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Orly Clerge

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Balancing stigma and status: racial and class identities among middle-class Haitian youth

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Abstract

This article examines the identity formation of middle-class Haitian youth. Segmented assimilation theory predicts that the Haitian second generation will integrate into the black American underclass or maintain strong ethnic group identities. The black middle class, however, is an unexplored pathway of cultural assimilation. This paper uses the literature on the racial and class experiences of the black American middle class as a departure point for understanding the boundary work of middle-class Haitian youth. Based on qualitative interviews and a focus group, we uncover the mechanisms of identity formation for this invisible population. Racial, ethnic and class boundaries compel Haitian youths to create strategies of either empowerment or distancing. They negotiate between their middle-class status and ethnoracial exclusion in a racially segregated neighbourhood, an ethnically homogenous church and a mixed-race school setting. This study's findings extend our theoretical understandings of middle-class immigrants and their identity work.

Keywords: second generation; social identity; race; class; ethnicity; minority middle class.

Introduction

This paper is an exploration of the integration experiences of the second-largest black foreign-born population in the USA: Haitians (Mederios-Kent 2007). The study takes place in Cascades,¹ a black middle-class neighbourhood in New York. Based on qualitative work in this community, we unpack the racial and class identities of middle-class first- and second-generation Haitian immigrants. The

long-standing tradition in sociological research on immigrants has been to use the white American middle class as the standard of social inclusion. This has been done for good reasons. Members of the white middle class are full citizens and maintain political control over social and economic resources. Historically, white ethnic immigrants crossed ethnic and racial boundaries by changing their last names, marrying across ethnic groups and abandoning the language of their home country in order to assimilate into the so-called American white middle class (Alba and Nee 2005; Roediger 2005). The boundaries of race render black native and foreign-born individuals in the USA unassimilable and marginal despite their increasing class status (Glazer 1993). Therefore, this paper uses the experiences of the African American middle class as a departure point for understanding the distinctive identity formation of middle class Haitian youth.

Middle-class Haitians are an interesting case study because: (1) unlike West Indian immigrants who have been considered model minorities (Model 2008), a Haitian ethnic identity is stigmatized as being almost always lower class (Zéphir 2001); and (2) despite the disproportionate presence of Haitians in Miami's lower class, there exists a growing middle class in enclaves of New York, Boston and Ft Lauderdale (Stepick 1998; Terrazas 2007). Middle-class status in this study is defined by parental attainment of degrees beyond high school and work in middle-income professions such as nurses and service managers. Identities are measured in terms of respondents' experiences and beliefs about their class and racial experiences. The following questions guide this research. How do Haitians in the middle class understand their racial identities? How do they manage ethnic boundaries? How does social class operate for the Haitian middle class? I draw on the immigrant integration and black middle-class literatures to frame the understudied mechanisms of identity formation for Haitian middle-class immigrants and their children. The work on the black immigrant population addresses the ethnic and racial boundaries that first- and subsequent-generation immigrants have to negotiate in everyday life (Buchanan 1987; Kasinitz 1992; Waters 1999; Foner 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Butterfield 2004; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Rogers 2006; Kasinitz et al. 2008). However, the ways in which black immigrants in the middle class are negotiating imposed class, racial and ethnic categories is less understood. Therefore, Haitians in the middle class, like other middle-class immigrant groups, are an invisible population in the discourses on immigrant incorporation and stratification. This paper will unpack this group's identity work and analyse the particularities of ethnoracial and class identity formation in various social settings.

Literature*Haiti and Haitian immigrants in context*

Existing work on Haitians emphasizes the experiences of the lower class. Therefore, the Haitian middle class is an indiscernible population. Popular images of Haitians in Haiti and in America almost always display their poverty and outsider social status (Zacair 2010). This representation of Haitians is tied to widespread messages that Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere and does not have the capacity to recover from political and environmental challenges. Haitian immigrants counter this macro-level categorization of their nationality with high levels of pride in their homeland and strong nationalistic identities (Laguerre 1998; Stepick 1998). In addition, Haitians bring to the USA their own ideas about how race and social class operate, which inevitably shape their world views and interactions with others (Zéphir 2001).

The evolution of Haitian society has been characterized by class conflicts as well as historically contentious racial relations with its neighbouring country, the Dominican Republic (Nicholls 1996; Turits 2002). Internally, Haiti is wrought with class divisions that are highly correlated with skin colour. Haiti's class system is comprised of two populations: (1) the elite (bourgeoisie and middle class), which is largely made up of whites and mixed-race families; and (2) the masses (the urban working class and rural peasant class), who are largely black (Averill 1989). Haiti's history is founded on the political and social conflicts between these populations, and Haitian society continues to largely be defined by these hierarchies (Garrigus 2006). Therefore, Haitian immigrants entering the USA encounter a stratification system more complex and permeable in terms of class, yet similar in terms of racial cleavage. Colourism is rampant in Haiti because the light-skinned population is almost always given a higher class status compared to blacks, regardless of their market position (Averill 1989). A small black middle class has emerged since the mid-twentieth century; however, they continue to struggle for political and economic representation. Haitians enter the USA with the sociocultural realities of their homeland in mind. They reproduce these class and racial boundaries in social interactions, while also managing the realities of inequality in their local communities and institutions (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). These local and transnational dynamics make the Haitian middle class an interesting group in which to explore racial and class identity formation, specifically the ways in which this cultural baggage shapes the experiences of younger generations.

Cultural and economic integration dynamics in the USA

Historically, the Haitian immigrant experience has been characterized by their having a low social status, a poor sociopolitical context of reception, and a segregated living situation in inner-city black neighbourhoods upon arrival (Stepick 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). The children of Haitian immigrants are no exception. The Haitian second generation is joining the American underclass in large numbers. Portes, Fernandez-Kelly and Haller (2005) report that, when compared to other immigrant groups in Miami, Haitian youth exhibit higher unemployment rates, lower educational attainment and frequent interfaces with the criminal justice system. Culturally, the Haitian second generation are said to experience 'identity trouble' and they 'cover up' their ethnic background to distance themselves from their parents' stigmatized nationality. The goal of this ethnic distancing is to successfully integrate into social environments, such as schools and neighbourhoods, which are often hostile towards their co-ethnics (Stepick 1998; Zéphir 2001).

The Haitian second generation is believed to be vulnerable to adopting the underclass beliefs and practices of inner-city African Americans because they distance themselves from the first generation and their ethnic group (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997). Mary Waters' study of West Indians in New York City finds that the children of Caribbean working-class immigrants participate in ethnic distancing, which means they are more likely to adopt African American ethnic identities and an oppositional orientation to the American mainstream. West Indians in the middle class, however, adopt ethnic and immigrant identities more readily, which shields them from 'oppositional African American' identities. As a result, middle-class West Indian youths do not accept the cultural identities and values of lower-class African Americans. Haitians in the middle class, too, use cultural signifiers such as the French language and their ethnic identity as markers of linguistic and class distinctions from other blacks (Buchanan 1983; Zéphir 2001). However, our knowledge of the mechanisms by which the ethnic, class and racial identities of middle-class Haitians are expressed, particularly among youth, is limited.

Segmented assimilation has been challenged for its sensational depictions of the downward assimilation of immigrants and the fixed ties between cultural identity and social mobility (Neckerman, Carter and Lee 1999; Waldinger and Feliciano 2004; Alba, Kasinitz and Waters 2011). The segmented assimilation perspective posits that today's immigrants will assimilate into the white middle class, the black underclass or their own middle-class ethnic community. However, America's diverse immigrant population is experiencing structural and cultural integration in similar ways as upwardly mobile African

Americans (Neckerman, Carter and Lee 1999; Alba and Nee 2005; Kasinitz 2008; Itzigsohn 2009; Alba, Kasinitz and Waters 2011). Neckerman, Carter and Lee (1999) argue that the black middle class's experience with racial and class discrimination is closely mirrored by middle-class immigrants who have to strategically navigate their insider-outsider social position. They experience significant levels of discrimination and issues of conformity with the white middle class in public spaces such as school, work and residential settings (Feagin 1991) and actively cultivate their class identities in opposition to lower-class blacks (Patillo-McCoy 1999). While this paper cannot compare the experience of the African American middle class with that of Haitians, we can begin to explore the identity formation of Haitian middle-class youths in interracial and inter-class spaces such as schools, neighbourhoods and churches.

Place and people: ethnoburb and Haitian families

This study takes place in Cascades, Queens. Cascades and its adjacent neighbourhoods are ethnoburbs (Li 1998); they are middle class, residential and have a high percentage of African Americans and black ethnic groups from the Caribbean. This neighbourhood was chosen as a research site because of its high concentration of middle-income black households whose median household income surpasses that of white families (Roberts 2006) and its propinquity to a public school where Haitian children were severely discriminated against (Gonzalez 2005). Cascades is characterized as a middle-class neighbourhood because the median household income is \$80,205, well above Queens' \$55,291 overall median household income (Table 1). Cascades is a racially hyper-segregated neighbourhood, where blacks constitute 91.2 per cent of the population and the foreign born make up 39.8 per cent of the community. Haitians are the second-largest immigrant population² in the neighbourhood (NYC-DOCP 2000). The Haitian population³ in Queens County increased by 113 per cent, from 18,996 in 1990 to 40,488 in 2009 (Census 2000; American Community Survey 2005–09). Haitians from adjacent neighbourhoods in Long Island return to Cascades to work, attend religious gatherings, transfer money back home and purchase cultural products.

Respondents were recruited from a local Catholic church and a public school. Snowball sampling was employed to gain more respondents. The primary data-collection tool used was a semi-structured questionnaire. Interviews were conducted with 43 respondents. Fifteen families were interviewed totalling 31 Haitian parents and children (see Table 2 for details). In addition, interviews with five community leaders and a focus group with seven Haitian youths⁴ and young adults were conducted. Youths who were at least fourteen years

Table 1. Selected social and economic characteristics of Cascades, Queens County and New York Metropolitan Neighbourhood 2006–10

	Cascades	Queens County	New York City
Total population (n)	21,616	2,199,169	12,234,514
Black (%)	91.2	18	18.6
White (%)	1	28.6	45.3
Latino (%)	5	27	24
Asian (%)	1.7	22.9	10.1
High-school degree (%)	85	80	82.4
Some college (%)	59.9	51.4	56.4
College graduate (%)	35	29.5	35
High school dropout rate (16–19) (%)	0.4	5.6	6
Unemployment (%)	6.5	8.5	5.5
Median household income (\$)	80,205	55,291	60,169
Black	81,205	56,453	43,292
White	36,543	59,738	79,783
Latino	65,045	50,331	39,887
Asian	68,534	54,508	60,496
Tenure: owner occupied (%)	83.7	45.5%	46.8
Poverty status (black) (%)	6.1	12.6%	20
Foreign-born population (%) (n)	39.8 (8,607)	48 (1,057,271)	30 (3,760,686)
Caribbean	82.1	16	25.8
Jamaica	41.1 (3,536)	4.3	55
Haiti	28 (2,413)	2.5	3.2
Trinidad & Tobago	6	2.4	2.7
Central America	2.5	8.6	12
Panama	2.4	0.3	0.5
South America	5.7	23.4	14.4
Guyana	4.9	7.1	3.9
Haitian ancestry (%)	15.6	1.7	1.4

Source: US Census Bureau Social Explorer Tables: American Community Survey 2006–10 (five-year estimates)

of age and their Haitian-born parents were the target sample. Interviews were conducted with parents in order to frame the family's migration and socio-economic history. Human protections protocol was exercised by collecting written consent and assent from parents and youth, respectively.

Families qualified as middle class based on their education and occupation in middle-income professions: nurses, entrepreneurs, managers, and transportation workers. All parents had attained at least some college or a technical degree and were in the lower-middle- to middle-middle-class categories. Roughly two-thirds of the parents came from middle-class families in Haiti. The remaining one-third had upper-class (bourgeoisie), urban working-class or rural farmer origins. Over time, all families pursued post-secondary degrees professional

Table 2. *Characteristics of study sample*

Youth's name	Age	School type	Parent's name	Parent's age	Parent's occupation
Tatiana (F)	17	Public	Sandra (F)	49	Medical professional
Antoine ^a (M)	17	Public	Regine (F)	N/A	Retail manager
Ronny (M)	16	Public	Michael (M)	41	Medical professional
Joanna (F)	15	Catholic	Dionne (F)	50	Medical professional
Anice (F)	17	Catholic	Janet (F)	46	Finance manager
Della (F)	17	Catholic	Andrea (F)	53	Administrator
Linda (F)	17	Catholic	Magalie (F)	45	Entrepreneur
Mary (F)	17	Catholic	Ellen (F)	46	Organization director
Jean (M)	18	Public	Antoinette (F)	49	Transportation worker
Pierre (M)	17	Public	Jocelyn (F)	48	Medical professional
Sally (F)	14	Public	Mignon (F)	45	Medical professional
Sarah (F)	17	Public	Josephine (F)	53	Medical professional
Christina (F)	15	Public	Margaret (F)	51	Medical professional
Rachel (F)	16	Private	Alex (M)	45	Administration supervisor
Nancy (F)	16	Catholic	Yves (M)	67	Educator
Robert (M)	15	Catholic	Joseph (M)	50	Medical professional

^a Schedule conflicts prohibited interview with parent

programs, two-and four-year colleges in order to solidify their middle-class status.

This study's analytical strategy is based on a two-stage approach where previous theories of identity among black immigrants and the African American middle class were used to understand what social identities and spaces would be the most salient to the Haitian middle class. Then, inductive methods were used in order to analyse the meanings behind the categories of race, class and ethnicity for Haitian middle-class respondents. This study's aim is not to be representative, but attempts to explore the narratives of an invisible population in order to refine theories (Small 2009) of immigrant assimilation and re-examine the concept of what it means to be black and middle class in America today.

Findings

Learning race in schools and public space

Schools have historically been a vehicle of social mobility for immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Kasinitz et al. 2008; White and Glick 2009). However, schools have also been spaces where minority and immigrant youths are socialized with respect to their

place in the American social hierarchy through interactions with inter-ethnic and interracial students, administrators and teachers (Doucet and Suarez-Orozco 2006). The Haitian middle class in this study encountered and managed discrimination and microaggressions (Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso 2000) in their racially mixed school settings which shaped how they formed their racial identities.

School type was important to the ethnoracial encounters that Haitian middle-class youths experienced. Haitian youths attended integrated private schools and largely segregated public schools, causing varying levels of exposure to whites, Asians, blacks and Latinos. For Mary, a sixteen-year-old private-school student, racial exclusion characterized her early interactions with white teachers. Mary's mother, Ellen, a 1.5-generation organizational director, explained that from an early age, Mary had to cope with racial discrimination in the classroom. Ellen stated:

We did our homework to find a school that fit our needs. Like Mary, she had a very tough start at [her private elementary school]. She had some very bigoted teachers. I think it was in 5th grade, she had a teacher – there were two black kids in her class. The teacher did everything, she make sure that they didn't get invited back next year [students get invited back every year]. She terrorized. No matter what they did, she would lose their papers. They had a very strong principal who worked with us and I had to do my own "boo" at one point. It traumatized her a lot, but we have been OK.

All the youths in the sample who attended mixed-race or predominately white private schools were exposed at a young age to issues around 'being the only one', tokenism and racial exclusion at one time or another. Mary's case is an interesting example of the ways in which an immigrant family's dream of providing their children with a private-school education turned quickly into an encounter with the American realities of interpersonal racism. As a result, parents like Ellen interpreted the continued harassment of their children as strategically racist incidents, demonstrating the racial consciousness of Haitian middle-class parents. Exposure to this incident shaped Mary's emotional well-being in school, and Ellen actively engaged with school administrators to manage this traumatic racial incident in her daughter's adolescent years. Ellen was aware of her child's position as a racial 'other' in the classroom and built a strategy of active engagement with school administration to change her daughter's situation.

For Rachel, a sixteen-year-old second-generation female, interactions with white administrators demonstrated to her that, although she

was a student at an elite private high school, she existed on the margins of social and educational life of the school. Rachel stated:

There is a visiting day for prospective students at my school. I am a top student, do well in my classes. But they never choose me to meet with students interested in coming to the school. They maybe ask me to do it if it is a black student. It's like I go to the school but they don't really want me to be there because I am black. It bothers me because I do so much, I try to be involved.

Schools, as well as public shopping settings, were sites where youths encountered racial discrimination. For example, Linda, a sixteen-year-old private-school student, explained her experiences with racial boundaries in these settings:

There are pretty outrageous people in school, not because you are Haitian, but because you are black. There have been incidents in the locker rooms and stuff like that, inciting fights . . . they were saying black people are dirty, stuff like that. I don't know. One of my best friends almost got into a fight because of it. Also, when I go to stores, I know that they follow me because I am black.

The primacy of racial categories and prejudice in schools mutes ethnic discrimination in the context of Linda's experience in a predominately white Queens private school. Respondents expressed that racial tensions between black and white students manifested in locker rooms, classrooms and hallways.

Racially integrated, private Catholic schools were the preference for more than half of the parents in the sample. Parents believed that a private-school education would afford their children the moral and academic skills needed to be successful and keep them distant from lower-class students in public schools. However, the trade-off of attending some of the most expensive private schools in New York was that Haitian youths were frequently exposed to racial tensions and were learning their place in the social hierarchy of New York's multiracial and multi-ethnic social structure.

Della, also a sixteen-year-old private-school student, had problems with racially motivated comments and microaggressions directed towards her black friends in school:

My friend heard a white girl talking about black people and saying a whole bunch of things that don't make sense, like the white Christmas or the black Christmas was a horror movie. She said that "oh, nobody wants a black Christmas." And the girl said something like "oh, it's not my fault that you are dirty." She got

upset and she just told the Dean. She found out what the girl's name was. She didn't do anything to her directly, so the girl didn't get in trouble. Students who knew were mad and they knew better than to act out on it; they were just upset about it. Most of us who knew were black and we were just angry about it.

These encounters are also related to prospects for interracial friendship formation in the context of schools. Della shares that her most meaningful interracial interactions, good and bad, occur within the confines of her school. She resides in an all-black neighbourhood, and the majority of her friends are Haitian. She explained that most of her interactions with whites, Asians and Latinos only occur in school:

No one is biased towards me, I am not biased. But it is different because I am not close to anybody who is white. I guess 'cause you go to people who you think are like you, so you end up staying with them. But, like whites, blacks, Latinos and Asians hang out together. But it's like, like I have white friends, but none that I talk to outside of school. I don't really know, probably because everybody is already in their sort of clique, so nobody wants to go outside of it a lot.

Racially segregated, predominately black public high schools were also sites where Haitian youths experienced racial assaults, albeit from white administrators. Sarah, a seventeen-year-old public high-school student, stated that when she was a lower classman, she applied for an accelerated programme and a white female administrator did not accept her because she was a black student. Sarah, however, believed that she was one of the best candidates for the programme and was more qualified than the Asian students who were accepted:

I really wanted to be in the programme, but the woman told me that I could not be in it. I didn't understand why, it's like she didn't think I was smart or something because I was a black girl. But now that I am graduating at the top of my class, I saw her in the hallway the other day, and she was smiling at me and saying congratulations. She did not believe that I was capable of anything. But I didn't care, I still did what I needed to do.

Sarah demonstrated that, in spite of perceived racial discrimination, she continued to believe that she would do well. She expressed the confusion of being excluded from a programme that she believed she was qualified for, and believed that it was related to her racial background as opposed to her Haitian ethnic background. Sarah adopts a strategy of resilience in order to move past the differential treatment she received from the white administrator.

The majority of the youth sample were not discouraged by the multiple counts of discrimination that they faced in everyday life. Some used the assumptions of their racial inferiority as a source of motivation. They cited that being ‘underestimated’ by non-blacks because of their skin colour ‘gave them the drive to prove others wrong’ (Pierre, seventeen-year-old public-school student). The middle-class youths in this study managed the assaults on their identities as blacks, and are learning to do so in their adolescent and teenage years, since many were exposed to multiracial social environments early in life. The majority of youth respondents were also active members of step teams⁴ and African American history groups at school. This suggests that their racial identities also formed as they became similar to other blacks through social groups and cultural practices, in addition to experiences with racism. They embraced their black identities, both as imposed by the black–white boundary and as a source of collective membership and solidarity with black Americans.

Racial identities emerge as multiple, contextual and contingent among the Haitian middle class (Hall 1991; Jenkins 1994). Janet, a 1.5-generation mother who works in racially integrated settings in corporate America, exemplifies the multidimensionality of identity options available to Haitians in the middle class. Janet cultivates a Haitian social network for her children, but rarely speaks Kreyòl in her household. In addition to these characteristics, Janet strategically decides to send her son to Morehouse College, a historically black college (HBCU), to help him learn how to develop into a distinguished black man:

My son’s school, I think it’s a very good school, and actually it was sort of my idea that he goes there. The reason why I wanted him to go there is because I have seen people come out of Morehouse, actually a colleague from my work came out of Morehouse. What I noticed about them is that they had this quiet type of confidence where they didn’t boast about themselves . . . I think Morehouse is a good school . . . it still has that recognition. Morehouse, It’s not only the education, they are teaching them how to be responsible men in society . . . they want to mould them into responsible black men.

Janet and other respondents see value in black American institutions, and use them as mediums for socializing and mobilizing their children into middle-class educational systems and career paths (Kasinitz 2008). Previous studies assume that black immigrants automatically veer away from African American institutions to distance themselves from black identity and culture. However, Haitians in the middle class are exposed to and appreciate the social benefits that middle-class African American culture and organizations provide. This helps us

reconsider the ways in which we understand the relations between new and old blacks in America and the changing conceptions of black identity among ethnic groups like Haitians.

Neighbourhood and church: managing ethnic and class boundaries

Managing ethnic and class boundaries

The Haitian middle-class youths in this study interact with lower-class peers and encounter dilemmas around the authenticity of their Haitian identities. Although their black racial identity was pronounced in the context of schools, ethnic identity emerged as important in the context of neighborhood social circles. For example, respondents convey their class status in order to offset the lower-class stereotypes around being Haitian. As the focus group and interview data demonstrate, class identities were signalled by external identifiers of middle-class status, such as skin colour.

In order to observe dialogue about social identities among Haitian youths and young adults, a focus group was conducted with members of a neighbourhood church youth organization called Friends of the Lord.⁵ Friends of the Lord was chosen because it was a Haitian youth group that met weekly at a local Catholic church in Cascades.⁶ The focus group's conversation began with questions about black identity and Haitian identity. Throughout the focus group conversation, students brought up examples of 'typical Haitians' and the ways in which they and their families fit into the stereotypes. Haitians were described as having dark skin, heavy accents, traditional mores, large facial features, and limited knowledge of contemporary American style and culture. These labels were disclosed as inferior, lower-class characteristics. The youths claimed that they and their families deviated from these negative stereotypes and were 'different than those Haitians.' Marco, a fifteen-year-old public-school student, claimed that his family and friends were 'not like those Haitians who did not know how to dress, were dark skin, loud and did voodoo.' Other focus group members and leaders were upset that non-ethnics and co-ethnics alike often perpetuated this popular image of Haitians. Naomi, the twenty-eight-year-old young adult leader of the group, stated:

I get the, oh you are not Haitian from our community also. They also think that I am Indian because of this birthmark that I have . . . Another stereotype is that they are all dark skin and ugly, I'll get that too. "But you are very pretty for a Haitian." Haitians are not pretty? . . . That's the other stereotype. They have coarse hair, dark

skin, they stink. Their fashion is not presentable, they have on 500 different u, that's what I have gotten also. Nice one I got last week: Your family knows how to do voodoo?

Naomi, a light-skinned young woman, highlighted the psychological strain she experiences as a result of stigmas around her Haitian ethnic identity. She emphasized the ways in which her light skin made her an example of a Haitian woman who deviated from the low-status stereotype that accompanied the Haitian ethnic category.

Naomi clearly challenged the ethnic boundaries erected against Haitians. However, other Haitian youths crossed ethnic boundaries to avoid the social stigmas around their Haitian identity. For example, Tiffany, a fifteen-year-old public-school student and focus group member, highlighted that skin colour facilitated one's ability to 'cover up' their Haitian identity. Tiffany was openly accused by other focus group members during the meeting of allowing her peers in school to identify her as Dominican. Her light skin colour gave her the ability to 'pass' as a mixed-race Latina. In the context of New York, the presence of a large, light-skinned Dominican population created a social landscape for Tiffany to acquiesce to a Dominican identity. The social and racial characteristics of Dominicans are well known by Haitian youths in the focus group, particularly the colour variation among this multiracial population. When asked if she was passing as Dominican, Tiffany sharply stated: 'People usually think that I am Dominican and I just don't correct them.' Tiffany was ridiculed by her Haitian peers, particularly since she attended an all-Haitian church youth group. According to group leaders, Tiffany adopted a Dominican identity in school as a strategy to conceal her Haitian background in settings where people did not know her parents' heritage. Tiffany's family members reportedly had drastic skin colour variation among them, and there was conflict between her and her darker-skinned sister about their beauty. Here, we see the ways in which Haitian cultural ideas of skin colour impact intra-family relations, as well as one's presentations of their social self.

The colour conflicts within Tiffany's family are embedded in a larger local and transnational context of racial stratification. Similar to race, skin colour is a social indicator of class status among the black and non-black populations (Edwards 1973; Omi and Winant 1994; Herring, Verna and Horton Hayward 2004), as well as in Haiti (Averill 1989; Nicholls 1996; Turits 2002). The perception of Haitians as darker-skinned individuals among Haitian youths exacerbates the idea that they have a low social status both inside and outside of the black community. Tiffany did not present herself as Haitian to her peers because she learned that her fair skin afforded her membership (albeit false) in an ethnoracial group whose Spaniard as opposed to

African lineage received a higher social status. New York's multiracial and multiethnic milieu provides her with ethnoracial identity options that are similar to Latin American colour and class categories (Bonilla-Silva 2004).

Haitians' lower position in the ethnoracial hierarchy also surfaced during their social interactions with other black ethnic groups. Based on popular images of Haitians, they were often perceived as a dark-skinned, poor and uncultured population by other racial groups, resulting in their unfavourable treatment. Haitian and Jamaican relations, for example, were contentious in schools and in the neighbourhood. Jamaicans come from a country that celebrates its multiracial origins, and like Haiti, has been historically segmented by race and class (Stone 1973; Vickerman 1999). Similar to most post-colonial countries, darker phenotype continues to connote social inferiority in Jamaica. This suggests that, upon arrival, Jamaican immigrants' relations with other black groups are also characterized by this social history. Haitian parents reported experiencing high levels of social exclusion from Jamaicans upon arrival. Michael,⁷ a 1.5-generation medical professional who arrived in the USA as a teenager and is raising three teenagers of his own, noted: 'They treated Haitians like dirt. African Americans and Jamaicans would make our lives very hard when we just wanted to go to school to learn. It was very tough. Haitians had to fight for their respect.'

Michael described that many Haitians in the 1980s encountered ethnic teasing. They crossed ethnic boundaries by pretending that they were from Jamaica instead of Haiti to avoid exclusion from peers. Therefore, this ethnic boundary crossing occurs not only with the Dominican population, but also with other black ethnic groups who have a more favourable context of reception than Haitians (Zéphir 2001). The youth sample reported that they were aware of the ethnic clashes (sometimes violent) between Haitians and Jamaicans. Many were bewildered by the conflict and did not understand the origins of the inter-group problems. However, they reported lower levels of interpersonal discrimination from Jamaicans than their parents did. This demonstrates that inter-ethnic cleavages were tangible to the second generation, although this boundary blurred from the first generation to the second.

Class identity negotiation also occurred as middle-class youths interacted with lower-class peers in neighbourhood spaces. Intra-ethnic class boundaries between Haitian youths were relevant among half of the sample in this study. The middle-class background of the Haitian second generation was conveyed to lower-class co-ethnics by their parents' middle-income professions as medical professionals and managers, resulting in inter-class tensions. Mary's description of her interactions with lower-class Haitians demonstrates that her class

status is apparent to her peers, and draws boundaries between the lower class and the middle class:

I know some of the kids like in the community like the Haitian kids they didn't really like me for some reason because I guess they thought that I was too uppity or because of where my mother is they think that I thought highly of myself... it kind of makes the person feel like, "why aren't you going through it with me?" Like, I have had some friends that look down upon me at the community centre because they have been through it and I haven't. You know it's not really my fault and I can't take the blame.

At the age of sixteen, Mary encounters disapproval from her Haitian peers because of her middle-class background. She reconciles this by being sympathetic to the monetary 'struggle' that lower-class Haitian youths experience. Despite her close ethnic friendship circles, her confidants were primarily from the same class background as she. Although part of the same ethnic group, Mary notes that she has different orientations to her Haitian identity that are mediated through her class status.

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we have explored the mechanisms of ethnoracial and class-identity formation among a segment of the Haitian middle class. The Haitian middle class in this study resides in a predominately black middle-class neighbourhood. However, they venture outside of the neighbourhood into multiracial and multiethnic settings of school and work daily and encounter similar forms of exclusion as the African American middle class. Second-generation Haitians confront discrimination in schools from whites and have social problems with lower-class Haitians in neighbourhood and church settings. However, the Haitian middle-class youths in this study also managed a stigmatized ethnic identity by conveying their class distinction through skin colour variation. Racialized ideas about skin colour emerged as the more prominent problem among these young people, particularly since Haitians as well as outsiders ascribed to the belief that a dark phenotype is automatically tied to an inferior Haitian ethnicity.

From this study's data, we also glean that identity options are tied to social settings. The Haitian middle-class second generation balances between being black in racially integrated schools, Haitian in predominately black settings and middle class in their neighbourhoods (Lacy 2007). At school, they encounter racial and ethnic discrimination and exclusion from white teachers, students and non-Haitian blacks peers. As seen in the case of Della, encounters with interracial

tensions in predominately white private school shapes both her understandings of black identity and the psychological resilience built around this exclusion. Black identity, however, is not only a reactionary identity that emerges as important during encounters with racial discrimination, but one that Haitian middle-class youths also find to be productive and a source of pride (Lacy 2007). Many reported that they found enjoyment and comradeship in black social organizations in school. However, this was particularly the case for youths who attended predominately white private schools. Racial identity becomes a salient fault line in their social interactions with non-black students and school administrators.

However, ethnic identity continues to matter in their interactions with Jamaicans and co-ethnics, for example. Ethnic identity, similar to racial identity, is a boundary that the Haitian middle class navigates in black spaces, similar to lower-class co-ethnics. Focus group findings demonstrate that a Haitian ethnic identity is stigmatized as a lower-class identity in the imagination of respondents. Youths conveyed their class status by emphasizing their lighter skin colour, cosmopolitan style and demeanour in order to separate themselves from ethnic stereotypes. The continued social significance of 'colourism' (favouritism of lighter-skinned people) among middle-class Haitians inhibits their healthy identity formation (Hochschild and Weaver 2007; Alba 2009). As evidenced by Tiffany's adoption of a Dominican identity, the increased Latino population complicates the pre-existing black-white boundary work (Bonilla-Silva 2004), but also helps youths reproduce learned ideologies of race, colour and class. This poses a serious problem for the majority of young blacks who cannot pass as non-black to gain social acceptance from the outside world, and in some cases, each other.

Haitian youths also encountered lower-class co-ethnics who questioned their belonging to the ethnic group in their neighbourhood. Parents and youths alike managed situations where lower-class Haitians challenged their loyalty and authenticity to other Haitians. Because of their middle-class background, they were perceived to be out of touch with the experiences and social struggles of their less affluent co-ethnics. Lower-class peers may believe that middle-class Haitians have 'arrived' because they own property, drive luxury cars and can afford private-school education. However, from the testimonies uncovered in this study, middle-class status does not translate into full social inclusion and the erasure of social boundaries for black groups (Patillo-McCoy 1999). Haitian middle-class youths and parents had to navigate and cope with the class tensions that existed within their ethnic group in addition to the racial fault lines they deal with in public settings. Therefore, we begin to unravel the complex and sometimes contradictory ways in which the second and

2.5 generation negotiate ways of being and belonging (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004; Itzigsohn 2009) to their black identity, Haitian-ness and the middle-class status.

This sample is hardly perfect for uncovering complete patterns of identity formation and boundary work among middle-class black ethnics. However, it is a strong sample for beginning to explore the strategies that ‘new’ members of the black middle class use to navigate their class privilege and ethnoracial exclusion. Future directions are to conduct longitudinal mixed-method research on this base population and include other black ethnic groups in the sample in order to unpack the complexities of ethnic identity among middle-class groups. As the minority middle class becomes increasingly constrained in an uncertain economic climate, it will be important to compare the social experiences of today’s black ethnic groups in order to evaluate the ways in which their fluid and changing identities influence traditional indicators of integration, such as intermarriage, education, residential location and occupational attainment. Understanding these social dynamics is not just a study of immigrants and their trajectories, but a study of the ethnoracial climate of America and the mainstream’s ability to absorb an increasingly diverse minority population.

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Notes

1. Cascades is a pseudonym used for the actual Queens, New York location in order to protect the privacy of respondents.
2. The Census and American Community Survey does not include a question for parents’ country of birth, making it impossible to capture the second-generation population.
3. One young woman, Sally, was a part of the focus group and then was later recruited for an in-depth interview.
4. Stepping or step dancing is an African American art form of dancing, singing and chanting that has its roots in college and university performance competitions. It is a form of percussive dance where one’s entire body is used as an instrument that creates complex rhythms and sounds through a mixture of footsteps, spoken word and handclaps. It is generally performed in large groups and has a competitive history in black American fraternities and sororities.
5. Pseudonym used to protect the identities of the church and respondents.

6. The group provided direct access to the second-generation Haitian immigrant students who lived in the area.
7. The purpose of the focus group was to unpack attitudes towards and attachment to a Haitian identity.

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ORLY CLERGE is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Sociology at Brown University.

ADDRESS: Maxcy Hall, Box 1916. 112 George Street, Providence, RI, 02912.

Email: orly_clerge@brown.edu