Rediscovering the Color Line Within Work Organizations
The 'Knitting of Racial Groups' Revisited

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Although American sociology has long been concerned with racial and ethnic inequality within work organizations, this traditional strength has languished in recent years. Few ethnographic studies have managed to capture what E. C. Hughes once called "the knitting of racial groups" at work. This article critically reviews the literature on race and work organizations and offers a set of propositions that target neglected aspects of racial boundaries at work. These center on the spatial dimension of race and organizations, the relevance of racial boundaries for the acquisition of skill and expertise, the bearing of status hierarchies on the reproduction of racial boundaries, and the character of corporate and judicial responses to racial inequalities at work. This article offers a tentative strategy for research in the field that might reclaim the lost tradition of E. C. Hughes.

Keywords: racial discrimination; equal employment opportunity; race; work

American sociologists have traditionally devoted a great deal of attention to racial and ethnic divisions at work (e.g., Bonacich, 1976; Hughes, 1946; Kornblum, 1974). In recent decades, however, issues of class have tended to take center stage, often relegating race to a secondary or peripheral concern (e.g., Burawoy, 1979; cf. Hill, 1988). The logic that informed so much of the labor process debate in the United States, for example, assumed that

structural changes in the organization of work made class-based models of production increasingly appropriate. This, it was felt, was the lesson hidden within the resurgence of industrial conflict during the late 1960s and thereafter (Hyman, 1978).

American sociologists have, of course, conducted an abundance of research on racial inequalities at work. Yet with some exceptions, much of this literature has focused on *allocative* questions—that is, on the social conditions that distribute jobs, wages, and promotions among dominant and minority groups (Reskin, McBrier, & Kmec, 1999; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993; G. Wilson, 1997). By comparison, relatively little attention has been paid to the ways in which racial and ethnic relations unfold within the sphere of production itself. As a result, a wealth of econometric studies have focused on the distribution of opportunity but have produced remarkably little understanding of the social processes that underlie such disparities and that shape the work situations of historically excluded groups (Nkomo, 1992; Reskin, 2003). Precisely how do workers "do" race on the job? How might informal patterns of interaction and affiliation reproduce the color line within work organizations? How have corporate, legal, and judicial interventions affected the character of intergroup relations at work? These and kindred questions have languished because few researchers have developed the sort of ethnographic analysis needed to engage what E. C. Hughes (1946) once referred to as the "knitting of racial groups" within work organizations.[1]

It is worth asking why such questions have gone unaddressed and, in particular, why ethnographic research on race and work has so clearly fallen away. One reason is methodological: Qualitative research has been overwhelmed by positivist methods more generally, though this situation is in flux (Burawoy, 1998; Morrill & Fine, 1997). A second reason is theoretical: In recent decades, organizational sociologists have increasingly stressed the external environments of work organizations rather than the internal dynamics of the firm (Dobbin, Sutton, Meyer, & Scott, 1993; Edelman 1990, 1992). Third, social structural conditions such as deindustrialization, the spatial concentration of poverty, and the weakening of urban labor markets have inclined researchers to emphasize the availability rather than the nature of work for subordinate racial groups (W. J. Wilson, 1987). A final reason may be the increasing fear of litigation on the part of corporate employers who have legal reasons to fear social scientific research on such themes.

Such factors notwithstanding, greater emphasis needs to be given to the social and organizational processes that underlie both the structure and the experience of racial boundaries at work. My argument is not meant to challenge the validity or worth of quantitative analysis of racial inequalities at work. Contrarily, such studies are often the only way to document societal

disparities in the distribution of job rewards. Yet such studies often omit key relational attributes and dynamics that help account for the racial disparities that obtain. Understanding these phenomena will, I contend, require a fuller and more robust application of qualitative methods that are better equipped to capture the social and cultural dynamics of intergroup relations at work (Cornfield & Kane, 1998).

Toward this end, I offer several propositions having to do with the emergence and reproduction of racial boundaries and with corporate and legal responses to them. These propositions are prompted by my own fieldwork within American manufacturing settings (Vallas, 2003a, 2003b), the bulk of which has been located in highly traditional plants in the U.S. South where racial and ethnic distinctions have been especially salient. Rather than presenting data from this fieldwork, however, I offer a set of more abstract observations intended to stimulate or guide future research on race and work organizations. In the conclusion of the article, I suggest an agenda for research in this field along with some plausible strategies that such studies might fruitfully adopt.

A number of qualifications are in order before my discussion can begin. First, my intention is neither to propose a causal model nor to outline a string of hypotheses that might be tested empirically, but it is rather to develop informed speculation concerning some of the key mechanisms and processes that stand in need of empirical research. Partly reflecting the regional origin of this article, the bulk of my discussion is oriented toward boundaries between White and African American workers and only occasionally broaches the situations that Asian and Hispanic workers confront.[2] Finally, because formal organizations are the focal point of this analysis, it cannot engage recent literature on social capital formation between ethnic communities or participants in the informal economy (see Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993; Portes & Zhou, 1992). My goal is to provoke thought about ways in which sociological research might more directly engage the social processes that act to reproduce racial inequalities within work organizations in the United States.

UNDERSTANDING RACIAL AND ETHNIC BOUNDARIES AT WORK

The workplace very likely accounts for a large portion of the interaction that takes place across the color line in the United States and, to some extent, compensates for the sharp residential and social segregation characteristic of U.S. society. Yet existing evidence suggests that the workplace is marked by

salient boundaries and divisions that, as in residential communities, place important constraints on the movements and options available to members of minority groups.

According to the National Organizations Study, a 1991 survey administered to a representative sample of American work establishments, the median racial composition of U.S. work establishments was 88% White (Marsden, Cook, & Knoke, 1994, p. 896; cf. Reskin et al., 1999). This figure is in many respects a statistical fiction because nearly a quarter of all establishments in the United States employ no minorities and another quarter report minority employment levels under 10% (Kalleberg, Knoke, Marsden, & Spaeth, 1996). Thus, using Kanter's (1977) terminology, more than half of all U.S. work organizations could be characterized as either *skewed* (less than a 15% minority composition) or *uniform* groups. Segregation at the level of the job is more acutely drawn. According to data collected by Tomaskovic-Devey (1993), for example, more than half of all jobs held by workers in North Carolina were uniformly White in composition and a quarter of African American workers were employed in uniformly Black jobs.

Although the literature contains important inconsistencies, the bulk of the evidence suggests that minority workers employed in the private sector are disproportionately located within smaller, peripheral firms that provide less desirable and less secure employment. The civil rights movement and the legal gains it won have without doubt increased the job opportunities available to minority and female employees (Dobbin et al., 1993; Edelman, 1990), but evidence suggests that a significant proportion of managerial opportunities have remained highly racialized, with minority incumbents relegated to jobs on the periphery of corporate management (S. Collins, 1989, 1997; Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). Racial disparities in the distribution of authority have remained largely unchanged during the past two decades (R. A. Smith, 1997, 2001; G. Wilson, 1997; G. Wilson, Sakura-Lemmessy, & West, 1999); Black men are only half as likely to gain supervisory jobs as are members of the dominant group even when structural and human capital variables are held constant (cf. Maume, 1999). Vulnerability to layoffs, it seems, is greatest among minority workers and especially minority women (cf. Spalter-Roth & Deitch, 1999), although the strength and form of labor organization moderates this effect (Cornfield, 1987; Zeitlin & Weyher, 2001). Evidence is both strong and consistent that the processes governing the allocation of jobs are markedly different across racial and ethnic lines (G. Wilson, 1997) although considerable uncertainty persists as to how best to interpret these empirical patterns (Mouw, 2002).

One abiding approach has viewed racial and ethnic inequalities as a function of variations in the relative proportions of dominant and minority

workers within the firm. Much of this literature has appealed either to Kanter's theory of relative proportions (1977) or to Blalock's theory of group threat (1967; cf. Blumer 1958). The former holds that social and cultural barriers to minority attainment will be greatest within skewed groups where minority workers face heightened visibility, an exaggeration of social differences, and the imposition of stereotypes. These barriers are expected to diminish as the minority composition becomes more balanced. By contrast, the group threat approach expects a positive relation between minority composition and the salience of racial boundaries. That is, growth in the minority composition of a firm or occupation is expected to produce increased resistance by the dominant group, thus heightening the barriers to minority group attainment.

Although a number of studies have addressed these predictions, the resulting evidence remains complex and contradictory. Reskin and her coauthors (1999) discussed evidence indicating that minority workers are most harshly evaluated where their relative proportions are low, as Kanter (1977) would predict. Other studies lend support to the group threat perspective, finding that increasing levels of minority representation devalue or depreciate minority workers' skills and pay (Braddock & McPartland, 1987; Tienda & Lii, 1987) while also reducing their chances for promotion (Baldi & McBrier, 1997; Maume, 1999). The matter remains unresolved partly owing to wide variation in the outcome measures used by different studies. In more theoretical terms, however, it may prove unwise to view Kanter's and Blalock's perspectives as mutually exclusive hypotheses. In fact, they may simply identify two distinct forms of racial inequality that emerge at low and high levels of minority composition: paternalistic boundaries within skewed groups and competitive ones in more heterogeneous or balanced groups (van den Berge, 1967). In other words, the form but not the level of racial disparities may vary in accordance with minority composition.

Other approaches toward racial inequality at work have drawn theoretical inspiration from neo-Weberian theories of social closure (cf. Parkin, 1979; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993) and from new structuralist arguments that root racial disparities in the differential distribution of workers across economic and industrial sectors of the economy (Kaufman, 2002; see Reskin, 2003). Research has typically used aggregate data (from census reports or surveys of firms within metropolitan areas) to test hypotheses on the demographic and organizational conditions that devalue minority workers' jobs or block their movement into higher status positions (see Maume, 1999; Mouw, 2002; R. A. Smith, 1997, 2001; R. A. Smith & Elliott, 2002; G. Wilson, 1997; G. Wilson et al., 1999). Although this aggregate approach has repeatedly demonstrated the limits of human capital approaches, it has been hampered by its

inability to detect the social mechanisms and normative constructs that unequally allocate job rewards (Edelman, Fuller, & Mara-Drita, 2001; Reskin, 2003). Researchers have had to infer key relational influences *in*directly, through data on racial disparities in the determinants of hiring and promotion (cf. Reskin, 2003). Where studies inspired by Kanter (1977) and Blalock (1967) have highlighted patterns of interaction and affiliation between workers in different racial groups, neo-Weberian and new structuralist research has typically neglected such microsocial patterns and lost sight of the organizational processes that often reproduce racial and ethnic inequality at work.

Seeking to prompt research focused on precisely these processes and mechanisms, I will articulate a set of propositions about the color line in the remainder of this article. In so doing, I draw freely on recent theories of symbolic boundaries (Abbott, 1995; Epstein, 1992; Lamont, 1992, 2002; Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Vallas, 2001), an emerging approach toward social inequality that aims to identify the ways in which symbolic distinctions and systems of classification affect the institutionalization of social inequality. Whereas much of this literature has been aimed at the analysis of class boundaries, its reasoning is easily applicable to questions involving racial and ethnic inequality at work (Lamont, 2002).

FIVE PROPOSITIONS ON
THE COLOR LINE AT WORK

The social conditions at work that produce racial inequalities can be divided into two general categories: those rooted in the social relations of production and the labor process and those that flow from the formal policies and practices of corporate managers and the legal environment to which they respond. The relative importance of these two sets of conditions has often been debated, placing responsibility for racial inequalities at the doors alternately of dominant-group workers or of managerial employees who oversee the selection and compensation of employees (see Hartigan, 2001). I argue that both sets of conditions are significant and often interact, reproducing racial fault lines in ways that warrant much closer study than they have received.

SPATIAL SEGREGATION AT WORK

Much like residential communities, organizations have a spatial or ecological dimension that often contributes to the reproduction of inequalities

between racial groups. Led by such students of urban communities as Park and Burgess, the Chicago School in American sociology was traditionally quite sensitive to the ecological aspects of urban life (Bulmer, 1998). Knowing that segregation hinges on control over actors' movements through space, the Chicago School researchers often explored immigrant settlement patterns and processes of community formation within urban environments. Extending this ecological focus to the workplace, Hughes's (1946) aforementioned study of a metal polishing and finishing plant devoted considerable attention to the spatial aggregation of workers within the plant, and Kornblum (1974) stressed the importance of residential segregation for within-plant behaviors. The more general tendency, however, has been to neglect the ecological features of the work environment, viewing the workplace in abstraction from the ways it spatially distributes employees.

Yet good theoretical reason exists to stress the spatial dimension of work. The ecology of the work setting is often bound up with the racial or ethnic status of the worker; many factories, hospitals, restaurants, and hotels locate minority workers within back offices, kitchen areas, or service and cleaning spaces far removed from public contact and visibility. As in residential communities, spatial segregation within the workplace powerfully constrains the movements and activities of minority employees, which, in turn, affects their opportunities for interaction with dominant-group workers, limits their access to production skills and job information, and hinders their chances of establishing informal ties of solidarity to dominant-group workers. Because spatial segregation is often bound up with socially dominant conceptions of dignity, honor, and respectability (Hodson, 2001), the spatial location of minority workers may symbolize the peripheral or subordinate position of out-group employees. It may also communicate implicit organizing principles regarding the values of particular jobs and of the workers who perform them, thus exacerbating the devaluation of minority workers' skills (Braddock & McPartland, 1987; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). Workplace terrain can carry racial significance by providing tacit markers of the places that members of dominant and minority groups are expected to hold within the work organization and fueling conflict when such boundaries are transgressed (Blumer, 1958; Lee, 2000). Much as in Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) well-known analysis of the Kabyle home, where discrete areas within peasant houses came to be symbolically defined as the natural locale for highly gendered tasks, workplace terrain can develop along parallel racialized lines.

This point is not likely to be lost on minority workers. However, their responses to spatial segregation may have unanticipated consequences. Especially where they have encountered inhospitable treatment, minority workers may stake out particular spatial areas as their own terrain, claiming

and defending such spaces against intrusions of the dominant group. Such defensive tactics can provide historically excluded groups with highly valued job rewards that would not otherwise be available: freedom from out-group hostility, autonomy from White supervisors (Westwood, 1982), and a lair wherein one can share the group's "hidden transcript" (Scott, 1988). Ironically, such tactics may inadvertently damage the organizational prospects of minority employees by isolating them from job ladders that reach into the most prestigious and best paying positions and implicitly reproducing racialized views of minority workers' tasks. Just as patterns of worker resistance sometimes take their toll on members of subordinate classes (Burawoy, 1979; Willis, 1977), so too can the effort to carve out a comfortable refuge implicitly reproduce racial boundaries and inequalities at work.[3]

INFORMAL RELATIONS AND THE ACQUISITION OF SKILL

Symbolic boundaries between racial and ethnic groups are especially likely to have material effects on employment opportunity in workplaces where tacit knowledge, interpersonal interactions, and peer evaluations are critical to work performance. Kanter (1977) drew attention to the ways in which homophily (in-group preference) can bear on the selection and promotion of managerial employees. She contended that senior managers tend to seek out candidates who hold cultural and linguistic traits similar to their own, which sets in motion a kind of cultural exclusivism that works against members of out-groups whose backgrounds are at odds with those of the dominant group. Kanter's argument was framed in terms of the selection of employees for elite positions, but it has broader applicability. Levels of trust and familiarity affect not only admission *to* but also success *within* occupational realms, especially where social ties are vital to the accumulation of technical expertise (Blair-Loy, 2001).

For example, in manufacturing jobs in which strategic skills and expertise are often not codified and must therefore be acquired through on-the-job training and hands-on experience (Halle, 1984; Kusterer, 1978), a worker's chance of gaining an acceptable level of competence will often depend on the establishment of informal patterns of solidarity and trust with the members of a dominant group. Workers whose origins or loyalties are suspect or merely unknown will be less likely to accumulate the requisite support and expertise than will their in-group equivalents, especially where dominant-group workers are embedded within social networks derived from kinship or community ties that minority workers do not share (Kornblum, 1974, chap. 1). Differentially embedded within the work organization, minority workers will naturally find it more difficult to acquire the tacit knowledge, social supports, and

informal allies they need to conform to organizational demands quite apart from the boundary work of the dominant group. Legally mandated policies like affirmative action may require firms to hire minority workers, but they rarely address the informal obstacles that affect access to needed knowledge and expertise. Informal social networks bear not only on the hiring process, reproducing employment segregation (Mouw, 2002), but they also reach into the distribution of skill and social support *after* workers are hired in ways that have yet to be addressed.

Arguably, inequalities bred via differential levels of trust and embeddedness may hold *increasing* significance, especially if one assumes that technological change expands the role of tacit knowledge in technical occupations (see Barley, 1996; Orr, 1996), that employers increasingly demand workers who command "soft skills" (Moss & Tilly, 1996), and that acceptance and collaboration in team environments hold increased relevance as factors affecting the evaluation of work performance.[4] Literature suggests that inclusion within occupational communities holds growing significance for the employment relationship (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Saxenian, 1992). The dynamics of trust and embeddedness may play an increasingly prominent role as social conduits of skill, expertise, and support within organizations and occupations alike. This point holds obvious relevance for studies of racial disparities within high tech and "new economy" settings.

STATUS HIERARCHIES, RESISTANCE, AND THE REPRODUCTION OF RACIAL LINES

Racial boundaries often give rise to status hierarchies that injure the dignity of the most marginalized groups, which can provoke forms of resistance with complex, iterative effects on racial boundaries and even reproduce these boundaries over time. Although the published literature here is quite sparse, racial and ethnic hierarchies often intersect with gender and skill boundaries, thus producing complex patterns of status stratification at work that continue long-standing aspects of U.S. labor history (see Brody, 1960; O. Collins, 1946; Cornfield, 1989; Kornblum, 1974; and Roediger, 1991; cf. LeDuff, 2000). As wage and occupational data begin to suggest, and as my fieldwork reaffirms, White men often occupy the most privileged or core positions in the status order in manual work environments. Beneath them in the status hierarchy are African American men who, because they often share male-specific orientations and interests, can gain an important measure of acceptance and support and in effect become "honorary Whites." White women hold more peripheral positions in the status order yet are sometimes protected by ties of kinship or community that mute their outsider status to some

extent. Often, minority women and youth, whose ties to others are most tenuous, hold the lowest positions in the status hierarchy (Spalter-Roth & Deitch, 1999; Texeira, 2002).

Although little is known regarding the workings of such status hierarchies, a number of findings indicate that they hold important effects on the character of informal behavior at work. Workers at the bottom of the status hierarchy experience a greater frequency and intensity of harassment in various forms, which reflects their vulnerability and isolation (see Gruber & Bjorn, 1982; Mansfield et al., 1991; Texeira, 2002). Relations toward supervisors are also likely to be more troubled, with African American workers experiencing greater closeness of supervision, harsher job evaluations, and greater risk of unfair termination, net of skill level and organizational variables (Hodson, 2001, p. 110; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). Under these conditions, the normative obligations that bind low-status minority workers to the norms of their work group are likely to be relatively weak. The result, I suggest, tends to generate various forms of defiance such as acts of insubordination toward supervisors or others in authority, violations of established work norms, and at times allegations of racism or harassment on the part of superiors. These dynamics—in effect, a dialectic of exclusion and defiance—will inflame and even reproduce racial boundaries much in the manner that Willis (1977) and MacLeod (1995) have found with respect to class.

Consider the following situation, which is, in effect, a composite sketch abstracted from fieldwork conducted in manufacturing settings. In contexts where interracial trust is low and minority group defiance has occurred in the past, dominant group supervisors implicitly fear the possibility of allegations concerning unequal treatment. Following the path of least resistance, they tend to rely more heavily on their in-group subordinates, with whom they share informal social ties and cultural understandings. Such informal practices can, however, easily take their revenge, fostering resentment among both dominant- and minority-group employees. Dominant-group employees (Whites) come to resent what they see as an unfair burden and thus expect reciprocity from their supervisors in some form. Yet once supervisors reciprocate, for example by bending the rules for their in-group subordinates, they create the appearance of favoritism toward Whites, fostering greater suspicion among minority workers and reproducing the very intergroup tensions with which the cycle began. Because operations managers and human resources (HR) staff often lack organizational skills to handle such informal dynamics, these tensions can fester beneath the surface of the firm for years at a time, with minority- and dominant-group workers each finding ample reason to perceive unequal treatment within the firm (Anderson, 1999;

DiTomaso, 2000). Only the most skillfully constructed survey instrument could begin to tease out the existence of such spirals of intergroup tension and distrust.[5]

**THE LIMITS OF JURIDICALLY ORIENTED
HUMAN RESOURCE REGIMES**

As a number of studies have made clear, the passage of civil rights legislation in the 1960s and thereafter dramatically changed the legal environment in which U.S. firms operate. This shift in the legal context enhanced the power of HR executives and legal professionals and transformed the systems firms use for employee selection, evaluation, promotion, and compensation (see Dobbin et al., 1993; Edelman, 1990, 1992). Yet in the wake of the civil rights era and the procedural reforms it spawned, the structure of corporate institutions has encountered pressures of a different sort that drains away much of the power that HR executives previously enjoyed. In particular, the spread of new information technologies, new levels of competition, and the rising power of institutional investors (Useem, 1996; cf. S. Collins, 1997; Fligstein, 1987, 1990) have combined to prompt firms to adopt a more narrowly cast, performance-oriented conception of the firm's interests, enhancing the position of professionals outside the HR orbit—notably, executives in finance, accounting, and engineering. The result, I suggest, is that reforms aimed at attenuating racial and ethnic problems have been concerned primarily with minimizing the firm's exposure to the risk of antidiscrimination lawsuits and the reputational damage they might inflict rather than with ameliorating racial boundaries. Increasingly, juridically oriented HR regimes have emerged that provide a kind of legal exoskeleton or protective structure designed to satisfy the firm's legitimacy needs, although these regimes do little that might actively change the internal life of the firm.

This is not to suggest that juridically oriented HR regimes have no positive consequences. Where the threat of litigation seems real, firms seem to provide economic improvements (e.g., increasing minority workers' wage levels) that are much too important to ignore (Burstein & Edwards, 1994; Heckman & Payner, 1989). By formalizing the employment relationship, they also reduce the most egregious forms of managerial bias and job disparities (e.g., Bielby, 2000; Konrad & Linnehan, 1995; Reskin et al., 1999). Yet as discussed above, such regimes are often limited by their failure to engage the informal fabric of racial boundaries within the firm. Because they are driven by factors exogenous to the firm, such HR regimes institutionalize *corporate* priorities and concerns rather than those of minority (or White) employees. This point is consistent with S. Collins's (1989, 1997) findings

on career patterns among Black managers, whose career trajectories were largely shaped by the legitimacy needs of the firm rather than by the goal of equalizing the distribution of opportunity. It is also consistent with emerging research on corporate responses to worker disabilities, which finds little or no linkage between the adoption of formal provisions for nondiscrimination and the actual practices encountered by the subordinate group (Balser, 2002; Harlan & Robert, 1998). In short, if equal employment opportunity (EEO) reforms were often largely symbolic before, they are increasingly so today as the rhetoric of diversity displaces that of civil rights (cf. Edelman et al., 2001).

THE LIMITS OF JUDICIAL REMEDIES

Legal and judicial interventions within work environments have been largely framed on the basis of sociologically naïve conceptions of the "legal individual" with little regard for the normative context in which plaintiffs are embedded. Such theoretical failures leave the door open to important unanticipated consequences that can derail the goals of judicial intervention. Even in class action lawsuits, judicial intervention in civil rights cases has largely ignored social scientific research on the collectively generated character of racial inequalities. With some recent exceptions,[6] most court-imposed rulings and consent decrees have been informed by three empirically unwarranted assumptions: first, that racial inequalities at work stem from the behaviors of prejudiced individuals (or from management's failure to constrain such behaviors); second, that the role of ethnic and kinship networks is largely confined to occupational recruitment, which becomes irrelevant once workers are placed within work organizations; and third, that when discrimination is shown, "making plaintiffs whole" is merely a matter of restoring the compensation, training, and job placement opportunities that plaintiffs have been unfairly denied. Often, all three of these assumptions turn out to be false.

Much of the foregoing analysis has suggested ways in which racial distinctions and inequalities are collectively or organizationally induced, reflecting inherently *relational* processes and patterns of affiliation rather than individually rooted attitudes and traits (Blumer, 1958). It is also the case that workers do not arrive at the workplace as atomized individuals. In reality, they are embedded in social networks that differentially position them in relation to their employers, to their jobs, and to one another. As noted above, patterns of differential embeddedness can be expected to have substantial effects on workers' performance at work by providing in-group members with forms of support, sponsorship, and de facto training that out-group

members are denied. Yet much like military strategies that send soldiers into battle unarmed, judicial remedies for racial discrimination have failed to address the ensemble of relations into which workers are placed. In effect, this deprives minority workers of the very resources (e.g., access to tacit knowledge and social capital) they need to achieve favorable treatment within the work situation. Lacking such resources and thus unable to demonstrate their competence in the eyes of the in-group, their presence under these conditions may itself reinforce the jaundiced view of them held by members of the dominant group.

If the presociological conventions of judicial intervention are to evolve in more fruitful directions, intellectual exchange and discussion is needed between lawyers, judges, and legislators on one hand and social scientists concerned with workplace discrimination on the other. Members of the legal community need to consider more innovative and imaginative forms of intervention that might begin to transcend the hyperindividualistic blinders that American jurisprudence has been made to wear. Social scientists need to gain an increased sensitivity to legal concerns and reasoning and provide empirically based evaluations and critiques of varying forms of judicial intervention and their consequences, not only for the numerical representation or wages of minority workers but also for the informal climate and quality of employment among White and minority workers (see Nelson & Bridges, 1999).

DISCUSSION: METHODS AND STRATEGIES FOR RESEARCH

In much of the literature on race and work organizations, researchers have implicitly allowed the technology of social research (chiefly survey methodology) to shape the sorts of questions they pursue. Although survey methods provide advantages that are both obvious and familiar, undue reliance on surveys has encouraged researchers to reify racial attitudes by seeing race more as a variable than as a social relationship and thereby losing sight of the processes that underlie respondents' answers on survey questionnaires. In this section, I offer some brief observations and suggestions regarding the research strategies that students of race and work organizations might fruitfully pursue.

Especially in so litigious a context as the United States, employers are likely to remain highly reluctant to grant fieldworkers free access to study racial boundaries within their organizations. This fact, combined with the very real advantages of survey research, suggests that this method is likely to

remain an important tool for research in this field. Yet the standard analytic strategies for survey research have begun to manifest important limitations (Reskin, 2003). As noted, direct measures of the social mechanisms that mediate racial disparities in the distribution of job rewards are missing from large-scale survey data, and few efforts have been made to tap constructs such as homophily, boundary work, and social and cultural capital.[7]

If direct measures of the mechanisms that mediate racial and ethnic disparities have been missing from survey research, a key reason may be the paucity of fieldwork in this area, which has impeded our understanding of the ways in which the structural and cultural aspects of work organizations reproduce racial inequality. It is not accidental that one of the richest sources of theoretical guidance on gender boundaries at work—Kanter's (1977) classic study *Men and Women of the Corporation*—was itself largely based on ethnographic fieldwork in a corporate setting. This point underscores the need for more focused case studies designed to capture the social and organizational dynamics that engender racial boundaries, the ways in which actors conceive of or "do" race at work, and patterns of interaction and affiliation between racial and ethnic groups that produce and reproduce inequalities over time.

In a previous era of social research, such focused case studies might have been conducted on the basis of covert participant observation (see Graham, 1995; Grenier, 1988). However, given changes in the legal and ethical context of research on human subjects in the United States, this strategy is no longer tenable for academic social scientists (although journalists face no such constraint). Although individual researchers and research teams will find it difficult to overcome employer resistance to research on race, it may be possible for elite educational institutions, private foundations, and powerful governmental bodies, in conjunction with civil rights groups, to enlist the participation of corporate actors (and conceivably labor organizations and professional associations as well) in the pursuit of *in situ* fieldwork on race. Systematically coordinated field studies across multiple types of organizational contexts would be especially useful. Such comparative ethnography would combine the richness of qualitative research with at least some of the breadth, variations, and generalizability that positivist methodology allows.

Such possibilities notwithstanding, researchers will need to explore innovative research strategies, using data sources that have not previously been employed. For example, data gathered during the course of antidiscrimination litigation often contain elaborate narratives, insider testimony, and employee statistics that can provide privileged access into organizational processes ordinarily kept from public view. This was precisely the strategy used in Nelson and Bridges's (1999) study of gender inequality within

organizations (cf. Walsh, Dawson, & Nierobisz, 2002); it can serve equally useful functions for research on racial inequality at work. This approach would not only enable researchers to reconstruct the ways racial boundaries take shape within particular firms but also sensitize researchers to the conceptual logic that has informed judicial rulings and remedies. An alternative strategy might adopt a multimethod approach, combining EEO data on discrimination lawsuits with organizational surveys and interviews that can tease out the consequences of litigation over time. Such research could provide a wealth of information on the efficacy of EEO practices and judicial interventions together with any unanticipated consequences the latter may have had for levels of trust between different groups of employees. It might also help map out the responses of dominant-group workers to equal opportunity policies, which remain as yet poorly understood (DiTomaso, 2000).

CONCLUSION

Much research on both the labor process and work organizations has manifested a disturbing tendency to assume that the principal axis of social conflict or differentiation in capitalist firms runs between managers and workers. Although this assumption has engendered a rich literature on the question of labor control and more recently on the transformation of work apace with the transition to postindustrial economies, it has blinded scholars to the ways racial and ethnic boundaries overdetermine the work process, lending its internal operations a complexity that class-based approaches cannot detect.

Literature on the linkage between racial difference and employment opportunity has suffered from its own limitations. As I have argued, the existing literature has focused mainly on the allocative aspects of work (distribution of workers into jobs) without directly engaging the nature of workplace relations, the structure of worker affiliations, and the patterns of interaction that occur across the color line. Consequently, the literature provides little empirically based knowledge regarding the social processes implicated in the reproduction of racial boundaries, patterns of occupational and organizational exclusion, or the formation of informal social networks within and across organizational lines.

These deficiencies in social scientific knowledge come at a time of rapid increases in immigration within much of the advanced capitalist world, continuing tensions between workers of different social origins and regions, and sharp increases in economic uncertainty owing to the expanding influence of neoliberal economic regimes and rapid technological change (V. Smith, 2001; Vallas, 1999). These conditions argue strongly in favor of new

approaches to work organizations that transcend the monochromatic assumptions of the labor process school while retaining its emphasis on the importance of cultural meanings and human agency as key elements of workplace life. Indeed, acknowledging the significance of such racial and ethnic ties arguably stands to enrich our understanding of the ways in which class distinctions are drawn in different regions, industries, and nation-states (Lamont, 1992, 2000).

Although much previous theorizing has presumed that class and racial ties typically operate as rival poles of affiliation (i.e., that racial allegiances are antithetical to class solidarity; Roediger, 1991; Vanneman & Cannon, 1987), closer inquiry may show this assumption to be untrue. Often, primordial solidarities of race and ethnicity may be conjoined or compounded with class, fueling a stronger sense of collective identification and investment than would otherwise be the case. Precisely these sorts of class/race combinations may underlie the resurgence of labor organizations in Southern California, for example, where immigrant textile workers (both Asian and Hispanic) have organized to resist sweatshop employment conditions (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000). Indeed, racial affiliations seem to play a subtle yet important role in the process of union formation and adaptation in ways that are only now becoming understood (Brueggemann & Boswell, 1998; Cornfield, 1989, 1993).

For a generation now, research on the labor process has defined managerial control over labor as a precarious and often problematic phenomenon whose achievement rests on the ability of employers to develop institutional means with which to shape workers' interests and capacities. In hindsight, many assumptions that informed this school of thought must now be seen as themselves highly problematic and none more so than the neglect of racial fault lines that so often cut across and refashion class boundaries. At a time marked by sharp cutbacks in support for affirmative action, a general collapse of working class organizations, and the growth of reactionary movements in many parts of the advanced capitalist (and developing) world, closer understanding of the cultural meanings and categories that dominant ethnic groups construct at work, and minority workers' responses to them, constitutes an urgent task for sociologists of work, organizations, and social inequality.

NOTES

1. Even the more important studies of race and work, such as those conducted by S. Collins (1989, 1997), Kirschenman and Neckerman (1991), and Lamont (2000), rely exclusively on interview data rather than on ethnographic data collected in situ.

2. For analyses of relations between White workers and their Hispanic or Asian counterparts, see Tang (1997, 2000) and Wu (1998). On the role of ethnic divisions in the Los Angeles garment industry, see Bonacich and Appelbaum (2000, pp. 135-199).

3. To say this is by no means to embrace the work of theorists like Steele (1998) or McWhorter (2000) whose arguments, to say the least, are sociologically naïve. It is merely to point toward the unanticipated consequences of subordinate-group resistance. Boundaries, in other words, are often drawn from both above and below. See Willis (1977) and Vallas (2001).

4. Although few advocates of such team systems have taken note of racial and ethnic dynamics, evidence indicates that racial heterogeneity among self-directed teams has direct bearing on worker commitment and team performance (Townsend & Scott, 2001; Vallas, 2003a).

5. Interestingly, similar dynamics exist in postcolonial African societies (see Burawoy, 1972; Webster et al., 2001). In Zambia and South Africa, for example, White managers were able to capitalize on informal support from skilled White workers in ways that were not available to their African counterparts, which produced a tangle of resentment and distrust that has reproduced the color line. For the sociology of work in South Africa, see Webster (2001).

6. See the Coca-Cola consent decree of 1999, which contains several important provisions that break new ground in handling corporate remedies for past discrimination. In this case, the company agreed to submit its diversity practices to direct review by an external board of experts who will monitor the firm's progress in achieving equal opportunity. See Unger (2000).

7. Survey research on racial and class attitudes (Bobo & Kluegel, 1990; Jackman & Jackman, 1983) has adopted innovative approaches toward the measurement of racial biases leading far beyond older Jim Crow–era items. But such approaches have not yet been incorporated into organizationally oriented surveys of racial inequality. In particular, Jackman and Jackman's (1983) measure of the "degree of warmth" across different groups represents an innovative approach toward the classical construct of social distance and would seem to hold particular potential on this score.

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