TABLE A-2. (*continued*)

Component	Black Men		White Men		Black Women		White Women	
	Change	*%*	*Change*	*%*	*Change*	*%*	*Change*	*%*
Age 24–29								
Age	.003	−0.6	.005	−1.2	.002	−0.2	.018	−5.9
Education	.033	−6.4	−.037	9.4	.154	−19.4	.117	−38.8
Enrollment	−.001	0.2	−.000	0.1	−.036	4.6	−.067	22.3
Earnings	.075	−14.5	.077	−19.7	.041	−5.2	.011	−3.6
Employment	−.110	21.3	.001	−0.3	.002	−0.2	−.070	23.3
Residual	−.518	100.1	−.436	111.6	−.951	120.5	−.309	102.7
Total (logit)	−.517	100.0	−.390	100.0	−.789	100.0	−.301	100.0
Change in rate	−5.5		−5.4		−8.3		−4.3	
Age 30–39								
Age	.037	−10.1	n.a.	n.a.	.040	−8.1	n.a.	n.a.
Education	−.029	7.8	n.a.	n.a.	.090	−18.2	n.a.	n.a.
Enrollment	−.006	1.5	n.a.	n.a.	−.039	7.8	n.a.	n.a.
Earnings	.080	−21.6	n.a.	n.a.	.048	−9.8	n.a.	n.a.
Employment	−.050	13.5	n.a.	n.a.	.001	−0.2	n.a.	n.a.
Residual	−.402	108.9	n.a.	n.a.	−.632	128.5	n.a.	n.a.
Total (logit)	−.369	100.0	n.a.	n.a.	−.492	100.0	n.a.	n.a.
Change in rate	−2.9		0.1		−3.3		0.6	

SOURCES: Authors' calculations based on table 2 and table A-1.
n.a. Not available.
a. The components shown are differences in means between 1960 and 1980 of the independent variables weighted by their respective logit coefficients. For variables such as education with two or more coefficients, the weighted differences are summed. "Total" is the difference in the predicted log odds of marriage between 1960 and 1980. "Change in rate" is the difference in observed marriage rates between 1960 and 1980 as reported in columns 5 and 10 of table 1. Percentages of change may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

"We'd Love to Hire Them, But . . .": The Meaning of Race for Employers

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DESPITE BLACKS' disproportionate representation in the urban underclass, however defined, analyses of inner-city joblessness seldom consider racism or discrimination as a significant cause. In *The Truly Disadvantaged*, for instance, William Julius Wilson explains increased rates of inner-city unemployment as a consequence of other social or economic developments.[1] Job opportunities for unskilled workers are fewer, he argues, because employers have moved elsewhere or upgraded the skills they require. Because of increased social isolation in the inner city, poor blacks have fewer ways of finding out about the unskilled jobs that do remain. Social isolation has also contributed, he maintains, to a decline in the quality of this labor pool. Lacking the mainstream role models they once had, inner-city blacks no longer learn and value the habits associated with steady work. Wilson and other analysts acknowledge the importance of historical discrimination in education and employment, racial segregation in residence, and ghetto-specific culture; but in their analyses of blacks' current problems of employment, race itself is of little importance.

In this paper we explore the meaning of race and ethnicity to employers, the ways race and ethnicity are qualified by—and at times reinforce—other characteristics in the eyes of employers, and the conditions

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1. Wilson (1987).

under which race seems to matter most. Our interviews at Chicago-area businesses show that employers view inner-city workers, especially black men, as unstable, uncooperative, dishonest, and uneducated. Race is an important factor in hiring decisions. But it is not race alone: rather it is race in a complex interaction with employers' perceptions of class and space, or inner-city residence. Our findings suggest that racial discrimination deserves an important place in analyses of the underclass.

Race and Employment

In research on the disadvantages blacks experience in the labor market, social scientists tend to rely on indirect measures of racial discrimination. They interpret as evidence of this discrimination the differences in wages or employment among races and ethnic groups that remain after education and experience are controlled. With a few exceptions they have neglected the processes at the level of the firm that underlie these observed differences.[2] This neglect is more striking in contrast with research on gender and employment, in which the importance of firm-level characteristics and processes has received much attention.[3] So, despite intense interest in the relation of race to employment, very few scholars have studied the matter at the level of the firm, much less queried employers directly about their views of black workers or how race might enter into their recruitment and hiring decisions.

The theoretical literature conventionally distinguishes two types of discrimination, "pure" and "statistical." In pure discrimination, employers, employees, or consumers have a "taste" for discrimination, that is, they will pay a premium to avoid members of another group.[4] Statistical discrimination is a more recent conception that builds on the discussions of "signaling."[5] In statistical discrimination, employers use group membership as a proxy for aspects of productivity that are relatively expensive or impossible to measure. Those who use the concept disagree about whether employers' perceptions of group differences in productivity must reflect reality.[6] In this discussion, we are concerned with statistical discrimination as a cognitive process, regardless of whether the employer is correct or mistaken in his or her views of the labor force.[7]

2. One of the exceptions is Braddock and McPartland (1987).
3. Bielby and Baron (1986); England (1982); and Reskin and Roos (1990).
4. Becker (1957).
5. Phelps (1972); Arrow (1973); and Spence (1973).
6. See, for example, Thurow (1975); Aigner and Cain (1977); and Bielby and Baron (1986).

Economists note that pure discrimination and "mistaken" statistical discrimination are both costly. With a market in equilibrium, and given certain assumptions, employers who indulge their prejudices or make incorrect inferences about the correlation between race and productivity will be driven out of business by their competitors.[8] This well-known implication of neoclassical models may, in fact, account for the limited research attention given to racial discrimination. Because discrimination itself has seemed theoretically implausible, many social scientists interpret differences in earnings between races as a reflection of unmeasured productivity differences. But neoclassical economists do not predict that firms will never discriminate; they simply argue that, all other things being equal, and under certain assumptions, competitive pressures will tend to drive discriminating firms out of business. If employees or consumers have a taste for discrimination, or if the industry is not competitive, the economic prediction need not hold.[9] In short, neoclassical economics does not imply that discrimination will never occur unless it is based on differences in group productivity, nor does it imply that evidence of discrimination must be taken as prima facie evidence of such differences.

Characteristics of the firm and workplace may also militate against antidiscriminatory competitive pressures, at least in the short term. Incentives for individuals within the firm may differ from incentives for the firm as a whole. A personnel officer might, for instance, prefer simple—and from his or her perspective, cost-efficient—discriminatory practices regardless of their implications for the productivity of the work force and the rational conduct of the firm.

The distinction between pure and statistical discrimination is a useful one. However, it is also useful to recognize the relationship between the

7. Although the question of whether group differences in productivity exist is a critical one for public policy, it is not one we can settle with our data. It is, moreover, a very complex empirical question. Overall group differences in productivity may in fact be irrelevant to employers, who are more likely to be concerned with the correlation of productivity with race among the particular applicants they attract. The composition of the applicant pool depends on factors such as the firm's location, the wage rate and type of work, and the firm's recruitment practices, which in turn are influenced by employers' perceptions of black and white workers.
8. See Becker (1957), especially pp. 44–45, for conditions under which discrimination is completely eliminated.
9. Becker (1957).

two. There are several ways in which a taste for discrimination in employment practices may lead to perceived and actual productivity differences between groups, making statistical discrimination more likely. Social psychological evidence suggests that expectations about group differences in productivity may bias evaluation of job performance.[10] These expectations may also influence job placement. In particular, workers of lower expected productivity may be given less on-the-job training. Finally, and most important for our study, productivity is not an individual characteristic; rather, it is shaped by the social relations of the workplace. If these relations are strained because of tastes for discrimination on the part of the employer, supervisor, coworkers, or consumers, lower productivity may result.[11] Thus what begins as irrational practice based on prejudice or mistaken beliefs may end up being rational, profit-maximizing behavior.

Data

This research is based on face-to-face interviews with employers in Chicago and surrounding Cook County between July 1988 and March 1989. Inner-city firms were oversampled; all results here are weighted to adjust for this oversampling. Our overall response rate was 46 percent, and the completed sample of 185 employers is representative of the distribution of Cook County's employment by industry and firm size.[12]

Interviews included both closed- and open-ended questions about employers' hiring and recruitment practices and about their perceptions of Chicago's labor force and business climate. Our initial contacts, and most of the interviews themselves, were conducted with the highest ranking official at the establishment. Because of the many open-ended questions, we taped the interviews.

Most of the structured portion of the interview focused on a sample job, defined by the interview schedule as "the most typical entry-level position" in the firm's modal occupational category—sales, clerical, skilled, semiskilled, unskilled, or service, but excluding managerial, professional, and technical. The distribution of our sample jobs approximates the occupational distribution in the 1980 census for Cook County, again excluding professional, managerial, and technical categories. In effect, what we have is a sample of the opportunities facing the Chicago job-seeker with minimal skills.

10. See Bielby and Baron (1986) for a discussion.

11. Anderson (1980).

12. The sample and survey methods are described in more detail in the "Employer Survey Final Report," available from the authors.

The answers to the open-ended questions were coded, categorized, and, when it was meaningful to do so, counted. Given the nature of qualitative data, there are times when it does not make sense to tabulate. For instance, even though all employers were asked the same questions, the interviews varied in the amount of information they yielded. Some respondents were expressive, some were relaxed and gave longer interviews, while others were more pressed for time or more guarded and refused to commit themselves on controversial issues. Frequency of comment does not, therefore, equal significance.

Although we do not present our findings as necessarily representative of the attitudes of all Chicago employers, as the rules of positivist social science would require, they are representative of those Chicago employers who spoke to a particular issue. A standard rule of discourse is that some things are acceptable to say and others are better left unsaid. Silence has the capacity to speak volumes. Thus we were overwhelmed by the degree to which Chicago employers felt comfortable talking with us—in a situation where the temptation would be to conceal rather than reveal—in a negative manner about blacks. In this paper we make an effort to understand the discursive evidence by relating it to the practice of discrimination, using quantitative data to reinforce the qualitative findings.

We'd Love to Hire Them, But . . .

At least since 1915, when Emile Durkheim wrote *Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* sociologists have recognized the importance of categorization as a cognitive instrument for people in general as well as for social scientists.[13] Explanations for the high rates of unemployment and poverty among blacks have relied heavily on the categories of class and space.[14] We found that employers also relied on those categories, but they used them to refine the category of race, which for them is primary. Indeed, it was through the interaction of race with class and space that these categories were imbued with new meaning. It was race that made class and space important to employers.

Although some employers regarded Chicago's workers as highly

13. Durkheim (1965).

14. Wilson (1980, 1987); and Kasarda (1985). We use the term "space" in the tradition of urban geography. We do this to draw attention to the way people categorize and attach meaning to geographic locations.

skilled and having a good work ethic, far more thought that the labor force had deteriorated. When asked why they thought business had been leaving Chicago, 35 percent referred to the inferior quality of the work force. As one said, "Some of it has to do, I think, with the quality of the worker—the work force that they have to recruit from. We have talked about that several times ourselves, but we've made a commitment to the churches to stay in those communities. So we will be there, but it makes it very difficult to recruit staff." Employers needing machinists or nurses or other skilled workers worried about the short supply and high cost of these employees. City employers believed most skilled workers had fled to the suburbs and had no desire to commute back to Chicago: "They got out of here, why would they want to come back?" Several firms in our sample were relocating or seriously considering a move to the South in a search for cheap skilled labor. Employers of less skilled labor can find an ample supply of applicants, but many complained that it was becoming more difficult to find workers with basic skills and a good work ethic.

These employers coped with what they considered a less qualified work force through various strategies. Some restructured production to require either fewer workers or fewer skills. These strategies included increasing automation and deemphasizing literacy requirements—using color-coded filing systems, for example. But far more widespread were the use of recruiting and screening techniques to help select "good" workers. For instance, employers relied more heavily on referrals from employees, which tend to reproduce the traits and characteristics of the current work force: the Chicago Association of Commerce and Industry has reported a dramatic increase in the use of referral bonuses in the past few years. Or employers targeted newspaper ads to particular neighborhoods or ethnic groups. The rationale underlying these strategies was, in part, related to the productivity employers accorded different categories of workers.

For instance, whether or not the urban underclass is an objective social category, its subjective importance in the discourse of Chicago employers cannot be denied. Their characterizations of inner-city workers mirrored many descriptions of the underclass by social scientists. Common among the traits listed were that workers were unskilled, uneducated, illiterate, dishonest, lacking initiative, unmotivated, involved with drugs and gangs, did not understand work, had no personal charm, were unstable, lacked a work ethic, and had no family life or role models.

Social scientists discover pathologies; employers try to avoid them.

After explaining that he hired "the best applicant," the owner of a transportation firm added, "Probably what I'm trying to say is we're not social minded. We're not worried about solving the problems of sociology. We can't afford to." But despite not being worried about the "problems of sociology," employers have become lay social theorists, creating numerous distinctions among the labor force that then serve as bases for statistical discrimination. From their own experiences and biases, those of other employers, and accounts in the mass media, employers have attributed meaning to the categories of race and ethnicity, class, and space. These have then become markers of more or less desirable workers.

These categories were often confounded with each other, as when one respondent contrasted the white youth (with opportunities) from the North Shore with the black one (without opportunities) from the South Side. Although the primary distinction that more than 70 percent of our informants made was based on race and ethnicity, it was frequently confounded with class: black and Hispanic equaled lower class; white equaled middle class. And these distinctions also overlapped with space: "inner-city" and at times "Chicago" equaled minority, especially black; "suburb" equaled white. In fact, race was important in part because it signaled class and inner-city residence, which are less easy to observe directly. But employers also needed class and space to draw distinctions within racial and ethnic groups; race was the distinguishing characteristic most often referred to, followed respectively by class and space. Consider the use of race and ethnicity, class, and space in the following response from the owner of a Chicago construction firm who thought that for minorities in general "the quality of . . . education is not as great as white folk from the suburbs. . . . And it shows in the intellectual capability of the labor force." Furthermore, "The minority worker is not as punctual and not as concerned about punctuality as the middle-class white. So they're not as wired to the clock in keeping time and being on time as someone else who was raised in a family where the father went to work every day and the mother was up at the same time every day to make breakfast or go to work herself. It's just a cultural difference."

Race and Ethnicity

When they talked about the work ethic, tensions in the workplace, or attitudes toward work, employers emphasized the color of a person's skin. Many believed that white workers were superior to minorities in

their work ethic. A woman who hires for a suburban service firm said, "The Polish immigrants that I know and know of are more highly motivated than the Hispanics. The Hispanics share in some of the problems that the blacks do." These problems included "exposure to poverty and drugs" as well as "a lack of motivation" related to "their environment and background." A man from a Chicago construction company, expressing a view shared by many of our informants, said, "For all groups, the pride [in their work] of days gone by is not there, but what is left, I think probably the whites take more pride than some of the other minorities." (Interviewer: "And between blacks and Hispanics?") "Probably the same."

In the discourse of "work ethic," which looms large among the concerns of employers, whites usually came out on top. But although white workers generally looked good to employers, East European whites were repeatedly praised for really knowing how to work and caring about their work. Several informants cited positive experiences with their Polish domestic help. In the skilled occupations, East European men were sought. One company advertised for its skilled workers in Polish- and German-language newspapers, but hired all its unskilled workers, 97 percent of whom were Hispanic, through an employee network.

When asked directly whether they thought there were any differences in the work ethics of whites, blacks, and Hispanics, 37.7 percent of the employers ranked blacks last, 1.4 percent ranked Hispanics last, and no one ranked whites there. Another 7.6 percent placed blacks and Hispanics together on the lowest level; 51.4 percent either saw no difference or refused to categorize in a straightforward way. Many of the latter group qualified their response by saying they saw no differences once one controlled for education, background, or environment, and that any differences were more the result of class or space.

Although blacks were consistently evaluated less favorably than whites, employers' perceptions of Hispanics were more mixed. Some ranked them with blacks; others positioned them between whites and blacks: "[According to] the energy that they put into their job and trying to be as productive as possible, I would have to put the white native-born at the high end and the Hispanic in the middle and the blacks at the bottom." Some employers recognized ethnicity within Hispanicity: "Well, if you exclude Mexicans from the Hispanic group . . . you have Puerto Ricans, Cubans—their work ethic basically in our experience has been poor, as a group. We have exceptions. And I would say the work ethic

that we see from blacks is superior to that of Puerto Rican people." (Interviewer: "And what? Do you think white folks have the best work ethic of all?") "Not in every case, but, as a group, I guess, yes." Finally, some employers believed that Hispanics, as immigrants, had superior work habits.

They also believed that a homogeneous work force serves to maintain good relations among workers. As a respondent from a large Chicago insurance company put it,

> I wanted a person who was going to fit into this area. And sometimes just to satisfy affirmative action, I don't know if that's the hidden agenda here at all.
>
> (Interviewer: No, there isn't a hidden agenda.)
>
> You have to pick somebody who is black or Hispanic or whatever, not that that's a big thing, but you want that person to feel comfortable with the rest of your work force, you want that person to be, if they have phone skills to be articulate, you want them to be neat in their dress, and probably all those little fuzzy feelings that say I know what my current staff is, I want to bring somebody in who I know can deal with Mr. A and Ms. B and all that sort of thing.
>
> (Interviewer: So to some degree it's personality?)
>
> Exactly. You're looking for skills, but you are looking for someone who will fit in, and who will stick with the [company].

A personnel manager from a large, once all-white Chicago manufacturing concern lamented the tensions that race and ethnic diversity had created among workers: "I wish we could all be the same, but, unfortunately, we're not." An employer of an all-white work force said that "if I had one [black worker] back there it might be okay, but if I have two or more I would have trouble." But although some employers found a diverse work force more difficult to manage, few actually maintained a homogeneous labor force, at least in terms of race and ethnicity.

Employers worried about tensions not only between white and minority workers but also between Mexicans and blacks, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, and even African and American blacks. A restaurateur with an all-white staff of waiters and a Hispanic kitchen said, "The Mexican kids that work in the kitchen, they're not, they're not kids anymore, but they don't like to work with black guys. But they don't like to work with

Puerto Rican guys either." Another manufacturer distinguished among Hispanics and noted workplace tensions when she said,

> I would even break down the Hispanics. Well, it's only my observation, I'm not out in the plant working, but initially when I started with [this company] we employed mostly Mexicans, and it just seemed that things operated better and, of course, then there are immigration laws and we abided by the immigration laws, and also coming into this neighborhood, we've hired more Puerto Ricans.
>
> (Interviewer: And you find them to be less reliable workers?)
>
> Not so much, but there's more, there's actually friction in the groups to some degree.

A service employer in the suburbs mentioned that some black American workers had filed discrimination suits against their Nigerian supervisors. These respondents called attention to potential tensions that may arise from a heterogeneous workplace.

Blacks are by and large thought to possess very few of the characteristics of a "good" worker. Over and over employers said, "They don't want to work." "They don't want to stay." "They've got an attitude problem." One compared blacks with Mexicans: "Most of them are not as educated as you might think. I've never seen any of these guys read anything outside of a comic book. These Mexicans are sitting here reading novels constantly, even though they are in Spanish. These guys will sit and watch cartoons while the other guys are busy reading. To me that shows basic laziness. No desire to upgrade yourself." When asked about discrimination against black workers, a Chicago manufacturer related a common view: "Oh, I would in all honesty probably say there is some among most employers. I think one of the reasons, in all honesty, is because we've had bad experience in that sector, and believe me, I've tried. And as I say, if I find—whether he's black or white, if he's good and, you know, we'll hire him. We are not shutting out any black specifically. But I will say that our experience factor has been bad. We've had more bad black employees over the years than we had good." This negative opinion of blacks sometimes cuts across class lines. For instance, a personnel officer of a professional service company in the suburbs commented that "with the professional staff, black males that we've had, some of the skill levels—they're not as orientated to details. They lack some of the leadership skills."

One must also consider the "relevant nots": what were employers not talking about? They were not talking about how clever black workers were, they were not talking about the cultural richness of the black community, nor were they talking about rising divorce rates among whites. Furthermore, although each employer reserved the right to deny making distinctions along racial lines, fewer than 10 percent consistently refused to distinguish or generalize according to race.

These ways of talking about black workers—they have a bad work ethic, they create tensions in the workplace, they are lazy and unreliable, they have a bad attitude—reveal the meaning race has for many employers. If race were a proxy for expected productivity and the sole basis for statistical discrimination, black applicants would indeed find few job opportunities.

Class

Although some respondents spoke only in terms of race and ethnicity, or conflated class with race, others were sensitive to class distinctions. Class constituted a second, less easily detected signal for employers. Depending somewhat on the demands of the jobs, they used class markers to select among black applicants. The contrasts between their discourse about blacks and Hispanics were striking. Employers sometimes placed Hispanics with blacks in the lower class: an inner-city retailer confounded race, ethnicity, and class when he said, "I think there's a self-defeating prophecy that's maybe inherent in a lot of lower-income ethnic groups or races. Blacks, Hispanics." But although they rarely drew class distinctions among Hispanics, such distinctions were widely made for black workers. As one manufacturer said, "The black work ethic. There's no work ethic. At least at the unskilled. I'm sure with the skilled, as you go up, it's a lot different." Employers generally considered it likely that lower-class blacks would have more negative traits than blacks of other classes.

In many ways black business owners and black personnel managers were the most expressive about class divisions among blacks. A few believed poor blacks were more likely to be dishonest because of the economic pressures they face. A black jeweler said the most important quality he looked for in his help was "a person who doesn't need a job."

> (Interviewer: That's what you're looking for?)
>
> That's what we usually try to hire. People that don't need the job.
>
> (Interviewer: Why?)
>
> Because they will tend to be a little more honest. Most of the people

that live in the neighborhoods and areas where my stores are at need the job. They are low-income, and so, consequently, they're under more pressure and there's more of a tendency to be dishonest, because of the pressure.

He elaborated later:

I have a great deal of reluctance to hire a divorcee that lives by herself that doesn't have a source of income. I mean, you know, and she doesn't have to live in the projects, she could live right around the corner, she could live in a good neighborhood. Because the type of job that I have to offer her does not offer enough wage to justify a continuation of that type of lifestyle. I mean, I don't pay enough, $4 doesn't pay enough to support an apartment and a car and kids in school, it doesn't pay that much. So if I'm going to give you a job, and I know that it's not going to pay enough to maintain that lifestyle, what's going to happen? I mean, you've got to have an alternate source, you've got to have a boyfriend, you've got to have a rich parent, or it's going to be my jewelry.

Other employers mentioned problems that occur in the workplace when there are class divisions among the workers. These are reminiscent of the tensions created by the racial and ethnic diversity described earlier. One black businesswoman told of a program wherein disadvantaged youths were sent to private schools by wealthy sponsors. She herself was a sponsor and held the program in high regard, but she hired some of these youths and they did not get along with her other young employees: "Those kids were too smart 'cause they were from a middle-class background." (Interviewer: "So these were primarily middle-class kids?") "No, they're not middle class, but they have middle-class values because they're exposed to them all the time." They made excellent employees, she said, "if you kept your store filled with just them. They're more outgoing and less afraid of the customers. But they're very intimidating to the supervisors because they know everything by the time they get to be a sophomore in high school." A Chicago retailer talked about his "good" black women employees and his "bad" ones: the "good" employees ridiculed their "bad" coworkers and called them "ghetto chicks."

Thus, although many employers assumed that black meant "inner-city poor," others—both black and white—were quick to see divisions within the black population. Of course, class itself is not directly observable, but

markers that convey middle- or working-class status will help a black job applicant get through race-based exclusionary barriers. Class is primarily signaled to employers through speech, dress, education levels, skill levels, and place of residence. Although many respondents drew class distinctions among blacks, very few made those same distinctions among Hispanics or whites; in refining these categories, respondents referred to ethnicity and age rather than class.

Space

Although some employers spoke implicitly or explicitly in terms of class, for others "inner-city" was the more important category. For most the term immediately connoted black, poor, uneducated, unskilled, lacking in values, crime, gangs, drugs, and unstable families. "Suburb" connoted white, middle-class, educated, skilled, and stable families. Conversely, race was salient in part because it signaled space; black connoted inner city and white the suburbs. A communications employer associated Chicago with a minority work force: "Chicago has a people base maybe not all businesses would like. Spanish and black are very good for the things that we want, perhaps other companies don't think that." When asked what it would take for their firm to relocate to the inner city, respondents generally thought it an implausible notion. They were sure their skilled workers would not consider working in those neighborhoods because they feared for their safety, and the employers saw no alternative labor supply there.

The skepticism that greets the inner-city worker often arises when employers associate their race and residence with enrollment in Chicago's troubled public education system. Being educated in Chicago public schools has become a way of signaling "I'm black, I'm poor, and I'm from the inner city" to employers. Some mentioned that they passed over applicants from Chicago public schools for those with parochial or suburban educations. If employers were looking at an applicant's credentials when screening, blacks in the inner city did not do well. As one employer said, "The educational skills they come to the job with are minimal because of the schools in the areas where they generally live."

A vice president of a television station complained of the inner-city work force:

They are frequently unable to write. They go through the Chicago public schools or they dropped out when they were in the eighth grade.

> They can't read. They can't write. They can hardly talk. I have another opinion which is strictly my own and that is that people who insist on beating themselves to the point where they are out of the mainstream of the world suffer the consequences. And I'm talking about the languages that are spoken in the ghetto. They are not English.

Employers were clearly disappointed, not just in the academic content and level of training students receive, but in the failure of the school system to prepare them for the work force. Because the inner city is heavily associated with a lack of family values, employers wished the schools would compensate and provide students the self-discipline needed for worker socialization. Additionally, they complained that black workers had no "ability to understand work." As the Hispanic vice president of personnel for a large Chicago manufacturing concern said of black men,

> If you're handicapped by not having some of the basic, basic skills you need, if you're hired and you can't make it on the job because you don't even have the basic skills, that's part of the problem. Part of the problem may be role models in the families. The business of the discipline of having to be at work every day. If it's not in the school, and they didn't experience it in schools, when you put them in this work environment and all of a sudden try to change habits when there are no role models anywhere, it's not going to work.

It is not only educational content per se that employers were looking for; some were concerned with the educational "experience." One talked about how it just showed "they could finish something." Thus inner city is equated with public school attendance, which in turn signifies insufficient work skills and work ethic.

Address is another signal of an applicant's inner-city residence. Most employers we talked to about "address discrimination" said they did not care where an employee lived, or would not know in what kind of neighborhood a given address was located. However, ghetto residents interviewed earlier for the Urban Poverty and Family Structure project told us they thought their address had hurt them in their job search. A few even said they lied about where they lived. One employer who was from a large company in which one vice president came from the Robert Taylor Homes, a black public housing project, did not think it mattered where an employee lived, but "if I were at a small company, small plant that's located close to either one of those homes, and that the only candidates I

saw were from there . . . my feelings, my attitudes might be different." A large Chicago manufacturer offered this reasoning: "The address does have an indication or suggests that, okay, here is an applicant that'll probably fall into a pattern that others have. The result would be low job offers."

"Inner city" also connoted a "culture" that could be signaled by attributes other than address. For instance, employers talked about West Side blacks and South Side blacks. A few expressed a preference for those from the West Side because their roots were closer to the rural South; hence, they had more "understanding of work." The migration pattern was such that the South Side of Chicago was settled first and only then did the West Side become a black ghetto, so they were seeking out the more recent migrants. This was consistent with employers' generally higher regard, mentioned earlier, for immigrant labor. Another employer used space to refine the category of race: "We have some black women here but they're not inner city. They're from suburbs and . . . I think they're a little bit more willing to give it a shot, you know, I mean they're a little bit more willing [than black men] to give a day's work for a day's pay."

Employers readily distinguished among blacks on the basis of space. They talked about Cabrini Green or the Robert Taylor Homes or referred to the South Side and West Side as a shorthand for black. But they were not likely to make these distinctions among whites and Hispanics. They made no reference to Pilsen (a largely immigrant Mexican neighborhood), Humboldt Park (largely Puerto Rican), or Uptown (a community of poor whites and new immigrants).

For black applicants, having the wrong combination of class and space markers suggested low productivity and undesirability to an employer. The important finding of this research, then, is not only that employers make hiring decisions based on the color of a person's skin, but the extent to which that act has become nuanced. Race, class, and space interact with each other. Moreover, the precise nature of that interaction is largely determined by the demands of the job.

They Don't Have What It Takes

This section provides evidence about what race and ethnicity signal for different types of employers, and how they seem to respond. We compare three categories of occupations with distinctive sets of hiring criteria: sales and customer service jobs, clerical jobs, and semiskilled, unskilled,

TABLE 1. Employee Prerequisites and Employer Hiring Criteria for Sample Job, by Occupational Category

Percent

Criteria	*Sales and customer service*	*Clerical*	*Low-skilled*
Most important			
Communications skills	52.3	20.7	14.0
Appearance	46.6	20.7	14.9
Ability to deal with public	36.4	23.0	14.9
Dependable	14.8	20.7	32.4
Wants to work	12.5	6.3	22.1
Works well in a team	0	14.0	20.3
Job history	0	19.8	17.6
Specific job experience	8.0	18.9	7.2
Attitude	18.2	6.3	11.7
Work ethic	3.4	6.8	18.0
Skills	4.5	17.1	7.2
Technical skills	0	9.9	0.9
Prerequisites			
None	68.2	10.9	63.5
High school diploma	16.5	22.4	18.2
Skills test	11.8	16.7	15.1
High school diploma and skills test	3.5	50.0	3.1
Unweighted number	27	66	67

SOURCE: Authors' survey.

and other service jobs. Race enters into hiring decisions in different ways, depending on the observability of key job requirements and particular occupational demands.

Sales and Customer Service Jobs

For sales and customer service jobs, employers' key criteria are appearance, communications skills, and personality. When asked about the most important qualities for the sample job, one said, "Probably the ability to communicate, you know. Can they communicate with you. That's very important. And their appearance is very important also. As far as qualities, that's really about everything." Honesty and simple mathematics skills were occasionally mentioned, as were intelligence, flexibility, and aggressiveness. But as table 1 shows, job skills and specific work experience were relatively unimportant. How workers look, talk, and interact with customers or clients were clearly more important. As one respondent said, "A cheerful person can get by with fewer skills."

To most respondents in sales and service, appearance simply meant "someone who dresses neat and clean. They don't have on anything expensive but [they care] about their hygiene." These employers were not as concerned as the employers of clerical staff about professional or corporate appearance, although a few were dubious about unconventional styles such as "dangly earrings" and long hair or earrings on men.

Communication was considered crucial; employees who speak English and who have good voices are sought. When employers talked about the ability to communicate, some also seemed to mean the ability to think on one's feet or converse with customers. A few respondents looked for a certain style. A restaurateur with an all-white staff of waiters described his initial telephone screening: "I talk to them to see if they speak English, if they sound slightly sophisticated, that they've eaten in nice restaurants." But this was unusual: another said simply of the waitress he hired, "She's got to be able to use her mouth."

The ability to deal with the public was an important requirement for sales and service positions. Some respondents talked about it in terms of personality. One restaurateur said, "Personality is very important, an outgoing personality, a pleasing personality." A hotel manager looked for a houseman who "has a personality in that does he seem to like people and get along with them?" Asked what aspects of personality were important, another employer said, "Be nice and courteous when you treat the customers, courtesy towards the customer, give the customer some help." A respondent hiring commissioned sales staff wanted "what I call sales personality—has to be charismatic but at the same time has to be very aggressive." Others spoke in terms of attitude: the manager of a luggage store looked for "personality, attitude. We're looking for a smile, positive attitude, good communication skills. Our philosophy is we can train anybody as long as they're friendly and open and can talk to another individual." An important aspect of job performance, then, was how well the employee established rapport with the customer and, depending on the setting, flattered, reassured, or persuaded.

Sales and service employers' hiring criteria and processes were relatively simple, with minimal screening for skills or education. Asked how he identified good employees, one respondent said,

> If an applicant comes in and they're dressed neatly and they can spell correctly and fill out an application form with common sense, they're

usually a pretty good job prospect. If people come in looking, I don't mean they have to wear a suit, but if people come in looking like the clothes haven't been washed for two weeks, and they can't spell and read, they're usually a pretty poor source for a job. Believe it or not, I know that sounds pretty basic, but that's really kind of what the job market is like out there.

The important attributes for someone who deals with the public can readily be observed, and in fact some employers made explicit analogies between the job interview and interaction with customers. A restaurant manager hiring waitresses paid close attention to how a job applicant talked to him, "because if she's not going to communicate to me, she's certainly not going to be able to talk to a customer who's dissatisfied at that moment."

Given the significance of interaction with the public for sales and service employers, one might expect to have found some discussion of "black" styles of interaction and speech, as we found among clerical employers. But sales and service employers' discussions of race made little reference to customers. The two respondents who made specific references to "black English" or black culture spoke in terms of interaction with supervisors or coworkers rather than with the public. One retailer said that if the employer is a middle-aged white man "and this kid comes in with his hair in braids, and he doesn't speak the same language, [the employer] says 'oh uh, what've I got?' Whereas if this kid is white, give him a slap on the back of the head and say 'get to work.' He wouldn't be afraid of him but he's afraid of the other one." A florist, describing a black male employee who did not get along with coworkers, said, "He did not speak really white English American. He spoke black American English. And there's a big discrepancy there. A lot of black people are very bright and speak both black and white, but some don't speak white, and that makes it very hard."

Evidence of consumer discrimination appeared in a more direct form. One city restaurateur acknowledged that he discriminated by race because his customers did: "I have all white waitresses for a very basic reason. My clientele is 95 percent white. I simply wouldn't last very long if I had some black waitresses out there." A suburban restaurateur who hired blacks from Chicago because he could not get suburban teenagers to work for him reported that some of his white customers chided him, saying, "Why do you have all *those* people out here?" These two examples illustrated the dilemma employers found themselves in when adjudicating

between competitive pressures and consumer tastes. Although no one else reported consumer discrimination, it seems likely that other retailers in white neighborhoods or suburbs face similar pressures.

And when retail employers told us that appearance, communications skills, and personality were important, they may have been giving us code words for white skin or white styles of interaction. Sales employers who said they valued communications skills or ability to deal with the public hired fewer blacks and Hispanics than those who did not. These patterns are difficult to interpret, given the respondents' silence on the matter of race and styles of interaction, but they suggest that consumer discrimination has some influence on the hiring of sales employees.

Although most important qualities for sales and customer service workers are observable in the hiring interview, race, class, and space might also function as signals for at least one unobservable characteristic: honesty. A suburban drug store manager said,

It's unfortunate, but, in my business I think overall [black men] tend to be known to be dishonest. I think that's too bad but that's the image they have.

(Interviewer: So you think it's an image problem?)

Yeah, a dishonest, an image problem of being dishonest men and lazy. They're known to be lazy. They are [laughs]. I hate to tell you, but. It's all an image though. Whether they are or not, I don't know, but, it's an image that is perceived.

(Interviewer: I see. How do you think that image was developed?)

Go look in the jails [laughs].

The two black retailers cited earlier both noted the economic pressures on low-income black workers.

Clerical Jobs

Clerical jobs are the most highly skilled of the jobs we consider here. When asked what qualities were most important to them, employers of clerical workers emphasized job experience and skills, communications skills, and specific skills such as mathematics or typing (see table 1) but also mentioned personal qualities such as appearance.

Language ability and other clerical skills can readily be tested, and in fact two-thirds of clerical employers administered some kind of basic (language and mathematics) skills test. A few tested for writing, asking

applicants to write brief essays or letters. Informal "tests" were also common; one insurance company solicited letters from job applicants to get a sense of their writing skills. A law firm employer scanned the format of the resume. Requiring a high school degree was common, although the poor reputation of the Chicago public schools was reflected in significant differences between city and suburb: 90.9 percent of suburban employers required a high school diploma, compared with only 61.2 percent of city employers.

But clerical employers looked for other qualities as well. As table 1 suggests, employers are often concerned with interpersonal skills such as the ability to deal with the public or cooperate with coworkers. Employers in law firms, public relations agencies, and similar businesses emphasized the need for secretaries to get along with the hard-driving and demanding professionals they worked for. When hiring receptionists and others who dealt with clients or the public, employers looked for applicants who could represent the company with a polished, professional, and friendly manner—they had to know whom to serve coffee to, how to talk to clients, or in case of a hospital admitting clerk, how to "have a good effect on customers." Asked what she meant by attitude, an employer responded, "Mannerisms, speaking, well-bred, 'thank you, may I help you, I'm here to serve you, you're not here to serve me' kind of thing because there is a lot of contact [with clients] even though it's on the telephone."

Interpersonal skills were considered important even for clerical workers who would have little contact with senior employees or with the public. Respondents often spoke of wanting someone who would fit in, who would know how to behave and get along with other employees. "We have, like I said, more of a family-type relationship here. . . . It's one of our main things that we do look for, to get along with other people. We like to keep it so that, you know, we don't have people in the department fighting." An employer in a small downtown law firm was more succinct: "If you don't have that interpersonal skill of being able to get along with everybody, you're history."

Appearance signaled whether an applicant had a personal style compatible with the staff and image of the firm. One respondent, the placement director for a secretarial school, expressed her frustration with the students' styles of dress: "They don't realize what they're doing to the employers. They're turning them off before they have the interview. . . . I tell them the image is very, very important to the employer. It has nothing to do with the skills. They have to have a professional image going into

the company or the employers will not hire. And the employers agree. They must have an image." [15] Employers were also sensitive to speech patterns. Readily observable in interviews, appearance and voice are themselves productive criteria because of what they signal to others about the firm, but they may also signal other characteristics about an applicant to the employer.

Some white-collar employers told us that they felt blacks' styles of presentation and speech were inappropriate. The placement director quoted earlier complained that "a lot of the blacks still will wear their hair in tons and millions of braids all over their head. They're sort of hostile. They will [say] 'I never wear make-up.' " A black personnel officer said, "Unfortunately, there is a perception that most of [Chicago public high school] kids are black and they don't have the proper skills. They don't know how to write. They don't know how to speak. They don't act in a business fashion or dress in a business manner, in a way that the business community would like." Black speech patterns were an immediate marker of an undesirable job candidate; a former counseler said that one of the first things job seekers were taught was "you don't 'ax' nobody for a job, you'll *ask* them." Another respondent, who screens out most job applicants on the telephone on the basis of their "grammar and English," defended his methods: "I have every right to say that that's a requirement for this job. I don't care if you're pink, black, green, yellow, or orange, I demand someone who speaks well. You want to tell me that I'm a bigot, fine, call me a bigot. I know blacks, you don't even know they're black. So do you." Another believed that the styles of interaction characteristic of many blacks were out of place in the business world:

> I think for most middle-class white people there's a big cultural gap between them and the culture . . . I would call typical of many Chicago black men, and it's not something that a lot of white people are comfortable with. There's a certain type of repartee that goes on between black guys; even in this building you see it. We have a security guard and a couple of his friends that come in, I'm real uncomfortable with that. You know, I do my best to realize it's a cultural thing, but I don't

15. The potential significance of image is evident in a suit filed in 1989 against four New York City employment agencies that were charged with discriminating against minority job applicants. According to newspaper reports, most of the discrimination cases involved highly visible jobs, such as receptionist or secretary, that employers "wanted a certain look for." Employers indicated their preference for white job candidates by using code words such as "all-American," "front-office appearance," and "corporate image" (Craig Wolff, "New York Sues Job Agencies in Bias Case," *New York Times*, September 29, 1989, p. B1).

like it, I don't think it's being professional, and I don't think it's the right atmosphere for a building.

Clerical employers were notable for their sensitivity to class distinctions among blacks, and their responses were often framed in terms of speech patterns:

> I think it's primarily what I mentioned—the cultural thing. We have a couple of black workers—a friend of mine, one of the black secretaries who's been here several years, said, "Well, they're black but their soul is white" and, because culturally, they're white. They do not have black accents. They do not—I think the accent is a big part of it. If someone—it doesn't matter—if someone is black but they speak with the same accent as a Midwestern white person, it completely changes the perception of them. And then dress is part of it. So, you're dealing with what is almost more socioeconomic prejudice than purely racial prejudice.

Another said, "In many businesses the ability to meet the public is paramount, and you do not talk street talk to the buying public. Almost all your black welfare people talk street talk." Occasionally, a respondent referred to other characteristics perceived to be correlated with class: "I find that the less skilled, the less educational background of—and now I'll say black—the more belligerent they are."

Less common was reference to inner-city residence. One respondent described her interview with an applicant from the projects:

> The person came in, made a very, very poor impression physically. . . . I mean she was already for the interview in a state of pretty bad disarray. And I just did not feel she would mix in with the people that I already had, and I didn't want to start explaining that she'd have to show up for work in the morning and you go home at this time, and I think this company gives our clerical employees a fair amount of latitude. . . . I didn't really want to explain these small nuances of behavior to somebody like that.

To her, "inner city" connoted the inability to fit in with other employees or to apprehend and accept subtle rules of the workplace. Another respondent described how a job applicant can signal that these stereotypes did not apply: "You take somebody from the inner city, they may be right

out of the ghetto, they may be right out of the projects, if we feel confident they're not going to steal, I mean, they're sincere. They may be going to school nights or something. They have a little background. They interview well. They're neat and clean. They fill out an 'ap.' We don't have any problems." However, it is likely that most inner-city applicants are screened out by the education and skill requirements of clerical jobs. So while the category "inner city" may be familiar from newspaper accounts, it is not one that is prominent in their hiring and recruitment decisions, other than through its correlation with lower class. Rather, the primary criteria that distinguish appropriate black clerical applicants are those based on class.

Low-Skilled Blue-Collar and Service Jobs

Like sales and customer service employers, most employers of low-skilled blue-collar and service workers do not require job skills (see table 1). In fact, several employers said explicitly that they valued trainability over experience. One looked for a "bright" job applicant, one with an attitude that "I don't have any of the basic skills but I can learn them in a hurry." A few said they wanted candidates who were familiar with factory work, "someone who has worked in or has an interest in working in this type of environment, running a machine, 'cause it's not a real clean job and the working conditions, it's hot in the summer, it's dirty, some of the work is heavy."

What is crucial in these jobs is dependability: "Every day coming to work on time." Common complaints about low-skilled workers focused on those who were hired and never showed up, or quit without warning. Respondents tended to use terms such as "stability," "dependability," "good work history," and "attendance record" interchangeably, and many said explicitly that they saw an applicant's work record as an index of stability: "As far as dependability, and that's why I said earlier that past work record, that's important, so I almost automatically disqualify someone who has moved from position to position, numerous positions within a very short period of time." Rapid turnover was a more important warning sign than a long spell of unemployment. Some respondents immediately ruled out "job hoppers" but were willing to consider applicants with long periods of unemployment if they had a good reason for being out of work.

Closely related to dependability in employers' discussions were work ethic, "willingness to work," or "desire to have a job." This phrasing al-

most never occurred in interviews with other types of employers, but these respondents took its meaning for granted when discussing the most important qualities of a worker with few skills: "Desire to have a job and do a good job, willingness to come to work." "Just the characteristic stuff. You know, if they're willing to work, if they're willing to take the job." As this last quotation suggests, "willingness to work" is a conventional phrase; the context suggests that employers want workers who have a good work ethic, who "do a day's work for a day's pay."

Work history is not the only marker of reliability and motivation. A few employers said they looked at whether an employee was a family man, assuming that married men were more stable because they needed the job: "Well, I think that you know you can tell during an interview process how eager they are to work. What the family situation is. Usually if they have, if they're married, I would say that would have an influence because we found here that people who are in these entry-level positions, if they are married they generally have more, feel more, a bigger sense of responsibility and would be less likely to either screw around or leave." Most semiskilled and unskilled workers are not in the public eye, so appearance is not part of job performance. However, it is a common indicator of desire to work: "Well, I think probably the first major factor is an enthusiasm to want to work. And that enthusiasm gets symbolized by a lot of different factors, like showing up on time, your appearance, just all the little subtle things that convey how badly, or how sincerely, you want to do your work." Finally, as these statements suggest, employers relied on their gut feeling from the interview: "You can tell a certain amount just by talking to them."

Willingness to cooperate with others and take instructions were other crucial characteristics for low-skilled workers. Employers were concerned not with brief interactions with the public but with day-to-day working relations over the long term. Some respondents said they would use the interview to "get a fix on" how well someone worked with others. But one employer stressed the difficulty of assessing this quality:

> You know they have to be able to get along with the other employees that we have up there. We've had in the past years people who just cannot get along, they're always arguing with each other and so forth and so on and we try to avoid that type of thing where possible. But, of course, you never know until after they are hired. When you are interviewing them, everybody is on good behavior.
>
> (Interviewer: I know one thing I've learned from the study is that all of you folks that do the hiring have to be sort of lay psychologists, I think.)
>
> Yeah.
>
> (Interviewer: Figure out how to read people.)
>
> We try, we try. But sometimes you get fooled.

Only a few respondents made an explicit connection between racial heterogeneity and workplace tensions. But those employers of low-skilled workers who valued teamwork were twice as likely to have racially and ethnically homogeneous work forces in the sample job—37.8 percent versus 16.4 percent.[16]

Unlike employers of clerical and sales workers, employers of low-skilled labor had no direct measures of the most important qualities for the sample job. Work history was the only more or less objective measure of dependability and stability. Employers gauged work ethic or willingness to work largely from their impressions in the interview. Even the qualities of personality that make someone a cooperative employee and good team member may be difficult to assess in an interview: job interviews are similar to the short-term encounters with the public that employers of clerical and sales and service workers were concerned about, but they are relatively unlike the longer-term working relationships that low-skilled employees may need to establish.

Because the most desired traits in low-skilled workers are unobservable, employers of such labor seemed more likely to engage in statistical discrimination. According to some of our respondents, the widespread perception that black workers were unreliable or had a poor work ethic hurt them in the labor market:

> In talking about reasons black men don't get jobs, you know, I think a lot of people see that group as being quote lazy unquote, which is a stereotypical image that you would have, and a lot of employers have had experience with hiring people like that and if they get enough of them who tend to make that a reality—that yes, they are. They're not reliable. They're not dependable. They don't show up. When they do show up they don't do a good job. They're just going to say, "Well, I'm not going to hire anybody like that anymore." And that's human nature.

16. Homogeneous work forces were defined as those in which 90 percent or more of sample job workers were either white, black, or Hispanic.

An inner-city manufacturer reported that "when we hear other employers talk, they'll go after primarily the Hispanic and Oriental first, those two, and, I'll qualify that even further, the Mexican Hispanic, and any Oriental, and after that, that's pretty much it, that's pretty much where they like to draw the line, right there."

Like those cited above, some employers talked only in terms of race and ethnicity. But in most cases race did not disqualify a job applicant: many employers praised their "good" black employees, often speaking in terms of their long tenure at the firm. Rather, employers perceived the black labor force as relatively heterogeneous. The significance of race for them was that black job applicants were scrutinized more carefully. As one manufacturer said, "I meet people who look at the black males with a little more finely tuned eye than they would someone else."

In contrast to employers of clerical workers, who were concerned with class and paid little attention to space, employers of low-skilled workers were most concerned with characteristics associated with the distinction between inner-city blacks and other blacks. Some drew this distinction explicitly, as one responded to the question about "address discrimination": "If you take a perceived bigoted position that black males are lazy, which I probably unfortunately did earlier, then how do you sort through that and find those who are not? Well, you sure as hell don't go to the projects to look for someone who is not. Now a lot of great people come out of the projects, but you know, that's not where I'd go looking for the exception." Another commented, "I think the stereotyping of if you live in a housing project or if you're black or if you're Hispanic or if you're, you know, you have big gaps in your work record, you put all those things together and you've got an undesirable animal. And many times that's probably, maybe, true. You may have a person who you're not going to get anywhere with. And you're going to spend a lot of money training these people and you're going to have a high turnover." But they also did this implicitly, relying on markers associated with inner city as a cultural pattern rather than a physical location. These markers may include family status, dress, or style of speech. Finally, personal references may also be more important for black job applicants than for others: "All of a sudden, they take a look at a guy, and unless he's got an in, the reason why I hired this black kid the last time is 'cause my neighbor said to me, yeah, I used him for a few, he's good, and I said, you know what, I'm going to take a chance. But it was a recommendation. But other than that, I've got a walk-in, and, who knows? And I think that for the most part, a guy sees a black man, he's a bit hesitant, because I don't know." Other respondents who hired low-skilled black men also relied on informal networks or formal referral systems such as school-work cooperative programs to screen for good black workers.

One would expect racial stereotypes to influence hiring decisions most when there are few other indicators of an applicant's quality. Although the employer survey was not designed to examine statistical discrimination, we can test this briefly using a distinction between jobs that require basic skills and those that do not. Many employers wanted low-skilled workers who could speak English, read and write, or do basic mathematics, either because the job itself required it or because employers wanted to be able to communicate with workers in writing. If racial stereotypes influence hiring decisions most when reliable information about productivity is lacking, and if Hispanics are regarded as more reliable workers than blacks, then one would expect employers to favor Hispanics for less skilled jobs requiring no language or math skills.

We compared the race and ethnic composition of these jobs by occupation and city or suburban location (table 2). City employers who did not seek basic skills placed more Hispanics than blacks in the sample job. By contrast, those who wanted language or mathematics skills had, on average, larger proportions of blacks. The relationship was reversed among suburban firms. Jobs requiring no language or math skills had higher proportions of blacks than Hispanics, while jobs requiring some skills had more Hispanics.[17]

Without information about the labor supply for these jobs, table 2 can only be suggestive.[18] But one interpretation is that when employers of low-skilled labor have some other criteria on which to screen, racial stereotypes become less important. Whether basic skills requirements for less skilled workers are important for the job or simply help the employer screen out applicants with undesirable personal qualities is irrelevant; what matters is that these criteria give the employer objective information about the applicant that supplements the fact of skin color. Another interpretation is simply that employers prefer Hispanic workers as long as they have the requisite skills. It seems likely that the Hispanic workers in the suburbs are more proficient at English and thus are more equipped to

17. City-surburban differences remained when we controlled for percent black and Hispanic residents in the neighborhood or suburb.

18. The question of statistical discrimination is examined in more detail in Neckerman and Kirschenman (1990).

TABLE 2. Black and Hispanic Employees in Blue-Collar and Non–Customer Service Jobs, by Location of Firm and Basic Skills Requirement

Percent

Firm location and basic skills requirement	*Black*	*Hispanic*	*Unweighted number*
City			
Semiskilled			
Not required	19.7	64.6	3
Required	26.0	17.9	7
Unskilled			
Not required	24.4	37.6	8
Required	40.9	20.3	15
Service			
Not required	20.6	39.5	5
Required	47.9	19.3	6
Average			
Not required	22.3	42.8	16
Required	39.0	19.5	28
Suburbs			
Semiskilled			
Not required	51.7	13.3	3
Required	6.0	45.3	3
Unskilled			
Not required	35.4	1.6	2
Required	24.6	41.3	2
Service			
Not required	. . .	. . .	0
Required	50.0	25.0	2
Total			
Not required	45.2	8.6	5
Required	19.5	40.6	7

SOURCE: Authors' survey.

compete for jobs requiring language skills, while the reverse is true in the city. In either case, employers appear to be acting on their beliefs that Hispanics are better workers than blacks.

Conclusion

Chicago's employers did not hesitate to generalize about race or ethnic differences in the quality of the labor force. Most associated negative images with inner-city workers, and particularly with black men. "Black" and "inner-city" were inextricably linked, and both were linked with "lower-class."

Regardless of the generalizations employers made, they did consider the black population particularly heterogeneous, which made it more important that they be able to distinguish "good" from "bad" workers. Whether through skills tests, credentials, personal references, folk theories, or their intuition, they used some means of screening out the inner-city applicant. The ubiquitous anecdote about the good black worker, the exception to the rule, testified to their own perceived success at doing this. So did frequent references to "our" black workers as opposed to "those guys on the street corner."

And black job applicants, unlike their white counterparts, must indicate to employers that the stereotypes do not apply to them. Inner-city and lower-class workers were seen as undesirable, and black applicants had to try to signal to employers that they did not fall into those categories, either by demonstrating their skills or by adopting a middle-class style of dress, manner, and speech or perhaps (as we were told some did) by lying about their address or work history.

By stressing employers' preconceptions about inner-city workers, we do not mean to imply that there are no problems of labor quality in the inner city: the low reading and mathematics test scores of Chicago public school students testify to these problems. But if the quality of the inner-city labor force has indeed deteriorated, then it is incumbent on employers to avoid hiring inner-city workers. This is precisely the result one would expect from William Julius Wilson's account of increased social dislocations in the inner city since the early 1970s. Because race and inner-city residence are so highly correlated, it would not be surprising if race were to become a key marker of worker productivity.

However, productivity is not an individual characteristic. Rather it is embedded in social relations. The qualities most likely to be proxied by race are not job skills but behavioral and attitudinal attributes—dependability, strong work ethic, and cooperativeness—that are closely tied to interactions among workers and between workers and employers. Our evidence suggests that more attention should be paid to social relations in the workplace. Antagonisms among workers and between workers and their employers are likely to diminish productivity. Thus employers' expectations may become self-fulfilling prophecies.

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Part Three
Causes and Consequences of Concentrated Poverty

THE URBAN UNDERCLASS

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Preface

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM tells us that the United States *is* witnessing a significant growth in the size of its urban underclass. Many believe that the percentage of the population persistently poor is large and rapidly increasing, that more and more unmarried teenage girls are bearing children, and that welfare rolls are exploding. It is frequently alleged that crime is on the increase, young people are dropping out of school in record numbers, and higher percentages of the population are withdrawing from the labor force. The poor are also said to be increasingly isolated in ghettos at the cores of our metropolitan areas.

Yet none of these propositions is true. The essays on the urban underclass in this book try to separate the truth about poverty, social dislocation, and changes in American family life from the myths that have become part of contemporary folklore. They show that the most important problem—the rise in the percentage of children living in poverty—is due to the increasing number of female-headed households and the decline in the earnings of young men. They demonstrate that the main issue is not so much a growth in the size of the underclass as the persistence of poverty decades after the country thought it had addressed the problem. And they point out that the paradox of poverty in a wealthy nation will continue until society makes greater efforts to provide all citizens with improved educational and economic opportunities as well as adequate income maintenance in times of need.

These essays were initially presented at a conference held at Northwestern University in October 1989 that was sponsored by the Social Science Research Council's Committee for Research on the Urban Underclass and Northwestern University's Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research. We especially wish to thank Martha Gephart, Robert Pearson, and Raquel Rivera, senior staff members of the Committee for Research on the Urban Underclass, who helped plan the conference, identify presenters, discussants, and other participants, obtain written comments

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James Schneider and Nancy Davidson edited the book, Todd Quinn verified the manuscript, Eje Wray assisted in the physical preparation of the manuscript, and Max Franke compiled the index.

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March 1991

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