlier European immigrants than for the more recent black migrants, it is clear that early 20th-century black migration took place within the context of severe racial discrimination and structured inequality. Moreover, as Drake and Cayton ([1945] 1962) pointed out, patterns of employment and the character of residential settlement profoundly influenced the nature of black adjustment to and participation in the urban social structure. The combination of occupational concentration and residential segregation provided the basis for new forms of association and social organization and influenced the type and character of community institutions which emerged.

Occupational Concentration

Prior to the great migration of the early 20th century, the relatively small black labor force in urban centers of the northeast and midwest had already begun to concentrate in certain occupational categories (Du Bois [1899] 1967; Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962; Handlin 1959a). Hershberg (1973) has shown how employment opportunities for blacks in Philadelphia declined precipitously from 1838 to 1880 despite an expanding economy and increasing demand for skilled and unskilled laborers. Seheiner (1965) reports a similar trend in employment patterns among black workers in New York City between 1865 and 1920. Declining economic participation of black workers in many northern cities was apparently related to increasing European immigration which saw foreign immigrants displace
blacks in a variety of skilled and unskilled occupations (Farley 1968). But increasing job discrimination appears to have had a greater effect than direct competition on excluding blacks from skilled trades and industrial jobs (Spero and Harris 1931). Although statistical evidence is fragmentary, it does suggest that by the end of the 1880s, the majority of black adult workers in northern cities were in the service trades. Du Bois's ([1899] 1967) study of Philadelphia's Seventh Ward which, in 1896, contained the largest concentration of blacks outside the South, found that roughly 74% of the black labor force was employed as domestic servants, while the remainder was concentrated in a variety of other service-related occupations.

A decline in the volume of European immigration after 1915 saw blacks replace foreign immigrants as the primary source of unskilled and menial labor (Handlin 1959b). Like the majority of European immigrants who preceded them, black migrants entered the labor force at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy. Some found employment in the construction and garment industries, in petty trade, and as skilled artisans. But racial discrimination, reinforced by trade union restrictions, prevented access to a variety of skilled, technical, and clerical jobs (Spero and Harris 1931; Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962). Although the First World War and the postwar boom created limited opportunities for upward mobility and resulted in relative improvements in the occupational status of black workers, the contraction of industrial growth and employment opportunities during the Depression reversed this trend. It was only with renewed prosperity in the 1940s that black workers began to experience significant improvements in their occupational status (Killingsworth 1969).

The potential contribution of occupational concentration to ethnic identification and solidarity has been demonstrated in a number of studies (Lieberson 1963; Williams 1964; Hechter 1974). Yancey et al. (1976) argue that common occupational status facilitates group consciousness to the degree that it results in similarities in economic status or life-styles, common social and economic interests, and common patterns of association. That the bulk of black workers in early 20th-century northern cities were concentrated in certain occupational categories is clear (Spero and Harris 1931; Taeuber and Taeuber 1965; Kornweibel 1976). That such concentrations encouraged group consciousness and collective solidarity has also been amply documented (e.g., Reuter [1927] 1970; Gosnell 1935; Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962). Moreover, to the degree that blacks in northern cities experienced relatively little intergenerational mobility during this period (Lieberson 1963) and were subjected to increasing patterns of residential ghettoization, the potential for the emergence of collective consciousness and subcultural development was maximized.
Residential Segregation

Although the development and growth of relatively large homogeneous areas of black settlement in northern metropolitan regions has been attributed to the rapid increase in the black populations in these cities between 1910 and 1930, there is some evidence (Warner and Burke 1969) that highly concentrated black settlements could be found in some northern cities as early as the 1830s. Warner and Burke present evidence of strong clustering of blacks in such cities as Philadelphia and New York by 1860 and note similar trends in other northern cities during and after this period. Nonetheless, pre-20th-century patterns of black urban settlement do not appear to have been substantially different from the pattern of settlement of early European immigrants (Handlin 1959b; Weaver 1948). That is, given their low socioeconomic status, early black residents of northern cities concentrated first on the periphery, and later near the center of cities, in correspondence to the distribution of employment opportunities and low cost housing (Warner and Burke 1969). In general, the distribution of black populations in northern cities appears to have been determined by such factors as the percentage of blacks in the population of a given city, the nature of the local industrial economy, and local attitudes toward segregation (Kennedy 1930; Woofter 1928).

Although black residential segregation did not originate during the early decades of the 20th century, it was intensified greatly then (Lieberson 1963; Taeuber and Taeuber 1965). Although the number of black in-migrants during this period was significantly smaller than the European immigration of 1880 to 1910, as Fried has noted, "it increased the proportions of the black population living in urban areas more dramatically than any equivalent concentration of a single ethnic group during the earlier period" (1969, pp. 130–31). Increases in the observed level of black residential segregation from 1910 to 1930 have been reported by Lieberson (1963). His study of ethnic assimilation in 10 American cities revealed high levels of residential segregation among all ethnic groups for all the cities studied, but the indices of segregation for blacks in each city were substantially higher. Also, he found that the degree of residential segregation among immigrant groups was influenced by their socioeconomic status and by length of residence. In contrast, patterns of black residential segregation were less responsive to changes in socioeconomic status or length of residence in northern cities (Woofter 1928; Taeuber and Taeuber 1965). As a result, black communities "tended to be ethnically distinctive and represented a wider range of social class positions . . ." (Fried 1969, p. 145) than did immigrant communities of the same period.

Residential segregation affects other dimensions of urban organization. Hawley (1944) has noted that residential segregation of a minority group
population not only accentuates differences and therefore heightens visibility but also encourages the development and retention of distinctive cultural traits. In addition, residential concentration fosters a variety of formal and informal associations to satisfy the needs of those so concentrated (Brenton 1964). There is some evidence that the growth in residential segregation promoted the development of a variety of specialized black institutions and services (newspapers, churches, bars, cafes, etc.). Foley (1966) has shown a direct relationship between increases in residential concentration of blacks in northern cities and the growth of black businesses. Such establishments, along with other local organizations, served as focal points for social relationships and as sources of authority over local residents. As such, they promoted the development of internal bonds and cohesion among older and more recent black residents of northern cities (Little [1965] 1968; Hannerz 1974).

THE INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK COMMUNITIES

Although few immigrants to American cities of the late 19th and early 20th centuries escaped the disorganizing effects of the urban industrial environment, it has been argued that the survival and transformation of selected aspects of preimmigrant cultural and social patterns facilitated adjustments to the unfamiliar conditions (Ware 1935; Ward 1971) and provided the bases for ethnic communities and subcultures. In contrast, black in-migrants to urban areas were generally assumed to have been without the social and cultural resources to resist the disintegrating pressures of urban life (Frazier [1949] 1957; Glazer and Moynihan [1963] 1970). This view was based largely upon the alleged historical weaknesses of black familial and social organization. However, recent historical (Furstenberg, Hershberg, and Modell 1975; Gutman 1976) and contemporary (Suttles 1968; Hannerz 1969; Stack 1974) research raises serious doubts as to the extent of family and social disorganization among urban black populations. Gutman (1976) has demonstrated that traditional interpretations of black family life and social organization are seriously misleading. With respect to family structure, he writes:

> At all moments in time between 1880 and 1925—that is from an adult generation born in slavery to an adult generation about to be devastated by the Great Depression of the 1930's . . . the typical Afro-American family was lower class in status and headed by two parents. That was so in the urban and rural South in 1880 and 1900 and in New York City in 1905 and 1925. The two-parent household was not limited to better advantaged Afro-Americans. . . . It was just as common among farm laborers, sharecroppers, tenants, and northern and southern urban unskilled laborers and service workers. It accompanied the southern blacks in the great migration to the North that has so reshaped the United States in the twentieth century. [P. 456]
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If, as Gutman and others (e.g., Blasingame 1972; Mintz and Price 1976) have shown, a distinctive institutional and cultural life did develop among blacks prior to and after the emancipation, and if the black family, as the principal agent through which cultural traits are transmitted from generation to generation, remained viable in both rural and urban areas of the North and South, it is reasonable to argue that early 20th-century black migrants to northern cities possessed the essential social and cultural resources which enable other migrant populations to cope with urban industrial society.5

Indeed, an abundance of historical and sociological evidence (Du Bois [1899] 1967; Woofter 1928; Kennedy 1930; Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962; Hershberg 1973) indicates that a well-established communal life, organized around churches, benevolent societies, and other characteristic ethnic associations, had evolved among relatively segregated black populations in many northern cities prior to the substantial increase in southern migration (Handlin 1959b). These settlements had grown only moderately in size since the mid-19th century and contained a relatively homogeneous population (Weaver 1948). However, the influx of large numbers of southern migrants during the first three decades of the 20th century transformed the communal organizations and supplied the impetus for a wider range of services and institutions (Johnson 1943).

The impact of earlier and continuing patterns of residential segregation and massive black in-migration could be seen in the emergence of all-black schools, hospitals, parks, stores, and other facilities within areas of black concentration during this period (Kennedy 1930; Johnson 1943). The presence of such facilities within a relatively bounded spatial region made possible a degree of institutional completeness found to be of critical importance in affecting local community orientations (Brenton 1964; Kasarda and Janowitz 1974). Moreover, the use of local institutions and services for satisfying immediate social and economic needs would appear to have encouraged a sense of local spatial identity and attachment in much the same way as in other lower class ethnic communities (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962; Firey 1945; Whyte 1943).

The survival and stability of early 20th-century black settlements were related to the expansion of adjacent central business districts which posed a continuous threat to all centrally concentrated populations during this

5 For Gutman (1976), the key aspects of an evolving black culture begun under slavery are distinctive kinship networks and domestic arrangements which formed the social basis of developing black communities. Mintz and Price (1976), however, would focus less on sociocultural formations and more on the apparent values and cognitive orientations reflected in normative patterns of behavior and social relations which were transmitted in the socialization process. While the specifics of black culture are, of course, relevant and are the subject of continuing empirical investigation, they should not detain us here.
period. As a consequence of the trend toward regional decentralization of commercial activities during the latter part of the 1800s and early 20th century, some residential settlements on the periphery of the central business district lost their economic advantage as potential areas of commercial expansion. It was largely in these areas that stable ghettos were established (Ward 1968). Black areas of settlement tended to expand as adjacent districts which housed other groups were abandoned by their original populations. In such cities as New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia, they became "self-contained cities" (Frazier 1937; Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962), which, while bearing a functional economic relationship to the larger metropolitan area, were largely autonomous in their sociocultural life. Since much of black residential expansion occurred within a tightly segregated pattern, it might be expected that residential instability and dislocation were decidedly minimized.

Local organizations and institutions helped community stability by facilitating the adjustment of black in-migrants to the urban milieu. The role of black civic, religious, and other voluntary organizations in assisting the adaptive process has been well documented (Scott 1920; Kennedy 1930; Reuter [1927] 1970). Although usually interpreted in terms of their "compensatory" function (Myrdal [1944] 1964; Orum 1966), the abundance of voluntary associations which emerged during this period might best be seen as a characteristic response to the conditions of urban life. The need for material and moral support, prompted by the pressures of the new environment, tended to emphasize the value of belonging to social organizations and, in the absence of relatives and friends, such associations became all the more essential.

Despite barriers to black residential mobility imposed by extralegal, economic, and ecological factors, there are suggestions that emergent black communities in northern cities were more than "areas of minimum choice" (McKenzie 1926) for their inhabitants, and came eventually to be seen as cultural and symbolic manifestations of an evolving collective identity (Ososky 1966; Spear 1967). For example, Drake and Cayton's ([1945] 1962, vol. 1) classic study of black community life in Chicago notes that black inhabitants of the ghetto did not view their institutional life as inferior to other distinctive local life-styles; indeed, "they expressed considerable pride in it, viewing it as evidence that they, as well as whites, can create a collective life. . . . They do not ordinarily experience their social separateness as oppressive or undesirable. Black metropolis is the world of their relatives and friends" (p. 122). Such collective sentiments were also present in other northern black communities (Scott 1920; Frazier [1949] 1957).

Residential segregation and concentration spurred community development in another respect as well: it fostered black political participation
Opportunities to enter the political process not only fostered group consciousness and solidarity but also perpetuated the division of cities, both demographically and politically, into ethnic components. The articulation of political interests required leadership and organization, which in early 20th-century black communities came primarily from religious and civic organizations (Gosnell 1935; Frazier [1949] 1957). Religious and civic leaders were frequently active in promoting a national ideology for the black community and in providing the moral justification for identification with it. Indeed the emergence of radical and more moderate political movements of the 1920s and 1930s may be seen as both evidence and expressions of an emergent corporate self-awareness and solidarity among urban blacks fostered, in part, through such efforts (Reuter [1927] 1970).

It may be argued, then, that migration, urbanization, spatial isolation, and concentration all promoted black subcultural development and ethnicity in early 20th-century northern cities. Moreover, community integration and ethnic identification appear to have been intensified by the nature of intergroup contacts and by political and violent conflict (Frazier [1949] 1957; Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962). Thus such communities could be characterized as “cultural-symbolic units” (Hunter 1975) which not only supported a viable institutional life but also offered opportunities for satisfactions and attachments. Although contemporary black ethnicity may derive from a somewhat different set of variables, its origins are to be found in structural conditions of early 20th-century American cities.

**THE CONTEMPORARY BASES OF BLACK ETHNICITY**

It has been suggested that the demographic and ecological factors which had earlier promoted ethnic identification and community development among European immigrants to northern cities have been greatly attenuated in recent years. The dispersal of economic opportunities and the residential decentralization of ethnic populations are among the principal factors identified as having altered the ecological and interpersonal bases of ethnic communities. Thus, Yancey et al. argue that contemporary ethnicity

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6 The political implications of black migration and concentration in northern cities have been impressively documented in Osofsky's *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*. He asserts that “... while the urbanization of the Negro obviously caused great difficulties, it also provided the base for significant political power unprecedented in the history of the Negro in the North. As the Negro population increased in numbers, the cynical and apathetic attitudes that typified the reactions of politicians in the late nineteenth century came to an end. ... In the 1890s Negroes were an almost powerless minority group; the least influential minority group in the metropolis. Their role, if any, was on the periphery of municipal affairs. Within the next generation ... Negroes became an integral part of city government and politics—and politics provide a wedge for economic advancement” (1966, pp. 159, 177).

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must be understood as, in part, "responses to residues of earlier historical periods and, in part, responses to the increasingly more marginal social and economic positions of the white working-class neighborhood" (1976, p. 399). It may be argued that the contemporary situation of blacks in northern cities has been similarly affected by changing ecological conditions, but that the influence of these changes on black ethnicity and community differs from that observed for white ethnic groups.

While the enactment of restrictive immigration legislation in 1924 severely reduced European immigration to the United States, black in-migration to northern cities has continued at a fairly high level since the 1920s (Farley 1968). While residential decentralization and concomitant reductions in residential segregation have been evident for almost all immigrant groups since the cessation of large scale immigration (Lieberson 1963; Kantrowitz 1969), the degree of black residential segregation from other urban populations has increased. Moreover, the attraction of black migrants to inner-city districts, together with the continual areal expansion of such districts within northern metropolitan regions, has transformed moderate-sized black residential areas into large urban ghettos (Foley 1973). Despite the changing socioeconomic characteristics of northern black migrants (Lieberson 1973) and reported trends toward residential decentralization through black suburbanization (Farley 1970), there is little evidence that black residential segregation has declined significantly.

It might be anticipated that to the degree that black populations in northern cities are sharply differentiated in their residential location from other urban populations, they are also likely to differ in the extent of their participation in the urban economy (Lieberson 1963; Mooney 1969). At least one study comparing the contemporary economic status of northern blacks with that of other ethnic groups indicates that the occupational structure of many black communities resembles the occupational patterns of first and second generation immigrants of three quarters of a century ago in its heavy concentration in manufacturing, laboring, and service occupations (Newman 1965). This has made blacks particularly vulnerable to changing patterns of industrial and commercial employment (Taylor 1977). The concentration of industrial growth and employment opportunities on the periphery of central cities has tended to exacerbate the job finding problems of less skilled and typically younger black inner-city residents by increasing the distance between them and new sources of employment. As a consequence, growing numbers of inner-city inhabitants have been relegated to economically less productive and increasingly marginal positions in the urban labor force. This development may be seen as reinforcing current patterns of black residential segregation and concentration, while at the same time giving impetus to new forms of association and collective behavior (Suttles 1968).
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The growth in size and density of black populations in northern cities, accompanied by declining economic opportunities, raises important questions about the social solidarity among residents of inner-city ghettos. High unemployment, family instability, poor housing, and other characteristics associated with inner-city districts suggest a degree of social disorganization which would militate against strong community attachments and social integration. Thus in contrast to the relatively stable, family-based working-class communities of contemporary urban white ethnics, black inner-city communities have been characterized as fragmentary in their social organization (Glazer and Moynihan [1963] 1970; Rainwater 1970a) and lacking in extensive associational networks and overarching institutions of social control. At best, areas of black concentration in northern cities have been seen as "pseudoneighborhoods" lacking many of the indigenous social and cultural resources essential for social integration. However, a growing body of urban ethnographic research (Suttles 1968; Hannerz 1969; Valentine and Valentine 1970; Stack 1974) has revealed the limitations of such oversimplified characterizations of black communities. In part, these limitations stem from a preoccupation with the physical aspects of the ghetto environment (Hartman 1963; Fried and Levin 1968) and from a failure to distinguish between the varieties of urban residential areas (Suttles 1972). As Fried and Levin have noted, "the skid-row type of slum, in particular, has determined the popular conception of slums out of all proportion to the distribution of populations in different kinds of slum areas" (1968, p. 61). The physical aspects of the ghetto must be distinguished from its functions as a setting for social action. Systematic evidence indicates that the institutional, normative, and ecological dimensions of communities in general (Kaufman 1959; Kasarda and Janowitz 1974) and the ghetto community in particular (Hannerz 1969; Stack 1974) can be identified by focusing on the nature of local social networks. Such a focus avoids the tendency to view ghetto communities as fragmentary or disorganized.

One illustration of the relationship between community structure and local social networks is provided by Hannerz in his study of the black inner-city ghetto of Washington, D.C. He found that its internal structure was effectively defined by the "multitude of connecting personal networks of kinsmen, peers, and neighbors" (1969, p. 34). While age, sex, kinship roles, and life-style ordered social relations and generated functional differentiations within the community, the overall pattern was one of "organized diversity" sustained by a shared perspective and common participation in local community institutions. Similar observations have been reported by Suttles in his investigation of the Addams area of Chicago. He notes that face-to-face relations and a "personalistic morality" were the primary forms of association among black residents of the area, and that

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"kinship functions to create an extensive web of connections between informal groups" (1968, p. 229). The network of formal and informal associational ties, rooted in a personalistic morality, formed the basis of the "ordered segmentation" characterizing the relationship between blacks and other ethnic groups inhabiting the area.

Although neighborhood, place of work, life-style, and other factors tend to influence the frequency of interaction and forms of association among ghetto inhabitants, there are suggestions that patterns of kinship relations are more frequent determinants of interpersonal ties and social relations within black lower- and working-class communities (Hays and Mindel 1973). In her investigation of black family organization and residence in a midwestern city, Stack (1974) found that social relations within the community not only were organized on the model of kin relationships but were frequently initiated and facilitated on the basis of "socially recognized" kinship ties. Through an elaborate system of mutual aid and reciprocal obligations, kinship was observed to overlap with non-kin networks to form extensive interpersonal links between multiple domestic units and informal groups. Whitten and Szwed suggest that the use of kinship as a model for organizing social relationships within ghetto communities is understandable when it is recognized that "people adapt first to the dominant modalities in their environment by using their most accessible social capital—kinship—in such a way as to maximize flexible networks" (1970, p. 47). Thus they see the highly flexible networks of kin and pseudo-kin relationships as a response to socioeconomic marginality. Whether explained in socioeconomic or in cultural terms, the general conclusion from current, though limited, empirical evidence is that kin and friendship ties are extensive among blacks residing in urban areas (Martineau 1977). Such evidence tends to refute the image of the atomized or anonymous slum dweller.

The spatial mobility of black inner-city residents contributes indirectly to the enlargement and complexity of community social networks and to their relative integration by fostering multiple interpersonal links among local neighborhoods (Smith, Form, and Stone 1954; Feagan 1970; Hannerz 1969). Although such intracommunity ties and involvements have been characterized as weak (Liebow 1967; Rainwater 1970a), there are suggestions that weak interpersonal ties may be more productive of group cohesion and community integration than strong ones. Granovetter (1973) has demonstrated the positive effects of weak interpersonal ties on the diffusion of information and influence, mobility opportunities, and community organizations. Whitten and Szwed, in basic agreement with Granovetter, argue that under conditions of social and economic marginality, "definable, bounded groups are maladaptive, and survival value for them is thereby limited" (1970, p. 45). The presence or absence of flexible,
overlapping, and extended social networks may explain the ability or inability of local groups to evolve a sense of community beyond the local neighborhood or to act in concert toward the achievement of collective social and political goals (Gans 1962; Suttles 1972; Granovetter 1973). Such highly elastic kinship, friendship, and associational ties abound in black inner-city ghettos.

While variations are to be found in patterns of community identification and involvement among urban populations, a number of studies (Hartman 1963; Fried and Levin 1968; Hunter 1974) point to the strong attachment that inner-city residents develop for the local neighborhood and the general residential environment. Although little systematic evidence is available, reports of residential satisfaction among black inner-city inhabitants (McAllister, Kaiser, and Butler 1971) and internal resistance to the prospect of moving into integrated neighborhoods (Watts et al. 1964) may be interpreted as evidence of community attachment. Local spatial identity and the sense of satisfaction and belonging are frequently explained in terms of the abundance of associational networks and attachments to local institutions. More specifically, the presence of specialized institutions and services (churches, food stores, bars, radio stations, etc.) lend a special quality to interpersonal relations and to the spatial context within which they are experienced. The psychosociological basis of community attachment among black inner-city residents has recently been summarized by Drake: “For the masses of ghetto dwellers, this is a warm and familiar milieu, preferable to the sanitary coldness of middle-class neighborhoods, and a counterpart to the communities of the foreign born, each of which has its own distinctive subcultural flavor” (1965, p. 778).

These observations suggest that the contemporary urban black residential community is both a spatial and a sociopsychological community. In varying degrees, residents of the local spatial area may share a sense of interdependence and a diffused psychological unity with blacks in other communities based on common social experiences, sentiments, and a shared awareness of their ascribed ethnic status (Williams 1964). These common bonds are sustained through a variety of local, regional, and national affiliations and a wide range of mass media. As a symbolic object of orientation, the sociospatial black community may evoke varying degrees of identification and involvement from different segments of the black population depending, among other factors, on the extent of local internal differentiation and the structure of urban opportunities (Hannerz 1974). However, there appears to be a close correspondence between location in the spatial community and involvement in the sociopsychological community. Williams (1964) has examined this relationship and describes it schematically as shown in Table 1.

Membership in the spatial and sociopsychological community involves
the majority of urban blacks (table 1, segment A). For some spatially dispersed blacks (table 1, segment B), the South (typically referred to as "down-home"), similar economic status, and the common experience of discrimination and oppression are fundamental aspects of a shared perspective creating a diffused psychological group unity. For this segment, who reside in integrated or predominantly white communities, membership in the sociopsychological community may be sustained through contributions to and involvements in local or national black organizations, through subscriptions to black publications, and through frequent contacts with friends and relatives in the spatial community.

In contrast to the preceding groups, a certain portion (table 1, segment C) of the local black population may reside in the spatial community but participate only to a limited extent in its institutional life and identify with it only in limited situations. This segment is likely to include younger, more upwardly mobile residents. Janowitz's (1951) concept of the "community of limited liability" seems appropriate in describing the orientations of this segment. Another, and even smaller group (table 1, segment D) neither resides nor participates in the local spatial community nor feels a sense of sociopsychological unity with its inhabitants. Their social relationships are confined largely to whites of similar socioeconomic status, interests, and aspirations. Members of this segment are likely to include older, well-established, northern-born blacks whose high socioeconomic status or professional involvements have minimized their participation in the black subsociety. The considerable diversity of black experience should not obscure the fact that the majority of blacks are identified with the spatial and sociopsychological black community.

The preceding observations do not deny the negative effects of social and residential ghettoization—or the larger implications of structural and collective oppression—but they do identify those common elements and critical orientations which provide the core of social organization and group identification for a majority of urban blacks. To be sure, the quality of life in some inner-city ghettos is closer to the "urban jungle" than to the

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<th>Black segment A</th>
<th>Existence in Spatial Community</th>
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<td>Black segment B</td>
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“urban village,” but such characterizations tend to obscure rather than clarify the normative, behavioral, and symbolic properties that have come to be associated with ghetto communities. Moreover, the argument that patterns of social organization and behavior among urban blacks are largely reflections of community and class rather than manifestations of a putative “black culture” (Berger 1970; Gans 1974) tends to ignore the role of differentiating factors in promoting group identifications and solidarities (Hechter 1974). Persistent patterns of structured inequality have, until recently, created systematic uniformities in the environments of blacks of virtually all class levels, producing, in turn, similarities in experiences, basic orientations, and patterns of behavior. Thus contemporary black ethnicity may be seen partly as a response to the more general perception of the intensification of these systematic conditions and partly as an emergence from a long political process in which the historically ascribed status of blacks has become the focal point around which they have sought to organize for the advancement of collective interests.

Indeed, contemporary black ethnicity has much in common with what some writers (Cohen 1969; Bell 1975) call political ethnicity, the mobilization of affective social ties, values, symbols, and other “collective representations” in order to articulate informal political organization and to advance social, economic, and political interests. The revitalization of interest in African cultural traditions, the focus on distinctive aspects of black life-styles and subcultural orientations, and the emphasis on black pride and solidarity may all be seen as strategic developments in the institutionalization of a new collective status. Yet contemporary black ethnicity is not at base a political phenomenon, even though politics has played a central role in recent attempts to raise the level of communal consciousness and strengthen collective bonds. To view it largely in terms of its political dimensions is to ignore the more fundamental structural arrangements from which it emerged.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Some scholars suggest a radical discontinuity between the historical and contemporary status of blacks and the sociocultural characteristics and experiences of immigrant ethnic groups in American cities. Yet our review of the history of black populations in northern cities indicates that black ethnogenesis was inspired by the same structural conditions that promoted solidarities and communities among white ethnic populations.

It should not be inferred that there are no significant differences between the historical experience or contemporary situation of blacks and other major ethnic groups in American society. Nor do observed similarities in situational responses or social characteristics constitute sufficient evidence
for assuming comparable outcomes in status achievements or in the level of social participation. Neither the legacy of systematic discrimination nor the magnitude of current social and economic disadvantages encountered by large segments of urban black populations warrants such conclusions. Rather, my discussion takes issue with the view that, until recently, black populations in northern cities lacked many of the indigenous social and cultural resources with which to sustain communal life, and, by extension, the view that black ethnicity is a recent phenomenon. It has not been sufficiently appreciated that the various immigrant collectivities forged common identities in different ways (Haller 1975) and sought to institutionalize different forms of behavior as they encountered differential urban opportunities (Handlin 1959b; Hannerz 1974). While social and economic constraints were indubitably more severe and the range of opportunities more limited for black in-migrants to northern cities, they, too, sought to articulate formal social organization and establish a corporate identity. Traditional analyses have erred in assuming that white ethnic groups, but not blacks, encountered conditions which generated ethnic identification and community.

Ethnicity involves a complex set of interdependent variables requiring multiple levels of analysis and modes of study. If ethnicity is the system of interaction among members of a group sharing the social definition of an ethnic minority, network analysis may help to illuminate this phenomenon among black urban populations. Such an approach "gives priority to the way social life is organized through empirically observed systems of interaction and reliance, systems of resource allocation, and systems of integration and coordination" (Craven and Wellman 1974, p. 58). From this perspective, ethnicity and community become less abstract and amorphous, and the internal fabric of urban black ghettos becomes more clearly visible. If ethnicity is conceived as a cultural or symbolic system, the cultural symbols and meanings which constitute a collective identity system must be clearly delineated, along with the distinctive networks of subcultural relationships which foster and sustain it. In this respect, Valentine's characterization of black collective orientations and behavior as "bicultural" in the sense that blacks "regularly draw upon . . . an ethnically distinctive repertoire of beliefs and customs and . . . make use of behavior patterns from the European American cultural mainstream" (1972, p. 33) is useful.

This discussion has sought only to provide the historical and structural context within which black ethnogenesis unfolds. Larger social, psychological, and political implications remain to be considered. The review of past research presented here should contribute to the realistic formulation and conduct of future studies, for it has demonstrated that neither black corporate pride nor black ethnicity is a recent phenomenon in American
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life. On the contrary, what is new is the belated recognition of their historical and contemporary reality.

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