CHAPTER 5

The Sting of Prejudice

An important and conspicuous difference between then and now is that immigrants today are, in significant numbers, people of color, whereas those at the turn of the century were, in the main, phenotypically white. There are also vast differences in the New York that immigrants find when they arrive. In 1900, blacks made up a little under 2 percent of the city's population, and an even smaller proportion were Asian or Hispanic. Immigrants now enter a city that was on the receiving end of an enormous internal migration. A massive flow of African Americans from the South between World War I and the 1960s and a huge migration of Puerto Ricans after World War II transformed New York's racial dynamics. By 1960, the city was more than one-fifth black and Hispanic. In 1998, the figure was up to 57 percent, and of that group about four out of ten were still of native stock.[1]

Not only have the realities of New York's racial composition changed, but the very idea of race is different, too. Today, New Yorkers of eastern and southern European ancestry are considered fully and unquestionably white. They didn't look that way, however, to commentators at the turn of the century. There was considerable prejudice against Jews and Italians, and, to a surprising degree, it was expressed in racial terms.

Racial differences may seem permanent and immutable—as if they are inevitable and "natural"—but, in fact, race is a changeable perception. Indeed, the awesome power of race is related to its ability to pass as a feature of the natural landscape.[2] Races are not fixed biological categories, and dividing human populations into "races," as physical anthropologists have shown, has no basis in genetics.[3] Regardless of its dubious roots in biology, however, race "is real because, to paraphrase W. I. Thomas, people act as though it is real and thus it has become real in its consequences."[4] Race, in other words, is a social and cultural construction, and what is important

is how physical characteristics or traits are interpreted within particular social contexts and are used to define categories of people as inferior or superior.[5] At the turn of the century, Jews and Italians were seen as belonging to different races—and one of the current groups, Asians, is undergoing a contemporary metamorphosis.

Another window on current racial perceptions involves the way West Indians and Hispanics are seen. The experiences of West Indians, as blacks of African descent, are testimony to the durability of the black-white divide in American society. As for Hispanics, although they share strong cultural and linguistic similarities, and often come from the same sending countries, racially they are extremely diverse. The way they are seen sheds light on their self-perceptions and the way the culture as a whole views racial and, just as important, class distinctions.

Last, the whole question of racial prejudice is complicated by enormous changes in the nature of public discourse on racial issues. What was acceptable and commonplace in 1900 would be considered unthinkable today. In fact, it is arguable that the only totally prohibited form of public discourse in America is overt language that deals with racial and ethnic stereotypes.

When Jews and Italians Were Inferior Races

It seems obvious that Jews and Italians are white, but to many Americans, this was not clear at the time of the last great immigration wave. Then, the white population was seen as divided into many sharply distinguishable races. Jews and Italians were thought of as racially distinct in physiognomy, mental abilities, and character. A common belief was that they belonged to inferior "mongrel" races that were polluting the country's Anglo-Saxon or Nordic stock.

Contemporary historians have coined phrases like "in-between peoples," "probationary whites," and "not-yet-white ethnics" to describe Jews' and Italians' ambiguous racial status.[6] On the one hand, southern and eastern European immigrants were typically placed above African and Asian Americans. Indeed, the courts consistently allowed Jews and Italians to be naturalized as "white" citizens and almost as consistently turned down non-European applicants as "nonwhite." On the other hand, eastern and southern European immigrants were seen as below other "white" people.[7] In the essay "How Did Jews Become White Folks?" Karen Sacks asks why so many prominent Americans early in the twentieth century did not think her ancestors were truly white.[8] Earlier generations of Americans, as Matthew Jacobson observes, saw "Celtic, Hebrew, Anglo-Saxon or Mediterra-

nean physiognomies whereas today we see only subtly varying shades of a mostly undifferentiated whiteness."[9]

Far from being on the fringe, full-blown theories about the racial inferiority of eastern Europeans and southern Italians were well within the mainstream of the scientific community at the turn of the century. Openly propounded by respected scholars, such views were also propagated and given the stamp of approval by public intellectuals and opinion leaders and the press.

The Passing of the Great Race, the most influential of the books proclaiming a scientific racism—it "inspired a bevy of popular writers and influenced a number of scholarly ones"—appeared in 1916 but achieved peak popularity in the early 1920s.[10] Written by Madison Grant, a patrician New Yorker who was founder and later chairman of the New York Zoological Society, it had an introduction by Henry Fairfield Osborn, a prominent biologist and president of the American Museum of Natural History. The book set forth the notion that America had originally been settled by descendants of a genetically pure and biologically superior "Nordic" race with "fair skin, blond hair, straight nose, and splendid fighting and moral qualities." Grant warned that American stock would be mongrelized by inferior Europeans such as the Alpines from central Europe, Mediterraneans and, worst of all, Jews. People of inferior breeding, he believed, were overrunning the country, intermarrying and diminishing the quality of American blood. The "dark Mediterranean subspecies" are "long skulled like the Nordic race, but the absolute size of the skull is less. The eyes and hair are very dark or black, and the skin more or less swarthy. The stature is stunted in comparison to that of the Nordic race and the musculature and bony framework weak." Of Polish Jews, Grant wrote, their "dwarf stature, peculiar mentality, and ruthless concentration on self-interest are being engrafted on the stock of the nation." Inevitably, the mixing of two races "gives us a race reverting to the more ancient, generalized and lower type." Thus, "the cross between any of the three European races and a Jew is a Jew."[11] America, he feared, was being swept toward a "racial abyss." "If the Melting Pot is allowed to boil without control . . . the type of native American of Colonial descent will become as extinct as the Athenian of the age of Pericles, and the Viking of the days of Rollo."[12]

Edward A. Ross, one of the most race conscious of American social scientists, was also troubled that newcomers, with their inborn deficiencies, would dilute America's sturdier Anglo-Saxon stock. He condemned Jews for their inborn love of money, and southern Italians for their volatility, instability, and unreliability. Steerage passengers from Naples "show a distressing frequency of low foreheads, open mouths, weak chins, poor features, skew faces, small or knobby crania, and backless heads. Such people lack the power to take rational care of themselves." Ross spoke of the "dusk of Saracenic or Berber ancestors" showing in the cheeks of Italian immigrant children. "One sees no reason," he wrote, "why the Italian dusk should not in time quench what of the Celto-Teutonic flush lingers in the cheek of the native American."[13]

According to Ross, the massive influx of new immigrants would, if unchecked, lead to a falling off of good looks: "It is unthinkable that so many persons with crooked faces, coarse mouths, bad noses, heavy jaws, and low foreheads can mingle their heredity with ours without making personal beauty yet more rare among us than it actually is." With more Italians coming to the United States, intelligence would suffer: "So far as the American people consents to incorporate with itself great numbers of wavering, excitable, impulsive persons who cannot organize themselves, it must in the end resign itself to lower efficiency, to less democracy, or to both." With more Jews, the moral standards of the nation were in danger since lower-class eastern European Jews are "moral cripples, their souls warped and dwarfed by iron circumstance. . . . Life amid a bigoted and hostile population has left them aloof and thick-skinned. A tribal spirit intensified by social isolation prompts them to rush to the rescue of the caught rascal of their own race . . . and many of them have developed a monstrous and repulsive love of gain."[14]

Articles in the press and popular magazines echoed racial views of this kind. Influential publications like the *New York Times* and the *Saturday Evening Post* ran editorials sympathetic to Madison Grant's theories. In a series of widely read articles for the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1920–21, Kenneth Roberts cast his findings on immigration into the framework of the Nordic theory, concluding that a continuing deluge of Alpine, Mediterranean, and Semitic immigrants would inevitably produce "a hybrid race of people as worthless and futile as the good-for-nothing mongrels of Central America and Southeastern Europe."[15] Articles with titles like "Are the Jews an Inferior Race?" (1912) and "Will the Jews Ever Lose Their Racial Identity?" (1911) appeared in the most frequently read periodicals. A story in the *New York Times* (1893) referred to the "hatchet-faced, pimply, sallow-cheeked, rat-eyed young men of the Russian Jewish colony."[16] The "marks of their race," said *Harper's* of Lower East Side Jews, "appear in the formation of the jaw and mouth and in the general facial aspect."[17] Jewish racial features, the *New York Sun* (1893) argued, made them unassimilable: "Other races of men lose their identity by migration and by intermarrying with differ-

ent peoples, with the result that their peculiar characteristics and physiognomies are lost in the mess. The Jewish face and character remain the same as they were in the days of PHARAOH. Everybody can distinguish the Jewish features in the most ancient carvings and representations, for they are the same as those seen at this day. Usually a Jew is recognizable as such by sight. In whatever country he is, his race is always conspicuous. . . . After a few generations other immigrants to this country lose their race identity and become Americans only. Generally the Jews retain theirs, undiminished, so that it is observable by all men."[18]

Even the social reformer Jacob Riis unabashedly used racial stereotypes in his classic exposé *How the Other Half Lives*. The Italian, wrote Riis, "is a born gambler. His soul is in the game from the moment the cards are on the table, and very frequently his knife is in it too before the game is ended. . . . With all his conspicuous faults, the swarthy Italian immigrant has his redeeming traits. He is as honest as he is hot-headed. . . . The Italian is gay, lighthearted and, if his fur is not stroked the wrong way, inoffensive as a child." As for the Jews: "Thrift is the watchword of Jewtown . . . at once its strength and its fatal weakness, its cardinal virtue and its foul disgrace. . . . Life itself is of little value compared with even the leanest bank account. In no other spot does life wear so intensely bald and materialistic an aspect as in Ludlow Street."[19]

Many politicians of the Progressive Era tailored their thinking about the racial desirability of the new European immigrants to appeal to the "foreign" vote—for example, in the election of 1912, Woodrow Wilson repudiated the contemptuous phrases he had written about southern and eastern European immigrants in his history text a decade earlier.[20] But it was not unusual for political figures to speak, in the racial symbolism of the day, of the dangerous possibility that the "inferior European races" would alter the essential character of the United States. In 1921 no less a figure than Calvin Coolidge wrote that "there are racial considerations too grave to be brushed aside. . . . The Nordics propagate themselves successfully. With other races, the outcome shows deterioration on both sides. Quality of mind and body suggests that observance of ethnic law is as great a necessity to a nation as immigrant law."[21]

The racial attack on southern and eastern European immigrants was, as John Higham notes, a powerful ideological weapon of the movement to reduce immigration, helping to mobilize public sentiment in favor of restriction.[22] Genetic arguments about inferior races gave those wanting to cut immigration from southern and eastern Europe a scientific sanction; restriction against the new immigration seemed like a biological imperative.[23] Ultimately, the restrictionists won, and 1924 legislation—reducing the number of European immigrants allowed yearly to 2 percent of the foreign-born of each nationality in the United States according to the 1890 census—marked the end of the massive influx of southern and eastern Europeans.[24]

If the notion that Jews and Italians were inferior races was commonplace in public discourse at the beginning of the twentieth century, in everyday life there was a racial vocabulary to describe—and abuse—them. As James Barrett and David Roediger note, the words themselves were important: "They were not only the means by which native born and elite people marked new immigrants as inferiors, but also the means by which immigrant workers came to locate themselves and those about them in the nation's racial hierarchy."[25]

The racialization of Italians was especially pronounced, and the language of color was sometimes involved. Italians were often described as swarthy, and a common epithet for them, guinea, had long referred to African slaves, particularly those from the continent's northwest coast and their descendants.[26] "You don't call an Italian a white man?" a member of a congressional committee asked a West Coast construction boss. "No sir," he answered, "an Italian is a dago."[27] In all sections of the country, John Higham concludes, "native-born and northern European laborers called themselves 'white men' to distinguish themselves from southern Europeans whom they worked beside."[28] As late as the 1930s, a second generation Italian in New Haven told a researcher that "our skin gives us away. . . . It's dark and oily." Another described a conversation with his employer, who called Italians names. When asked why he felt this way about all Italians, the employer said: "I don't mean you, Henry. You're white."[29]

Eastern Europeans were also racialized in the popular mind, according to Barrett and Roediger: "While racist jokes mocked the black servant who thought her child, fathered by a Chinese man, would be a Jew, racist folklore held that Jews, inside-out, were 'niggers.' "[30] Jews were thought to have visible physical characteristics that marked them off and made them "look Jewish."[31] To refute the racial stereotypes, Dr. Maurice Fishberg, a professor of medicine at New York University and Bellevue Medical College and Russian Jewish immigrant himself, actually classified the noses of 2,836 Jewish men in New York City, finding "that only 14 percent had the aquiline or hooked nose commonly labeled as a 'Jewish' nose."[32] In 1923, New York University was plastered with signs that told Jews to drop out so the school could be a "white man's college."[33] As late as the 1930s, an American history textbook asked whether it would be possible to absorb

"the millions of olive-skinned Italians and swarthy black-haired Slavs and dark-eyed Hebrews into the body of the American people."[34]

Not only was it acceptable to speak about the inferiority of Jews and Italians in newspapers, magazines, and public forums, but discrimination against them was open and, by and large, legal. Elite summer resorts made no bones about shutting out Jews. In the 1880s, many in upstate New York set up placards: "No Jews or Dogs Admitted Here." Although a 1913 New York State law forbade places of public accommodation from advertising their unwillingness to admit anyone because of race, creed, or color—with violations punished as misdemeanors—in states without such laws, resort owners still flaunted such slogans as "Altitude 1869 feet. Too high for Jews."[35] Where the law applied, more subtle means were employed. When resorts and private clubs announced that they served "restricted clientele," it was understood that Jews were not allowed.

"Restrictive covenants," clauses in real estate titles that limited the sale or transfer of property to members of certain groups, kept Jews out of some of New York City's most desirable suburban neighborhoods. Toward the end of the 1920s, apartment-house owners in Jackson Heights, Queens, advertised that their buildings were "restricted" and prohibited Catholics, Jews, and dogs. A legal battle over the exclusions ensued, but the court upheld the rights of the property owners to choose their own tenants. It was not until a 1948 Supreme Court case outlawed restrictive covenants that such agreements became unenforceable in the courts of law.[36]

There were various forms of open discrimination in employment, too. At the end of the nineteenth century, for example, pay rates for common laboring jobs often varied by racial group. In 1895, a public notice recruiting laborers to build the Croton Reservoir listed the daily wage schedule of three groups: common labor, white, $1.30 to $1.50; common labor, colored, $1.25 to $1.40; common labor, Italian, $1.15 to $1.25.[37] For Jews, the bars were felt higher up the job scale. In 1917, the United States Army inserted ads in the *New York World* blatantly stating its need for "Christian" carpenters, although after objections from the president of the American Jewish Committee, a directive was issued forbidding such bigotry. After World War I, as more Jews sought white-collar jobs with private firms, newspaper advertisements indicating a preference for Christians proliferated.[38]

Also in the post–World War I years, many colleges, universities, and medical schools adopted quota systems that set limits on Jewish admission. Although in 1922 President Lowell of Harvard University openly recommended limiting the number of Jewish students, the allotments there, as elsewhere, were covert, and institutions developed discreet ways to

achieve their objectives. The application for Sarah Lawrence College, for example, asked, "Has your daughter been brought up with strict Sunday observance?" Columbia College wanted to know the student applicant's "religious affiliation," whether his parents had ever been known by another name, the parents' place of birth, the mother's full maiden name, and the father's occupation. Harvard came up with the idea of enforcing a geographical distribution, assuming that one would find few Jews outside of the major cities of the east and midwest. It was not until 1946 that New York's City Council passed a resolution threatening the tax-exempt status of nonsectarian colleges and universities that used racial or religious criteria in selecting students; in 1948, New York State (soon followed by New Jersey and Massachusetts) forbade discrimination on grounds of religion and race in higher education.[39]

Race and the Newest New Yorkers

Today, immigrants of European ancestry, whether from Ireland or Poland, England or Russia, Italy or Israel, are fully and unquestionably white. Europeans, of course, are a minority of the current newcomers. Most of the latest immigrants are "nonwhite" or "people of color," but what this means in the New York of today is staggeringly complex.

The white-black cleavage remains central in New York, as it did for much of the twentieth century, ever since the massive migration of African Americans from the South and the fading of Euro-American racial distinctions.[40] This dichotomy has a special resonance and significance given the history of American slavery, the government policies of legal segregation in the South, and the fierce prejudice and institutionalized discrimination throughout the country. Whereas white denotes European antecedents, black stands for Africa. No matter how light their skin tones, Americans with known African ancestry continue to be delineated as black. Although legally in retreat, the peculiarly American "one drop rule" that defined as black a person with as little as a single drop of black blood has had an enduring legacy.

As people of African descent, West Indians are clearly on the black side of the racial divide. Where Hispanics and Asians fit in is much more complicated. Hispanics are generally thought of as nonwhite, although they include people of extraordinary racial diversity, ranging from dark-skinned Dominicans to white-skinned Latin Americans who claim a strong European heritage. Asians may well be the present-day in-between peoples. Neither black nor white, they appear to be moving closer to whites in the

racial hierarchy. In general, "nonwhite" immigrants who are *not* defined as black have had the most success in being recognized for their nationality, rather than their color, and in benefiting from the "whitening" effects of class.

Being Black: West Indian New Yorkers

For West Indians, being black is the master status that pervades and penetrates their lives. The term West Indian refers here to people of African descent from the English-speaking Caribbean, although what I say about race also pertains to immigrants from Haiti, who are also considered black. I do not include the growing number of Trinidadian and Guyanese immigrants of East Indian descent, whose ancestors were brought to the Caribbean as indentured laborers to replace slaves after emancipation. East Indians, as they are called in the Caribbean, are a separate, and fascinating, case, since they typically attempt to establish an Asian identity in New York as a way to avoid being labeled black.

West Indians of African descent cannot avoid this designation. In New York, they often find themselves lumped with American blacks—virtually invisible to most white New Yorkers in a sea of anonymous black faces.[41] Two especially dramatic racial incidents illustrate this invisibility: the Howard Beach murder in 1986 and the Crown Heights riots in 1991. The focus in the mainstream media was on the fact that the victims were black, and most New Yorkers never knew, or cared, that they were West Indian.

Given the realities of American race relations, this focus is not surprising—but that is precisely the point. Indeed, in the Howard Beach incident, Michael Griffith, a Trinidadian immigrant, was attacked because he was black. He was killed—struck by a car—after being chased on the highway by a group of white teenagers. The victim who sparked the riots in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn was a seven-year-old Guyanese boy named Gavin Cato, who was killed when a car driven by a Hasidic Jew jumped a curb (his sister was also seriously injured) . Rumors spread that a Hasidic ambulance service had ignored the children while rushing to the slightly injured driver. Several hours later, a band of black youths fatally stabbed a Jewish rabbinical student, Yankel Rosenbaum, which precipitated several nights of rioting, mostly by young African American and Caribbean black males.[42] The protests and publicity surrounding the incidents, which defined them in black-white terms and largely ignored the ethnic identity of the victims, brought home to West Indians, in a powerful way, that in New York, regardless of the differences they see between themselves and black Americans, others often see them only as blacks.[43]

This is not always the case, of course. In another violent incident that dominated the local news in 1997, the media described the man who was brutally attacked by police officers inside the station house of a Brooklyn precinct as a Haitian immigrant. But even when other New Yorkers recognize Caribbean immigrants as West Indian, as foreign, or, as many whites say, "from the islands," West Indians are seen as an ethnic group within the larger black population. Their racial status, in other words, is always salient. Being viewed as black, and being identified with black Americans, has enormous consequences for their lives. Certainly it is true, as many studies show, that American whites have become much more racially tolerant and less likely to voice racist sentiments to pollsters and in public since the civil rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s.[44] Today, most white Americans would like to convey an image of themselves as unprejudiced and compassionate.[45] Yet racial stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against blacks have had a tenacious hold—and persist in a variety of forms.

At one extreme, racially motivated violent attacks, though the exception, clearly still happen. Some other examples: in 1990, a West Indian family who bought a house in Canarsie, Brooklyn, saw their property torched before they could move in; in 1992, a fourteen-year-old West Indian boy and his sister were attacked on the way to school in the Bronx by four young white men who squirted them with white paint and yelled racial epithets; and in 1995, a West Indian Episcopalian priest and his family who were the first blacks to move into an all-white section of Midwood, Brooklyn, had their car set on fire.[46] Less dramatic, but also painful, West Indians tell of racial slurs, insults, and slights and of their sense that whites do not want to socialize or associate with them. When Andrew Hacker writes that "every black American knows . . . how it feels to have an unfavorable—and unfair—identity imposed on you every waking day," I would add that, as blacks, West Indians in New York know it too.[47]

According to Joe Feagin, no matter how affluent or influential blacks may be, in public places they cannot escape the stigma of being black.[48] A West Indian social worker recalled how once, when he was the only black person on an airplane, he was also the only passenger whom the hostess neglected to offer a magazine.[49] Well-dressed black professionals often find that taxis are unwilling to stop for them in Manhattan. West Indian teenagers describe being followed in stores because they are suspected of shoplifting and having whites recoil from them in fear on the street, in the subway, and in parks.[50] "Because when you go to the stores . . . people follow

you around, you go on the bus and people hold their pocketbooks," one fourteen-year-old West Indian girl explained. "They don't discriminate against you because you're West Indian. They are discriminating against you because you are black."[51] Young black men, whom many whites see as potentially dangerous, have an especially hard time. It is not unusual for whites to cross the street or clutch their handbags when they see a young black man approach—and they do not stop to wonder whether the man is West Indian or American. Regardless of their socioeconomic status, Feagin claims, most black males, by the time they are in their twenties, have been stopped by the police because "blackness" is considered a sign of possible criminality by police officers.[52]

If social distance marks relations between most blacks and whites in New York, residential segregation by race also has been remarkably persistent. Sociologists have developed a statistical measure of residential segregation, called the index of dissimilarity, that gives the percentage of people in a group who would have to move in order to achieve an even or completely integrated pattern; 100 represents total segregation between two groups, and 0 minimum segregation. This measure shows that West Indians are extremely segregated from whites—as segregated as American blacks. Using 1990 census data, Kyle Crowder calculated that the index of dissimilarity between West Indians and non-Hispanic whites in the New York metropolitan area was 82, almost the same as for African Americans (81).[53]

Like other newcomers, many West Indians congregate in distinct West Indian neighborhoods because that is where they want to be. As I described in Chapter 2, West Indians generally move into areas with fairly decent housing, and have high rates of home ownership. But race—and racial isolation—put severe constraints in their way. Real estate agents, for example, often steer them to black neighborhoods or withhold information on housing availability elsewhere, and West Indians themselves often prefer communities where there can avoid racism and rejection. "Some neighborhoods," observed one West Indian New Yorker, "are not yet ready for black people. And I don't want to be a hero."[54] Those who have braved open hostility and branched out from West Indian areas in Brooklyn and Queens to adjacent white communities find that their new neighborhoods become increasingly black. So, for example, Canarsie-Flatlands, a lower-middle-class white ethnic enclave in the 1980s, had a population that was 65 percent black by 1996.[55] Antiblack prejudice tends to fuel a process of racial turnover, as whites begin to leave and no new whites move in; at the same time, the growing number of black families in the neighborhood

makes it seem more welcoming to West Indians looking for homes. The result is a pattern of segregation in which West Indian residential enclaves are located in largely black areas of the city and the suburbs. Indeed, West Indians are not very segregated from African Americans—in 1990, the index of dissimilarity between the two groups in the New York metropolitan area was 43, a fairly moderate rate.[56] If figures for all black New Yorkers are anything to go by, and the evidence shows that they are, higher class standing does little to buy West Indians a racially integrated environment.[57]

This continuing American apartheid, to use Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton's phrase, has far-reaching implications.[58] West Indians' lack of access to white neighborhoods—and the inevitable racial turnover that takes place when middle-class "pioneers" move into white communities—confines the majority to areas with inferior schools, high crime rates, and poor government services and limits their informal contacts with white Americans. Outside of work (and sometimes at work as well), most West Indians find themselves moving in all-black social worlds. This is fortified, it should be noted, by patterns of marriage, which are another indication of continuing racial prejudice and the distinctive social distance separating whites and blacks in America. Again, we have to rely on figures for the entire black population, but they are no doubt similar for West Indians as well. Although 98 percent of married whites in the United States in 1990 had a white spouse, when they married outside of their group, they were several times more likely to marry members of groups other than blacks. Put another way, among married couples, more than one out of four (nearly 30 percent) Asians and Hispanics had white spouses, compared to only one in eighteen (5 percent) blacks.[59] Among native-born married couples twenty-five to thirty-four years old in 1990, 70 percent of Asian women and 39 percent of Hispanic women, but only 2 percent of black women, had white husbands; 5 percent of black men had white wives compared to 33 percent of Hispanic men and 40 percent of Asian men.[60]

The sting of racial prejudice in New York is especially painful, because West Indians come from societies with different racial hierarchies and conceptions of race. There is no denying that the long history of West Indian plantation slavery and colonial social arrangements have left, in their wake, the assumption that African ancestry is inferior; dark skin, moreover, continues to be correlated with poverty.[61] But blackness does not have the same stigma that it does in the United States—and blackness is not, in itself, a barrier to social acceptance or upward mobility. In most West Indian societies, people of African ancestry are the overwhelming majority (the exceptions are Trinidad and Guyana, with their enormous East Indian popu-

lations), and there are hardly any whites or Europeans. Black and colored West Indians in influential and important jobs are hardly token representatives of their race. That they occupy high-status roles is normal and unremarkable. Indeed, since the end of World War II, black and colored West Indians have dominated public affairs and routinely fill prestigious and professional positions.[62]

The very notion of who is considered black differs in the West Indies. Whereas in the United States, the category black includes those who range from very dark skinned to very light skinned, in the West Indies blackness is a matter of ancestry, skin color, hair type, facial features, and socioeconomic status. As Milton Vickerman observes, those defined as black in the United States belong to different groups in Jamaica, where there is a keen consciousness of shade—the lighter, the better.[63] In Jamaica, blacks are generally thought of as impoverished individuals with African ancestry, dark skin, and Negroid facial features and hair type. People who combine features from several types (African plus European, Asian, or Middle Eastern) are traditionally considered brown or colored. Moreover, money still "whitens"; as individuals improve their income, education, lifestyle, and financial status, they seem progressively whiter. What matters, above all, is having education, wealth, manners, and well-placed associates, not race.

Obviously, this changes in New York, where West Indians are considered black and are victims of racial discrimination, whatever their achievements or shade. It is not surprising that a number of Jamaicans I met in the course of my research told me that they never knew what it meant to be black until they came to America. This new racial awareness—or, as Sutton and Makiesky put it, the "heightened consciousness of themselves as a black minority enclosed within a sometimes menacing, sometimes friendly, world of more powerful whites"[64]—gives West Indians a sense of common cause with African Americans on issues and in political struggles where black and white interests are seen to be in conflict.

At the same time, however, West Indians often try to distance themselves from—and avoid the stigma associated with—African Americans. They do this by emphasizing cultural, linguistic, and behavioral features that, in their view, make them different from, indeed superior to, African Americans. In other words, race unites West Indians and African Americans; ethnicity divides them.[65]

West Indians come to New York to improve their lives, and although there are, as the late journalist Orde Coombs noted, "no guarantees that identification with the white ruling class assures upward mobility, it is certain, they feel, that affiliation with the black underclass does not."[66] West Indians see themselves as "harder workers, more ambitious, and greater achievers" than African Americans. Many Jamaicans told me that they are more likely to buy homes than American blacks and that they place more value on education and discipline. Another common theme was that they are less hostile to whites than American blacks—they "don't have chips on [their] shoulders"—and have more dignity and greater self-assurance in dealing with whites.[67] Many Jamaicans I interviewed felt that when whites found out that they were Jamaican, and not African American, they viewed and treated them more favorably. "Once you say something," one man explained, "and they recognize you're not from this country, they treat you a little different." To what extent this is actually the case is hard to say. What is clear, however, is that many West Indians believe it to be true—and the belief itself further bolsters their sense of ethnic pride and distinctiveness, and their feeling of superiority to African Americans.

Hispanic Newcomers

The racial status of New York's Hispanic immigrants is a much more complicated matter: it shows enormous ambiguity, inconsistency, and flux. Although scholars debate whether it is justifiable to call Hispanics a race, in popular discourse they are often thought of this way. To most Americans, Hispanics are not white, though they are not imagined as black either. Hispanics are commonly thought of as brown or of mixed race,even though, in fact, they display remarkable racial diversity. As one journalist notes, there are black Hispanics from the Dominican Republic, Argentines who are almost entirely European white, and Mexicans who would be counted by census takers as American Indians if they had been born north of the Rio Grande.[68]

The term Hispanic is a recent creation in the United States, coined only a few decades ago by census takers as a statistical term of convenience to deal with counting the Latin American population. Some scholars argue that the label is no more than a statistical fiction that bears little relation to reality. Latin American immigrants prefer to be known by their group of national origin not as Hispanics or Latinos, and although they share linguistic and cultural roots, they do not comprise a single, coherent community.[69] Yet what started out as a statistical label of convenience has gradually been transformed by public use into a real social entity from the perspective of American society.[70] Indeed, a recent book, entitled *His-*

panic Nation, examines how a combination of state policies, the Spanish-language media, and political movements is turning the statistical fiction "Hispanic" into a social reality in American society.[71]

What do most New Yorkers think of when they hear the term Hispanic? Is it just an ethnic category, a synonym for people whose origins are in Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and who are seen as having a distinctive cultural heritage or background? The census treats Hispanics this way, since it asks people who say they have Hispanic origins to indicate their race as well (the choice in 1990 including White, Black, American Indian, Asian or Pacific Islander, and Other). Thus, the census category "non-Hispanic whites" was invented. But read nearly any New York newspaper or hear people talk on the street and it becomes clear that Hispanic stands for something more than ethnicity. There has been a gradual racialization of Hispanics—a belief that physical characteristics, particularly skin color, are involved. Indeed, by treating Hispanics as a group equivalent to blacks in antidiscrimination and affirmative-action policies, the federal government has contributed to raising Hispanic to the status of a racial category.[72]

Increasingly, in political and street-level discourse, New Yorkers think in terms of a four-race framework of white, black, Hispanic, and Asian. (American Indians, the fifth race, are not often mentioned as such in New York City.) "When people in the contemporary United States talk about racial politics, racial discrimination, or racial violence," observes Roger Sanjek "it is this white-black-Hispanic-Asian (plus American Indian in some localities) framework that they speak within."[73]

In New York, politicians and political pundits as well as the media routinely refer to blacks, Hispanics, and Asians as minorities in opposition to whites. It is not unusual for New York police to describe a perpetrator or victim as Hispanic, based only on his or her appearance. This generally means someone who is "too dark to be white, too light to be black, and who has no easily identifiable Asian traits."[74] A comment by a Salvadoran immigrant on Long Island indicates an awareness of this kind of racial stereotyping: "The police hassle Hispanics everywhere," he explained; "as soon as they see the *face of a Hispanic* [italics mine] inside a car they immediately turn on their lights and stop his car to ask him for his papers."[75] The presumption that Hispanic immigrants are nonwhite also comes out in casual conversations when New Yorkers describe Hispanics who are phenotypically white. "She's Colombian, but she's white," I have heard people say. New Yorkers feel no need to mention the skin color of European immigrants, who are assumed to be white as a matter of course.

The label Hispanic carries a stigma in New York, often conjuring up images of people who are brown- or tan-skinned, foreign in speech and manner, and unable or unwilling to adapt to U.S. laws, culture, and norms of hygiene.[76] A Cuban-born stock broker, whose only contact with clients was on the phone, described how he changed his surname (Gonzalez) so that when he solicited new clients they would "listen to me and trust me more than they would with a Hispanic name." (In fact, he was phenotypically white and had no accent, having moved to the United States as a small child; he had not told his mother, in Florida, about the name change, fearing that "she would be crushed.")[77] New Yorkers are generally not sensitive to the differences among immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, and Honduras. And they often lump the most recent Spanish-speaking arrivals with Puerto Ricans, who are still New York's single largest Hispanic group, have extraordinarily high rates of poverty, and are imagined, by many New Yorkers, as an underclass mired in crime and drugs. Indeed, for much of the post–World War II era, before the recent immigration wave, the all-encompassing minority category in New York City was "blacks and Puerto Ricans." No wonder that Spanish-speaking immigrants from the Caribbean and Latin America often make efforts to distinguish themselves by nationality from blacks and Puerto Ricans, the city's most stigmatized minorities. Robert Smith, for example, tells of how Mexican immigrants define themselves as neither black nor Puerto Rican, emphasizing their strong community institutions, tightly knit families, and solid work ethic.[78]

The case of New York's Brazilian immigrants is especially interesting, since even though most are phenotypically white (and speak Portuguese), they are often labeled Hispanic. They strongly object to this designation, which, they believe, results in discrimination. Doubtless they wish to escape the color connotations of the Hispanic label. Also, class is involved. Most Brazilian New Yorkers are from the middle strata of Brazilian society and are well educated; they consider it an insult to be confused with the rest of the city's Latino population, who typically come from poorer backgrounds and have less education. Brazilians believe that they receive better treatment from white Americans when they make clear that they are not Hispanic, something they try to do by emphasizing their linguistic and cultural distinctiveness.[79]

And this leads to yet a further complication. If Hispanics are increasingly thought of as a race in popular discourse, in their day-to-day lives they also often identify, and are seen by others, in terms of the black-white dichotomy. On one end are white Hispanic immigrants of European an-

cestry who, if self-identification is anything to go by, are a substantial number. In the 1990 census, a quarter of New York City's Dominicans and over half of the Colombians and Cubans described themselves as white.[84] Like New York's white Brazilians, white Hispanic immigrants often cannot escape the stigma associated with the Hispanic label. The remark by one Puerto Rican New Yorker, recorded in Oscar Lewis's *La Vida*, would doubtless strike a familiar chord with many new arrivals. "I'm so white," the respondent said, "that they've even taken me for a Jew, but when they see my Spanish name, they back right off."[81] Ramón Grosfoguel and his colleague argue that "no matter how 'blonde or blue eyed' a person may be, and no matter how successfully he can 'pass' as white, the moment that person self-identifies as Puerto Rican, he enters the labyrinth of racial Otherness."[82]

Yet there are obvious advantages to being white. A recent study found that Dominicans who are perceived as white have much lower poverty levels than, and enjoy advantages in the labor market over, their darker-skinned compatriots. "When I got my job in the laundry," said one extremely fair-skinned Dominican, "the owners said that even though I spoke Spanish, they would hire me because they didn't want any Blacks working for them."[83] An analysis of residential segregation patterns based on 1980 census data found that white Hispanics from the Caribbean region in the New York metropolitan area were less segregated from non-Hispanic whites than Hispanics who described themselves as "other race" with some Spanish identification or as "black."[84] Presumably, many of the Hispanics who marry non-Hispanic whites—nationwide, in 1990, nearly half of the white men who intermarried wed Hispanics—are white or very light-skinned.[85]

As one might expect, the reality of the American color line creates special problems for dark-skinned or black Hispanics. (This has a significant impact on the Dominican population. In 1990, a quarter of the Dominicans in New York City, compared to 13 percent of the Cubans and 3 percent of Colombians, described themselves on the census as black.)[86] In the study of Caribbean Hispanic residence patterns, Hispanics who described themselves as black (as opposed to white or "Spanish race") in the 1980 census were the most segregated from non-Hispanic whites and the least segregated from the wider black population. Apart from residence, there are the day-to-day humiliations. A dark-skinned young New York–born man of Dominican descent explained, "When I was jumped by whites, I was not called a spic but I was called a nigger."[87] Or consider the experience of another dark-skinned Dominican who tells of waiting in a corporate office

for a job interview: "A woman wandered out into the room I was sitting in, looked at me, looked around, and returned to her office. A few minutes later she did the same thing again. After the third time, she finally asked, 'Are you Luis Rodriguez?' I replied 'Yes,' as the woman tried to explain her way out of the blunder she had just made. 'I was looking for someone who looked different, I mean Hispanic, I mean . . . ' "[88]

Dominicans with African features or dark skin find it especially unsettling to be confused with African Americans, since they come from a society where the category black is reserved for the highly disdained Haitians and where to be partly white (the case for most Dominicans) is to be nonblack. In the Dominican Republic, Dominicans of mixed phenotype tend to discount their African heritage and say they are "indios," seeing themselves as descendants of the Spanish and indigenous populations.[89] Dark-skinned immigrants from other Latin American countries experience a similar clash of racial orders in New York. Although each country in Latin America has evolved its own racial context because of its unique history, race is generally thought of as a continuum from black to white, with a large number of terms to describe those in-between. People can be more or less white, black, or Amerindian. A *trigueño,* or "wheat-colored" person, for example, is generally lighter skinned than a *moreno.* Moreover, income and education can have a lightening effect so that "a person who is called *negro* or *prieto* when he is poor and uneducated will almost always be described by some more flattering term, such as *trigueño,* if he rises in status."[90]

Where does this leave the many—indeed, probably most—Hispanic immigrants in New York, whose skin color and other physical features do not qualify them as white but who tend not to be considered black either? In many ways, very much in the middle. These are the people New Yorkers usually have in mind when they use or hear the term Hispanic. And they are the people likely to describe themselves as "other" when the census asks about race—a selection made, in 1990, by half the Dominicans, a quarter of the Cubans, and 43 percent of the Colombians in New York City.[91]

On occasion, "not white, not black" Hispanic immigrants may find that they are taken for "light-skinned blacks."[92] But on the whole, they have avoided the presumptions of inferiority associated with Africa and slavery and have been able to put a visible distance between themselves and black Americans. Hispanics who checked off the "other race" category in the 1980 census and gave some Spanish identification were highly segregated from non-Hispanic blacks. Although their residential patterns indicate that they are accepted on the basis of common ethnicity by white Hispanics, they ap-

pear not to be accepted as neighbors by non-Hispanic whites, from whom they remain highly segregated.[93]

Class distinctions add further complexity to the way Hispanic immigrants are seen. Whereas West Indians find that race remains a barrier whatever their class status, for white or light-skinned Hispanics, income, education, and occupation enhance and solidify the advantages they already enjoy. White or very light-skinned Hispanic New Yorkers who enter the upper reaches of the middle class and become fluent English speakers are able to move fairly easily in a white social world. It is worth noting that the light-skinned Puerto Rican who complained that New Yorkers backed off when they heard his Spanish name was from a poor slum family.

By the same token, lower-class status reinforces and intensifies racial prejudice against mixed race and black Hispanic immigrants. The case of Salvadorans on Long Island is instructive in this regard. The mayor of a town where many Salvadorans live and work put it bluntly: "People don't want to live with people with brown skin." Another consideration is that most Salvadorans come from poor peasant backgrounds and hold menial jobs in the town. Out of necessity, they live in overcrowded quarters, and many have to walk or bicycle to work, school, and social events because they cannot afford cars. When white old-timers see Salvadoran laborers—boot-clad, unshaven, and dusty—treading down Main Street as they return from work, it heightens animosity toward Hispanic immigrants, who are seen as eroding the quality of suburban life. Interestingly, white old-timers do not express antipathy toward better-educated and middle-class Korean or Chinese immigrants who live in their communities.[94]

Asians: The Elasticity of Race

Asians in America have long been seen as a separate racial category, but perceptions of them have changed remarkably in recent decades. Once looked down upon as the "yellow peril," East Asians are now frequently touted as the "model minority." Several popular articles have depicted high-achieving Asian American students as "proto-whites," and a number of scholarly accounts suggest that Asians may eventually blend into the white category through intermarriage and personal achievement. Such crystal-ball gazing is of course highly speculative, especially given the continued racial distinctions between whites and Asians. But the fact that such possibilities are under popular and academic scrutiny brings out the enormous transformations in the way Asians are seen.

In the past, Asians were subject to blatant exclusion and discrimination

on racial grounds. Until the recent immigration, Asian in New York meant Chinese. Not black, and not white, they were often portrayed as "slanty-eyed" and belonging to the "yellow race." One reason that Chinese immigrants huddled together in Chinatown was fear of racism in the world outside.

Racial prejudice against Asians was enshrined in restrictive immigration and naturalization laws. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 singled out the Chinese as the first and only group to be excluded from the United States on the basis of race, ethnicity, or nationality, and by 1917 Congress had banned the immigration of most other Asians as well. For much of the country's history, Asian immigrants were denied the right to become citizens. After Congress passed a statute in 1870 expanding naturalization to include persons of African descent, legal measures continued to deny this right to Asian immigrants. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act specifically defined Chinese as "aliens ineligible to citizenship"; over the next few decades the rule was extended, through a series of decisions in state and federal courts, to all other immigrants from east and south Asia. The judgment of a 1921 Federal District court stated that Congress required someone to be white for naturalization because "color [is] . . . evidence of a type of civilization which it characterizes. The yellow or bronze racial color is the hallmark of Oriental despotisms."[95] It was not until 1943 that Chinese immigrants gained the right to become citizens and that the discriminatory immigration laws affecting Asians began to be relaxed. Only in 1952, with the passage of the McCarran-Walter Act, was naturalization eligibility extended to all Asians.[96]

On the West Coast, where anti-Asian sentiments were particularly virulent, several states adopted laws prohibiting intermarriage between Asians and whites. A 1913 California law, targeted at Japanese farmers, barred Asian immigrants from owning land. When a California court held, in 1885, that the public schools had to admit Chinese children, the state legislature passed a bill allowing school districts to set up separate schools for "Mongolians."[97] Most devastating of all, during World War II more than one hundred thousand Japanese Americans who lived on the Pacific Coast were forcibly evacuated and moved to internment camps.

Today, over fifty years later, it is hard to imagine that Asians, as "aliens ineligible for citizenship," used to be cast, as Yen Le Espiritu puts it, as "almost blacks but not blacks." Now, the model minority stereotype renders them "almost whites but not whites."[98] New York's Asians rank just below whites in the city's racial hierarchy—and they generally meet with greater acceptance from middle-class white New Yorkers than other racial

minorities. Even the modern-day nativist Peter Brimelow, author of *Alien Nation*, who sees the latest arrivals as swamping white America, admits to a certain "sentimentality" about Asian immigrants whom, he writes, are often viewed as "the most 'Anglo Saxon' of the current wave."[99]

As compared to blacks and Hispanics, Asians are the least residentially segregated from non-Hispanic whites in the New York metropolitan area. Especially striking is the growing number of affluent suburban communities, like Scarsdale, where small numbers of Asians live in the midst of large white majorities.[100] Susan Slyomovics reports that white middle-class New Yorkers in the Bronx neighborhood she studied accepted the Muslim mosques of South Asians but rejected African American Muslim places of worship.[101] Nationwide, there is a high rate of intermarriage between the children of Asian immigrants and non-Hispanic whites. Moreover, a growing number of affluent white families in New York have adopted Asian children. Since the early 1990s, so many orphan Chinese girls have been adopted by upper-middle-class white professionals that, by 1997, about eighteen hundred families belonged to the Greater New York chapter of Families with Children from China; by one account, there were at least one thousand adopted Chinese orphan girls under the age of five in the New York area.[102]

For their part, most Asian immigrants see themselves as superior to blacks and Hispanics—and wish to avoid being lumped with these groups at the bottom of the racial-ethnic hierarchy. A black journalist reports how an Asian colleague described the sorts of people who got off at different subway stops. At one stop, the Asian colleague said, all the "minorities" got off, meaning the blacks and Hispanics. "He did not consider himself a minority, despite the fact that blacks and Latinos vastly outnumber Asians in the city. In his mind, as in many others, blacks and Latinos are the true minorities here."[103] At Columbia University, the president of the Korean Students Association explained why his group refused to participate in an umbrella body known as the United Students of Color Council: "My skin color is closer to a Jewish shade."[104] In fact, in terms of skin color, Koreans, like the Japanese and Chinese, "tend to register rather mildly on screens of 'white' American color sensitivity."[105] Indian immigrants, whose darker skin color puts them at risk of being confused with African Americans, emphasize their ethnic identity and distinctive history, customs, and culture as a way to avoid such mistakes. First-generation Indian immigrants, according to Johanna Lessinger, "do not acknowledge they are anything other than white—they think of themselves as white."[106]

What accounts for the greater acceptance, and changed perceptions, of

Asians today? Partly it is the class composition of the recent Asian immigration and the successes of their children. A large number of the new arrivals from Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and India come with college degrees, ready to compete for middle-class careers, able to afford homes in middle-class areas, and intent that their children advance through education. Many of their children have done extraordinarily well. National figures show that native-born Asians are substantially more likely to complete college than whites and other groups.[107] In New York City, Asian students are overrepresented at the top of the academic ladder. They now make up about half of the student body at Stuyvesant High School, the city's most selective public high school. So many Koreans attend Horace Mann School—one of New York's most competitive private high schools, known for its outstanding college admission record—that a special Korean parents' group has been organized (see Chapter 6).

Views of Asian immigrants' home countries have changed—and this is another factor behind the new racial perceptions. In the past, Americans saw Asia as a backward region. Now, Japan is a modern advanced nation and a world economic power; Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, and Hong Kong emerged, in the postwar period, as important modern economies; and China is a major player in world politics. Although many Americans have resented Japan's economic successes and Japanese takeovers of American firms, the Japanese, and by extension other east Asians, are no longer viewed as inferior. Indeed, in the early 1990s, Japan and other Asian economies were often held up as models for American companies.

Asians may now seem almost white to some New Yorkers, but they are still seen as racially distinct—and they still confront racial prejudice and discrimination.[108] There are reports of racial insults and slurs—Korean immigrants, for example, being faced with "go back to China" or "no chinks allowed."[109] One Filipino American college student recalls being rejected by her white boyfriend's parents in high school because she wasn't white ("They didn't even know that I was Filipino. They thought I was Chinese"); such an experience would strike a responsive chord among many other Asian Americans as well.[110]

Although Asians often live in communities with substantial numbers of whites, they have sometimes met with resistance, especially when they move into lower-middle-class white areas. In the late 1980s in Brooklyn's Bensonhurst neighborhood, anti-Asian flyers were distributed to mailboxes urging residents to boycott Korean and Chinese businesses as well as real estate agents who sold property to Asians.[111] A few years later, in 1995, in Bellerose, Queens, real estate agents were reported to be trying to drum

up business by calling and writing white residents with what seemed to be tips that more Indian and Pakistani immigrants were moving into the community.[112]

Although they are less likely to be subjects of racial attacks than blacks and Hispanics, Asians are occasionally victimized this way as well. Consider two incidents in the late 1980s and early 1990s: three Korean men were assaulted in Woodside, Queens, by two white men who began yelling racial slurs and physically attacked one of the Koreans, breaking his leg; and a gang of forty white youths jumped five Asian American teenagers in a predominantly white neighborhood of Bayside, Queens. In 1987, troubling attacks took place in a New Jersey town where large numbers of Indians had moved. Groups of young white and Hispanic hoodlums, who called themselves dotbusters, pushed, shoved, and insulted Indian housewives who walked down the street wearing saris and *bindi* (the cosmetic dot on the forehead of Hindu women). Dotbusters beat up Indian students at a nearby technical college, and eventually two young Indian men were set upon and brutally beaten; one suffered permanent brain damage, and the other was fatally injured.[113]

Asian immigrants, especially Koreans, confront the additional issue of racial hostility from African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans. Many Korean stores in Brooklyn and Manhattan have been targets of racial threats and verbal attacks by blacks; several Korean-owned stores in black neighborhoods have been destroyed by arsonists; and between 1981 and 1991, five long-term black boycotts of Korean stores took place in New York City. This hostility has a familiar ring, much like that experienced by Jewish shopkeepers and landlords in black neighborhoods in the not too distant past.

Korean merchants, like their Jewish counterparts before them, are convenient scapegoats for black residents' economic frustrations because of their classic role as middleman minorities, acting as intermediaries between large numbers of low-income African American customers and predominantly white-owned suppliers and manufacturers. There are inherent tensions in commercial transactions in this context. African American and Afro-Caribbean customers complain that Korean proprietors are rude, overcharge or shortchange them, treat them like potential thieves, and resort to force in dealing with shoplifters. Koreans counter that they have to worry about shoplifting and that customers often pay less than they owe or damage merchandise. Added to these complaints are the preexisting prejudices that each group brings to their interactions. Korean shop owners tend to be biased against blacks, viewing them as less intelligent, less honest, and more criminally oriented than whites. In fact, according to one survey, Korean merchants are more prejudiced against black customers than black customers are against Korean merchants. For the sake of their business interests, Korean shopowners try to hide their prejudiced attitudes; black customers have little to lose by displaying their hostilities.[114]

Public Discourse about Race

Along with enormous changes in perceptions of race, the very rhetoric of race has also undergone a striking transformation since the last great immigration wave. A hundred years ago, politicians, public intellectuals, and the press had little hesitation about expressing blatantly racist views, including those about the newest immigrants. It is hard to imagine a contemporary national figure of the prominence of then Vice President Calvin Coolidge writing, as he did in *Good Housekeeping* in 1921, that "America must be kept American. Biological laws show . . . that Nordics deteriorate when mixed with other races."[115] Or of a New York City congressman claiming, in the manner of the late-nineteenth-century Tammany candidate Tim Campbell, that "the local issue is the dago Rinaldo. He's from Italy, I am from Ireland. Are you in favor of Italy or Ireland?"[116]

Today, a different etiquette about race prevails in public discourse. The civil rights revolution ushered in a series of laws and court decisions banning discrimination and setting up new agencies and systems to enforce the law. The result has been a whole new climate and understanding about what is acceptable to say about race in public. Racial, religious, and ethnic slurs are now condemned when uttered by public officials and candidates and by those in private institutions with a visible responsibility to the public. By the 1970s and 1980s, Lawrence Fuchs writes, candidates for high office and public officials could not disparage, or even tolerate the disparagement of, any ethnic or religious group without suffering severe and widespread public condemnation.[117] In reaction, conservative critics complain about what they call the liberal culture of political correctness that makes it impossible to "tell it like it is." Peter Brimelow goes so far as to say that Americans are unwilling to own up to the negative social consequences of immigration because of the fear of being accused of racism.[118]

Now that racism is less acceptable in public, the movement to restrict immigration has a different tone than it did earlier in the century, when important officials and public leaders wrote and spoke about southern and eastern European races polluting the nation's superior Nordic stock. Today, most public appeals for restriction shy away from blatantly racist argu-

ments. Even Peter Brimelow—who writes about the impending breakdown of American society if immigration continues and the white core declines—presents himself as courageous for being willing to buck what he sees as the current trend of avoiding discussion of anything that smacks of racism.[119] Objections to the current scale of immigration are couched primarily in terms of concerns over the number of illegal immigrants, or the drain on public budgets, or the competition for jobs between immigrants and native-born Americans, or the dangers of overpopulation.[120]

In the new atmosphere of public tolerance, there are more subtle ways of casting aspersion on racial and ethnic groups. Instead of egregious epithets or slurs, "code words" are now used to refer to negative characteristics of minorities. One journalist speaks of the "slur-cum-apology," in which politicians profit from public prejudices by playing to them, then absolving themselves.[121] And although it is now taboo for public figures to make moral judgments of different races, when these differences are put in terms of "scientific" evidence, they acquire an aura of respectability. A notable example is the much publicized book *The Bell Curve,* which claims that differences in intelligence between blacks and whites have an important hereditary component.[122]

For all the changed rhetoric, race continues to be the basis for profound inequalities and prejudices. New York remains a highly segregated city in which blacks and Hispanics are more likely than whites—or Asians—to live in areas of concentrated poverty, with inferior schools, inadequate city services, and high crime rates.[123] Crimes motivated by bigotry have not disappeared, despite the creation of bias-investigation teams to prevent them. Police brutality against minorities is a serious problem. In 1996, almost 80 percent of police-misconduct complaints to New York City's Civilian Complaint Review Board were made by blacks, Hispanics, and Asians; in the same year, an Amnesty International report found a pattern of ill treatment of suspects, deaths in custody, and unjustified shootings by officers, with most abuses in black, Hispanic, and Asian neighborhoods.[124] Many whites are unwilling to support government programs aimed at assisting racial minorities; affirmative action has lost political support in the nation and is under attack in the courts. Thus, while contemporary immigrants benefit from entering a society that has witnessed remarkable progress since the civil rights revolution, racial divisions continue to matter in significant ways.

The racial difference between today's nonwhite immigrants and their white European predecessors seems like a basic—and obvious—fact. Yet

much is not obvious about racial matters then and now. At the turn of the century, Jews and Italians were not recognized as fully white, and negative views of them were often expressed in racial terms. At a time when nearly all New Yorkers were of European descent, Jews and Italians were seen as racially distinct from and inferior to those of Anglo-Saxon stock. Today, although immigrants from Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean are often referred to as nonwhite or people of color, these blanket terms oversimplify the nature and impact of race among them.

One of the benefits of a historical comparison is that it highlights the elasticity and changeability of racial perceptions. Today, New York's racial order is in a state of flux as the white share of the population continues to shrink and the proportion of Hispanics and Asians grows. In the context of contemporary New York, the term racial minority, as currently used, is in fact a misnomer now that whites are actually a numerical minority—some refer to New York as a majority minority city. In 1998, according to census estimates, only 35 percent of New Yorkers were white; Asians had reached 8 percent of the citywide total; blacks, 26 percent; and Hispanics, 31 percent.[125] In light of these changes, as Reynolds Farley observes, "the way we think about race, the meaning of the term, and the way we define and measure racial categories are all topics of debate as the old black-white dichotomy proves inadequate for the many-hued nation we are becoming."[126]

And the many-hued New York. A new racial hierarchy is evolving in the city in which Hispanics, in many contexts, are seen as a separate race and Asians have become the "whitest" of the nonwhite groups. This enormous change in perceptions of Asians has led to speculation that, with more intermarriage and intermingling, the category "white" may eventually be expanded to include Asians as well as lighter-skinned Hispanics, although a more pessimistic view holds that persistent discrimination will prevent Asians from ever being accepted as belonging to white America.[127]

Another new dynamic is that New York has a huge population of African Americans and Puerto Ricans, the groups many New Yorkers still have in mind when they use the term minority. This has enormous implications for black and Hispanic immigrants. On the positive side, blacks and Hispanics have the potential of joining together politically to further common aims and agendas—a potential that is realized on many occasions. Less happily, black and Hispanic immigrants often face the same kind of discrimination and prejudice as native minorities. One reason many of today's immigrants stress their ethnic identity is to set themselves apart from African Americans and Puerto Ricans. This is the case for West Indians, many Latino

newcomers, and even some dark-skinned Indians who run the risk of being confused with African Americans.

Despite the striking changes, the social construction of race in black-white terms has had a grim tenacity. As blacks of African descent, West Indians suffer extraordinary disabilities, and black Hispanic immigrants confront more severe discrimination than their lighter-skinned compatriots. A key issue for many of today's darker-skinned immigrants is not whether they will become white—which is currently out of the question—but whether they will gain recognition on the basis of their ethnicity or national heritage rather than be identified in terms of skin color.

The most intractable racial boundary in the United States remains that separating those deemed black from so-called whites. Consequently, although Asians and lighter-skinned Hispanics may well be the current "in-between peoples," the fate of black immigrants and their children is more problematic. Certainly, new racial conceptions are likely to evolve that erode the black-white dichotomy. It is also possible, however, that the crucial line will remain between blacks and all others, as black immigrants and their children remain on the black side of the racial divide and experience persistent discrimination well into the future.

CHAPTER 6

Transnational Ties

> The conception of citizenship itself is rapidly changing and we may have to recognize a sort of world or international citizenship as more logical than the present peripatetic kind, which makes a man an American while here, and an Italian while in Italy. International conferences are not so rare nowadays. Health, the apprehension or exclusion of criminals, financial standards, postage, telegraphs and shipping are today to a great extent, regulated by international action. . . . The old barriers are everywhere breaking down. We may even bring ourselves to the point of recognizing foreign "colonies" in our midst, on our own soil, as entitled to partake in the parliamentary life of their mother country.—Gino Speranza

Sound familiar? This reflection on the globalizing world and the possibility of electoral representation for Italians abroad describes issues that immigration scholars are debating and discussing today. The words were written, however, in 1906 by the secretary of the Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants.[1] They are a powerful reminder that processes that scholars now call transnational have a long history. Contemporary immigrant New Yorkers are not the first newcomers to live transnational lives. Although immigrants' transnational connections and communities today reflect many new dynamics, there are also significant continuities with the past.

The term transnationalism, as developed in the work of Linda Basch and her colleagues, refers to processes by which immigrants "forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. . . . An essential element . . . is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies." It's not just a question of political ties that span borders of the kind that Gino Speranza had in mind. In a transnational perspective, contemporary immigrants are seen as maintaining familial, economic, cultural, and politi-