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## THE SOCIOECONOMIC POSITION OF THE LOUISIANA CREOLES: AN EXAMINATION OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC STRATIFICATION

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*This study suggests that the class-caste argument associated with the Wilson-Willie debate provides a fundamental line of division in theories of racial and ethnic stratification; it maintains that groups that combine minority statuses may be affected by both class and caste influences, a situation of "double jeopardy"; and it describes French-speaking Louisiana blacks, or Creoles, as a group that combines minority statuses. Analysis of Census data shows that race and Louisiana French ethnicity are each related to life chances and that ethnic inequality is primarily a matter of class characteristics, while racial inequality is primarily a matter of caste characteristics. There is an interaction between ethnicity and race, however; minority ethnicity shows a weaker relationship to household income for blacks than for whites. We suggest that this may be a consequence of the relative power of minority identities.*

In recent years, one of the major debates in the scholarly discussion of racial and ethnic inequality has been the extent to which this inequality is to be regarded as a matter of social class status or as a matter of caste status. William Julius Wilson, perhaps the best-known advocate of the class explanation, has argued that the subordination of minority groups was historically produced by the imposition of caste positions through racism, but that contemporary racial inequality is maintained by the socioeconomic situations of minority group members (Wilson, 1978; 1987). Charles V. Willie (1978; 1979; 1989; 1991), in response, has argued that racial inequality remains

a matter of caste: the life chances of minority group members, notably blacks, continue to be limited by ascribed status.

The task of explaining why socioeconomic inequality exists among categories of people is complicated by the fact that these categories may be relatively advantaged or disadvantaged for different reasons. First, the Wilson-Willie debate has focused on race, leaving open the question of when and to what extent caste-class explanations may be applied to other ascribed characteristics such as sex or ethnicity. Secondly, the task is further complicated by the fact that characteristics may overlap. The "double jeopardy" argument (Beale 1979) and the multiple hierarchy approach to stratification (Jeffries and Ransford 1980) have provided the conceptual background for the study of the compound effect of multiple variables on life chances and perceptions. However, limited empirical documentation and conflicting findings on the combined effects of race, sex, ethnicity, age, education, religion and social class have not yielded a clear understanding of the specific effects of particular variables.

In this study we focus on the combination of race and ethnicity and its effect on socio-economic status. When race and ethnicity overlap, which (if either) is the primary source of disadvantage? Is this disadvantage a matter of class position associated with each group membership, or is it a matter of some caste-class combination?

We attempt to address these issues by examining the situation of a little-studied American racial-ethnic group: the French-speaking blacks of Louisiana, commonly known to themselves and others as "Creoles." Using data from the 1990 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) of the U.S. Census, we identify the socioeconomic position of Creoles. After this, we look at possible reasons for this position and examine which possible influences on life chances appear to affect Creoles as a result of their racial identity and which appear to affect them as a result of their ethnic identity.

### **Explanations of Racial and Ethnic Stratification**

From the point of view of social class explanations of racial and ethnic stratification, the sources of inequalities among groups are to be sought in the histories and characteristics of groups, rather

than in the ascribed status of group members. Classic assimilation perspectives (Warner and Srole 1945; Gordon 1964), and "culture of poverty" approaches (Lewis 1959, 1965; Moynihan 1965) focus on the transmission or lack of transmission of normative traits among immigrants or minority groups to explain differences in social mobility.

Norms and values, however, are not the only conceivable source of disadvantage resulting from a history at the lower ranges of the socioeconomic continuum. Human capital approaches concentrate on the unequal distribution of skills and education to explain how class inequalities are reproduced across generations (Blau and Duncan 1967; Featherman and Hauser 1978; Cohn 1979).

William Julius Wilson has brought many of these social class approaches together into a compelling account of racial stratification. According to Wilson (1978), when immigrant minorities were being assimilated into the society and economy of the United States in the early twentieth century blacks were prevented from following a similar process by massive discrimination. After World War II, the racial barriers to this assimilation were progressively, although never completely, removed. The removal of barriers, however, did make upward mobility possible for blacks, producing a rising black middle class. The class structure of the United States had changed since the early twentieth century, though, and the urban factory jobs that had provided the first step on the socioeconomic ladder for immigrant groups had grown scarce. As a consequence, black urban communities in the late twentieth century were plagued by joblessness.

This class situation, in Wilson's formula, affected both the culture and the human capital situation of urban minorities. Since few men had jobs, as in the culture of poverty perspective, single female-headed families became common. Growing up in an environment of little economic opportunity, moreover, young minority members tended to assume that their own life chances were extremely limited and they had little motivation to acquire the skills and credentials needed for upward mobility.

Wilson's critics, and critics of class arguments in general, have argued that racial stratification continues to be a matter of externally imposed ascribed status, that is, of caste. These critics maintain that discrimination, not class position or class cultural traits, lies behind minority disadvantages in power and

resources. Massey and Denton (1993) have provided evidence that residential segregation has actually intensified during the period that, according to Wilson, the significance of race supposedly declined. They maintain that this segregation has resulted from intentional racial discrimination, and that segregation plays a major part in perpetuating racial inequality. Willie (1989) concludes, based on a review of statistical data from a variety of sources, that blacks continue to suffer from racially based disadvantages in income, education, and residential segregation.

Caste perspectives have generally focused on the situations of blacks in American society, but they may be applied to the situations of other groups. In his internal colonialism argument, Robert Blauner (1969) indicated that Native Americans and Mexican Americans, as well as blacks, could be legitimately seen as colonized by conquerors of European origin. Moore (1981) has also argued that, although much of American thought tends to see only blacks as occupying a "caste-like" situation, the situations of Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans are actually quite similar to those of blacks. Blauner (1969), however, suggested that many minority groups did not find themselves trapped in a permanent caste identity by majority group control and exploitation. Members of these minority groups were able to achieve upward mobility in American society.

Even caste theorists, then, argue that a class perspective can explain the life situations of some groups. Since, as we will suggest below, individuals may hold more than one group identity, then class and caste may not be mutually exclusive phenomena. Class and caste, in the complexity of social reality, can overlap and interact with each other. In order to examine how these two principles of stratification may be combined and related to each other, we will first discuss multiple minority status in general and then focus on a particular example of this type of status as it relates to Louisiana Creoles.

### **Explanations of Multiple Minority Status**

If a caste explanation does indeed apply to some minority groups and a class explanation to others, then a major task of research in ethnic and racial stratification is attempting to discern which explanation applies to which types of group

membership. Those who combine several minority identities may be affected, to varying extents, by both ascription and social class. Sociologists have paid some attention to the combination of identities and its consequences; Gordon (1964:51) proposed the concept of "ethclass", a subsociety "created by the intersection of the vertical stratifications of ethnicity with the horizontal stratifications of social class." Proponents of a multiple hierarchy approach to stratification view socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race and gender as "separate hierarchies, each affecting the distribution of power, privilege and prestige" (Ransford and Miller, 1983:46); the intersection of class, sex and race creates unique aggregates, "ethgenders", with different life chances and experiences.

The most fertile debate has come from the "double jeopardy" argument. It originally described the dual and negative impact of sexism and racism on black (Beale 1979) and minority women (Lindsay 1979). It has since then been expanded to include other variables (Sharpe and Abdel-Ghany 1996; Smith 1988). Studies now routinely consider the impact of age (Hammond, 1993; Simic 1993), ethnicity (Pak, Dion and Dion 1991; Sladen 1987), class (Lindsay 1979; Osmond *et al.* 1993), and place of residence (Irizarry and Appel 1986; Rich, Rich and Mullins 1995).

The inclusion of several variables has led to a reformulation of "double" jeopardy now conceptualized as triple, quadruple and "multiple jeopardy" (King 1988). This has prompted a methodological adjustment; the original proposition by feminist scholars of the compound impact of racial and sexual oppression on minority women has been refined to assess the specific effect of each variable as well as the mechanism at play in their combination. The focus has also shifted to the multiplicative rather than additive effects of race, sex and class; King (1988:47) writes: "the modifier 'multiple' refers not only to several, simultaneous oppressions but to the multiplicative relationships among ... three interdependent control systems." Despite the ongoing debate, little empirical documentation of the processes at play in, and consequences of, double jeopardy has taken place. The consequences of the combination of two or more social disadvantages are generally found to be negative (French 1978; Pak, Dion and Dion 1991) though some studies have highlighted the adaptive capabilities of individuals faced with multiple jeopardy (Simic 1991, 1993; Hammond 1995).

Attempts at measuring the relative impact of each social disadvantage have yielded ambiguous results. Studies have suggested that ascribed traits (caste) such as race and sex function as stronger basis for discrimination than class characteristics such as education. Findings by Sharpe and Abdel-Ghany (1996) suggest that wage differentials in the youth labor market are a factor of gender more than race. Using interview data to evaluate multiple status differences experienced by black and Jewish women in the corporate world, Zweigenhaft (1991) noted the smaller impact of differences in religion than differences in race and sex. However, Hammond (1995) concluded otherwise; she found that high school education had a greater influence than age, race or marital status on elderly women's self-reports of health.

Race and ethnicity have figured prominently in the expansion and discussion of the double jeopardy argument but the combination of racial and cultural disadvantages has not been thoroughly examined. Tienda (1989) found that both race and ethnicity influenced the social positions of various segments of the Hispanic population of the U.S., and that race constituted a greater barrier to upward mobility. Research on Louisiana's white French-speakers, Cajuns, suggested that cultural traits - speaking French- and class -level of educational attainment- accounted for differentials in household income more than Acadian ancestry (Henry and Bankston, 1997). The situation of Louisiana's black French-speakers offers the opportunity to evaluate the distinct impacts of both caste and class in social stratification.

### **Louisiana Creoles as a Multiple Minority**

We will now sketch a portrait of Louisiana Creoles from historical sources, 1990 Census data, and qualitative data from secondary sources and fieldwork conducted by one of the authors in 1981-82 and 1996-97. We acknowledge that the historical circumstances, exclusive association with Louisiana, and the continued rurality of Creoles may affect the applicability of this study to other American ethnic and racial groups. Nevertheless, Louisiana Creoles provide an original though not unique example of a combination of racial and cultural characteristics; in 1990, for example, 3.4% of Hispanics in the United States identified themselves as black and 1.4% identified themselves as Asian (Bureau of the Census 1992a:3).

In Louisiana the word *creole* has had a variety of meanings. The term has been used to characterize different social groups on the basis of place of birth, ancestry, race and culture. In addition to definitions based on such traits, the meaning of *creole* has varied with time and with changes in social structure (Dominguez 1986; Hall 1992; Tregle 1992). The emergence of new referents, shifts in denotation, and the continuing influence of older connotations have resulted in an accumulation of meanings since the term's inception late in the 17th century. Currently the term as used in New Orleans refers to a native-born person of racially-mixed heritage or a scion of the former white elite; outside of New Orleans and especially in the southwestern region of the state known as Acadiana, the term is mostly claimed by blacks with some French heritage.

Creolism can be regarded as a combination of the elements of race/ancestry and culture, two major basis for the ascription of minority status. In contemporary Southwest Louisiana, *creole* refers to those who have at least some African ancestry and to those who retain a dialect of French and distinctive cultural traits, including ethnic foods and music. The self-definition of Creoles reflects the duality of race and culture. One Creole woman from Lafayette, LA. explained,

A Creole is somebody from Louisiana who is black, speaks French, has a unique way of thinking and eating and who embraces certain religious values. (Cited in "Louisiane Ka Palé Kreyol", 1990:4)

The presence of French-speakers of color in Southwest Louisiana is due to the early settlement of *gens de couleur libres* and the emancipation of black slaves owned by French-speaking owners (Brasseaux, Fontenot et Oubre 1994; Dormon 1996; Oubre 1982). Despite their cultural closeness (both blacks and Creoles spoke a French-based idiom and adopted Catholicism), these groups were markedly different in terms of racial make-up, political status, wealth, education and prestige. Prior to the Civil War, Creoles of color were of mixed race, light-skinned freedmen, well-off landowners or craftsmen, literate and schooled in their own institutions, and emulating the European-centered culture of their white counterparts in the *ancienne population*. In a stark contrast, slaves were of purer African-descent and deprived of liberty and opportunity. The postbellum era brought drastic changes to, among others, the fortunes of Creoles of color; wartime destruction and postwar economic crisis resulted in

their economic demise as a wealthy landholding class (Brasseaux, Oubre & Fontenot 1994; Mills 1977; Schweninger 1996); emancipation and the Jim Crow laws of the 1890's relegated them to the low status of recently freed blacks. The distinction between Creoles of color and French- and Creole-speaking descendants of slaves was further blurred by the involvement of both groups in the Civil Rights movement and intermarriage.

Following the pattern of racial bipolarization imposed by the Americanization of Louisiana, Creoles were classified as blacks by whites; one informant reflected:

I lived with my grand-parents in Breaux Bridge and we spoke Creole. To be Creole was a code of conduct whose deep meaning was "you know your place", that is in relation to whites. For example, we knew which side of the sidewalk to be on around whites, how to address people, how to go in to a store. (Cited in "Louisiane Ka Palé Kreyol", 1990:4)

If Creoles of color were classified as blacks by whites, this racial identification was challenged by themselves and by blacks. Creoles of color continue to be defined not only by miscegenation but also by marginality. Historical evidence (Mills 1977) and ethnographic data (Woods 1972; Wood 1994) consistently indicate the liminal racial status of Creoles of color. "Whites think we're black and blacks think we're stuck-up," complained a young Creole woman (cited in Dormon 1992:621). A Creole activist recalled:

Well let me give you a story. There is a place called Fritel Cove. There everybody was light skinned. The whole family was light-skinned. They didn't mix with blacks; they were blacks but they didn't mix with other darker skinned blacks. And they even married kinfolks. A lot of my friends were darker than me. And we went to a school dance where they didn't want to let us in because my friends were too dark. (Cited in Lemenestrel, 1997:80)

French or Creole language appears as a pivotal characteristic of Creolism: "I speak Creole, I am Creole," said one. (personal communication, 1997). The language of the Creoles is a French-based idiom. By all accounts, Louisiana Creole is declining and has been replaced by international French as a marker of Creole identity (Dominguez 1986; Klinger 1992). Qualitative and quantitative data document the situation of diglossia found

among Acadiana Creoles. "I spoke Creole and French all my life," said an informant; "My dad spoke Creole, Cajun and French," commented another. Data from the 1990 U.S. Census show that blacks are almost 6 times more likely to report French (2.6% do) than Creole (.4%) as a language other than English spoken at home; also, .1% of blacks reported speaking Cajun French, the variant spoken by the descendants of the Acadian exiles (Bureau of the Census, 1992b).

A comparable situation is found among white Cajuns; they are 7.3 times more likely to report speaking French than Cajun. It has been explained by the reluctance of Cajuns to claim Cajun as their idiom because of its characterization as a "bad" or "broken" language. Even though French language use is declining so that a third of Louisianian claiming Acadian ancestry report speaking French at home (Bureau of the Census, 1992b), a relation with the language is still considered a major ethnic marker of Cajunism and a criteria of self-definition by Cajuns (Dubois & Melançon 1996; Trépanier 1991). The argument can be extended to Creoles. Thus, it appears legitimate to consider use of a French-based idiom as a basis for a minimal operationalization of *creole* as a distinctive racial/ethnic combination.

### Research Questions

Our goals in this exploratory study are to answer the following questions: (1) Do race and Louisiana French ethnicity each have associations with life chances? By life chances, we mean what is generally referred to as socioeconomic status, i.e. access to material resources and to the prestige associated with material resources (2) If they do, can we attribute these associations with life chances to indicators of class explanations of social position, or does it appear that the association is a matter of racial or ethnic ascription? We take race to refer to social categories distinguished on the basis of physical appearance, such as black, white, and Asian. Ethnicity, we take to refer to social categories distinguished on the basis of cultural characteristics, such as language. Ascription refers to the imposition of a status on members of a group by the larger society purely as a result of group membership. (3) What is the result of combining minority race and minority ethnicity? Is the combination additive; that is, does each status have a separate association with life chances? Is

the combination multiplicative; that is, is there an interaction between racial minority status and ethnic minority status?

### **Data and Methods**

Our data are taken from the 5% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) of the 1990 Census of Population and Housing (Bureau of the Census, 1992b). We also use the census categories as the basis for our operational definitions of race (black or white), ethnicity (ancestry and language other than English spoken at home) and life chances; this concept mostly encompasses dimensions of the socio-economic status (household income, employment, type of occupation, level of education, marital status).

Using census data does involve some limitations, and these should be acknowledged at the outset. The data do not have the richness and detail that one might find in a survey constructed specifically to examine one's own questions of interest. Race and language use are simply answers to questions on the census, and these answers do not indicate the degree of self-identification with a race or an ethnicity. At the same time, however, one can place a great deal of confidence in the representative nature of census data: results that appear in the PUMS may be safely generalized to the Louisiana population. Using qualitative data in conjunction with the census, moreover, can help to provide context and richness of detail.

We begin by examining various indicators of the social situations of English-speaking whites, French-speaking whites, English-speaking blacks, and French-speaking blacks. This will enable us to look at the socioeconomic ranking of these four groups. We present the median household income of each of these groups. Next we look at educational levels in each group, recoding education from the 13 categories in the original data record (Bureau of the Census, 1992c:5-19) to three categories of attainment. We also look at another indicator of educational standing, which is also a measure of assimilation: fluency in English. This, we feel, is a critical variable when considering non-English speaking groups. Language ability is an essential aspect of the classic assimilation perspective (Warner and Srole, 1945; Gordon, 1964) that we have identified above as a social class explanation of ethnic stratification. We then consider occupational level. This gives us the three basic elements of

socioeconomic status: income, education, and occupation; and it enables us to see if we can find a coherent ranking of racial and ethnic combinations.

To look at life chances more fully, we also consider the percentage in each group unemployed and the percentage in each group not in the labor force. We examine percentages in each group living below the poverty level and percentages receiving public assistance, in order to obtain insight into the likelihood that members of these racial/ethnic combinations will be found in the most disadvantaged economic positions. Since assimilation is an issue for the French speakers, who may be somewhat older than other Louisianians, we have also looked at age differences among the four groups. Similarly, French Louisianians, both black and white, tend to be a rural population, so we have considered variations in the likelihood of residing in a non-metropolitan area. Finally, we consider variations in household structure and marital status.

After establishing some of the major differences among the racial and ethnic combinations, we then use OLS regression to try to identify the major predictors of life chances. Our dependent variable in this analysis is household income. We enter the independent variables in a number of theoretically meaningful steps. First, we enter only the racial/ethnic combinations, leaving white English speakers as the reference category, to establish a theoretical base: economic differences among the three groups when we take no explanation of the differences into consideration. Second, we enter age and sex, to see if any disadvantages of French speakers may be attributed to the fact that they tend to be older and, consequently, that more of them are female. Third, we bring in a central "culture of poverty" indicator: family structure. We consider whether the association of income with race or French-speaking ethnicity, or both, changes when we consider variations in family structure. Fourth, we look at two residential variables: residential stability, defined as living in the same Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) for at least five years, and non-metropolitan residence. PUMAs are defined as geographical areas with at least 100,000 inhabitants. In Louisiana PUMAs consist of one to three parishes (counties).

Finally, we look at the extent to which racial/ethnic differences in household income can be explained by measures of assimilation and human capital. We enter fluency in English in a fifth step, since this is a critical indicator of both assimilation and

human capital. Questions such as language ability also suggest that explanations of the positions of minority group members may be complicated by specific regional and cultural characteristics that have been largely unrecognized in the Wilson-Willie debates. Next, we bring in educational attainment. We enter educational attainment after English fluency because advanced English language ability is, bilingual education notwithstanding, usually a precondition for educational advancement. In the seventh step, we enter the occupational levels of those under consideration. Since education and occupation are central class explanations of social position, we should see most economic differences among the groups disappear by this seventh step, if the differences are to be explained by class. However, we do, in our last step, also look at current job status by considering whether individuals are employed and whether they are participating in the labor force. The major presentation of a class explanation of racial stratification, offered by Wilson, places joblessness at the heart of this stratification. Therefore, if Wilson's account does resolve the issue of racial or ethnic stratification, we should see that racial or ethnic inequalities disappear or are greatly reduced when we control for job status.

It would be difficult to measure, using census data, the extent to which inequalities are due to ascribed status, or caste. However, if we still see large income differences even after we control for the major socioeconomic predictors included in this analysis, then we have strong evidence against a class explanation. This would indicate that there is an association between an ascribed racial or ethnic status and economic situation, and that this association is not a matter of social class.

## Results

Table 1 (see page 275) looks at selected socioeconomic characteristics of English- and French-speaking white Louisianians and English- and French-speaking black Louisianians over 16 years of age. Income differences show a clear economic hierarchy among these four groups. French-speaking whites have a median household income that is \$10,000 per year lower than that of English-speaking whites. English-speaking blacks, in turn, have a median yearly income that is \$5,600 lower than the median income of white French speakers. Black French speakers are at

the bottom of the economic hierarchy, with a median income \$3,800 less than English-speaking blacks.

The differences in educational attainment are a bit more complicated, since they do not show a straightforward hierarchy with black French speakers at the bottom and white English speakers at the top. French speakers of both races show lower rates of educational attainment than either of the English-speaking groups, with lower rates of college graduation for French-speaking whites than for English-speaking blacks. All but the English-speaking whites have low rates of college completion. These results suggest that while human capital, a social class predictor of socioeconomic position, is related to racial and ethnic stratification, it does not explain why blacks are disadvantaged relative to whites. Moreover, since there is less of a gap in education between Francophone blacks and Anglophone blacks than there is between Francophone whites and Anglophone whites, it appears that the connection between Louisiana French ethnicity and educational attainment is more tenuous for blacks than it is for whites. Fluency in English is, predictably, a matter of French-speaking ethnicity, rather than of race.

To show occupational differences, we look only at those who have occupations and in Table 1, for clarity and economy, we show only percentages of those in the occupations that are at the "top" and the "bottom" of the SES hierarchy. Again, we see a linear ranking of the four groups: English-speaking whites are the most likely to be in high level white-collar jobs and French-speaking blacks are the least likely to be in these jobs; English-speaking whites are the least likely to be in low level blue-collar jobs and French-speaking blacks are the most likely. Here, however, we note that the differences between the two black categories are quite small, especially in the white-collar jobs. Also, a majority of blacks, whether French- or English-speaking are laborers, farmworkers, or unskilled service workers. This may provide some initial evidence of a racial caste system, since English-speaking blacks exhibit slightly higher levels of educational attainment than French-speaking whites, even though the former have both lower incomes and lower occupational positions than the latter.

Blacks have higher rates of unemployment than whites do. It is interesting that the French-speakers, within each racial group, are more likely to be employed than English-speakers, although the

difference for whites is too small to be statistically significant. A majority of French-speakers of each race were out of the labor market, but this may be a function of age.

In both poverty rates and rates of public assistance reception we see the same racial and ethnic ranking that we saw in income: white French-speakers are more likely to be poor and to receive public assistance than white English-speakers, black English-speakers have higher poverty and public assistance participation rates than either of the white categories, and black French-speakers are the most likely both to be poor and to receive public assistance. When we look at age, we see that there are young people among the French Louisiana ethnics, but that these ethnics do tend to be older than other Louisianians. Residence outside of metropolitan areas is also a Louisiana French characteristic: about one-third of those in each French category have non-metropolitan residences, compared to about one-quarter of the others.

Household types appear to be distinguished along racial rather than ethnic lines: whites are more likely than blacks to live in married couple families, while blacks are more likely to live in single female-headed families, although French-speaking blacks have higher rates of living in married couple families than English-speaking blacks do. Similarly, we see that the probability of being married is much higher for whites than it is for blacks. Since, the French ethnics do tend to be older than the others, it makes sense that we find more widowed individuals among them.

We see, then, that race and ethnicity together create an economic hierarchy, with English-speaking whites at the top of an income and occupational continuum and French-speaking blacks at the bottom. However, it would be difficult to say that this continuum results from human capital factors, since both education and English fluency are primarily connected to ethnicity rather than to race. We have noted that although English-speaking blacks tend to earn less than French-speaking whites, the former actually have higher levels of educational attainment and English fluency. Household structure also varies primarily along racial lines, which might suggest that the racial economic disparities might be related to variations in family structure, such as a lack of stable two-earner families, rather than to variations in human capital assets.

These results indicate that elements of both the class-type explanation of stratification argued by Wilson and the caste-type explanation advanced by Willie may be relevant to the socioeconomic position of those who combine racial and ethnic minority statuses. We turn now to regression analysis in order to attempt to identify more precisely what factors are related to socioeconomic differences between racial groups and what factors are related to socioeconomic differences between Louisiana French ethnic groups.

Table 2 (see page 277) examines selected predictors of income differences among the three groups. When we do not control for any other variables, white French speakers, on the average earn about \$10,040 per year less than white English speakers do. This is roughly the same as the median income in Table 1. Black English speakers earn about \$16,800 per year less than the reference group, and Black French speakers earn about \$20,370 less per year. Again, we see an income hierarchy composed of both minority race and minority ethnicity.

Step 2 brings in age and sex, enabling us to look at whether the income differences may be due to the fact that the French ethnics tend to be older and therefore more likely to be female. The racial gap remains, but the ethnic gap diminishes very slightly. Step 3 enters family structure, a central "culture of poverty" indicator. Both those in single-male families and single-female families earn significantly less than those in the reference category, two-partner households. However, while taking household type into account narrows the racial gap slightly, the household income of black English speakers continues to be \$14,570 lower than white English speakers and the household income of black French speakers \$17,960 lower.

Taking our residential variables into consideration, in Step 4, reduces the ethnic gap only slightly and has little effect on the racial gap. In Step 5, we enter English fluency. This narrows the gap between the majority of whites and the French whites by \$1600 per year. Further, while the gap between French-speaking blacks and other blacks decreases from a difference of \$2870 per year to a difference of only \$790 per year. Step 6 brings in another human capital variable, educational attainment. This narrows the difference between English-speaking whites and English-speaking blacks by \$4250, suggesting that educational background is much more important than household structure in accounting for economic position, since household structure



only narrowed this difference by \$2370. Educational attainment also appears to be a major factor in accounting for the ethnic gap. It has the greatest impact of any variable in reducing the difference between French whites and other whites. Moreover, once we take into account the educational limitations associated with Louisiana French ethnicity, the French-speaking blacks, the Creoles, actually have higher incomes than other blacks do.

In the final step, we introduce unemployment and being out of the labor force as predictors of household income. If racial differences in life chances were at core a matter of class-based joblessness, as Wilson claims, we should see the racial gap largely disappear at this point. It should be noted that we have already controlled for single-parent family structure, a social form that Wilson argues results from joblessness and exacerbates the negative consequences of joblessness. Being out of work temporarily or permanently, however, has little impact either on the racial gap or the ethnic gap.

It appears that insofar as social class characteristics can account for black-white economic differences, these characteristics would be less a matter of unavailable jobs than of inadequate training. Moreover, even after we have accounted for the principal elements of a social class explanation of racial inequality, a substantial racial gap remains.

For Louisiana French ethnicity, also, educational limitations offer the chief class explanation of economic disadvantage. Here, we note that the ethnic gap between French-speaking whites and English-speaking whites remains, but has been greatly reduced by controlling for education. For blacks, taking differences in educational attainment into consideration not only accounts for French-English difference, it reverses it. We note also that even in Step 1, the ethnic gap for Louisiana blacks was much smaller than the ethnic gap for whites. This may be partially a function of the fact that these represent distinctive, although culturally related, varieties of French ethnicity: white Cajuns and black Creoles. However, a more likely explanation may have to do with the relative power of minority identities in determining life chances. Being black is, our evidence suggests, an ascribed status with a powerful negative impact on economic opportunity; any additional minority status is secondary to this primary status and draws little additional discriminatory treatment. For whites, since they have no significantly detrimental racial identification, accented English or other

cultural markers are the only bases for discrimination. This "primary minority status" explanation is, of course, only speculation and requires further substantiation.

### **Conclusion**

We can now answer each of our three research questions. Race and Louisiana French ethnicity are each related to life chances. As a consequence, together they create a hierarchy, with the white English speakers, who have no minority status, at the top and the black French speakers, who have a double minority status, at the bottom. Second, class approaches do apply, to some extent, to both the racial gap and the ethnic gap. There is, then, some basis for Wilson's argument that contemporary minority group disadvantages are products of class characteristics. However, the evidence supports a version of a class approach to racial inequality that is markedly different from Wilson's theory, the dominant one among class approaches. Educational deficiency, not unemployment, appears to be the chief identifiable factor in black-white income differences. Further, single-parent household structure, a situation that Wilson links to joblessness and that culture of poverty theorists have placed at the center of their accounts, is a much weaker predictor than education of racial inequality in income.

Even after all of the major social class indicators are taken into consideration, though, English-speaking blacks still have household incomes over \$9,000 per year lower than English-speaking whites. While there may be subtle matters of social class that we cannot detect from census data, the magnitude of the continuing racial gap strongly suggests that ascribed status remains a primary basis of racial inequality. This finding provides support for the Willie side of the Wilson-Willie debate. The fact that class factors do account for part of the racial gap in income, though, suggests that both ascription and limitation of opportunities for achievement must be taken into consideration in theoretical models of ethnic stratification.

Ethnic inequality among these groups appears to be chiefly a matter of social class. Once again, education accounts for much of the gap in income: educational attainment alone accounts for 36% of the difference between English-speaking whites and French-speaking whites, and educational attainment plus

differences in English fluency account for 52% of this difference. For blacks, taking these two human capital characteristics into consideration does not simply reduce the ethnic gap; it reverses the gap.

In answering the third question, we have found an intriguing form of interaction between race and ethnicity. In general, race and ethnicity have effects that are additive: an income hierarchy results from adding the effects of race and French ethnicity together, but a minority French ethnicity does not intensify the impact of minority race. Instead, we have seen that minority French ethnicity has a weaker connection to the economic situation of blacks than to that of whites. We have suggested that this may be a consequence of the relative power of minority identities: individuals may be most affected by the minority identity that has the greatest social significance. Thus, blacks, regardless of ethnicity, may be affected most by being black. Whites, on the other hand, who have no such powerful racial identification, may be primarily affected by accent or other cultural markers.

In this study we have looked only at a single combination of race and ethnicity. It is possible that other combinations may have other outcomes, so we feel that research on a variety of multiple minorities is needed. For example, researchers should look at black Puerto Ricans to determine how their life chances are affected by being black and by being Hispanic. If researchers looking at other groups find results similar to those in this study, then it may be possible to generalize that social class is a primary basis of ethnic stratification in the United States, but only a secondary basis of racial stratification. Further, the analysis of census data can tell us economic outcomes, but it yields little information about the processes by which membership in social groups yields economic advantage or disadvantage. For this reason, our study needs to be supplemented by extensive fieldwork into how black French-speaking Louisianians understand their own complex statuses and into how others define and reify these statuses.

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**Table 1. Selected Socioeconomic Characteristics of Adult English-speaking Whites, French-speaking Whites, English-speaking Blacks, and French-speaking Blacks in Louisiana.**

	Whites		Blacks	
	English	French	English	French
Median HH income (\$)	30000.00	20000.00	14396.00	10552.50
Education (%)				
< HS	23.4	51.4	46.6	69.4
HS grad	58.2	41.7	45.4	25.4
Col. grad	18.4	6.9	8.1	5.2
Fluent in English (%)	99.0	70.1	99.5	63.6
Occupation <sup>1</sup> (%)				
Professional, managerial, technical	26.6	18.6	14.6	13.2
Laborers, Farmworkers, unskilled service workers	22.8	32.9	51.2	58.2
Unemployed (%)	3.8	2.8	10.4	7.7
Not in Labor force <sup>1</sup> (%)	38.3	55.1	44.2	56.3
Below poverty (%)	12.1	19.7	39.9	46.0
Receives public assistance (%)	3.2	7.0	14.8	20.4
Age (%)				

<sup>1</sup> Only those with occupations are included in the calculation of these percentages. Since only occupations with the highest and lowest socioeconomic status rankings are presented here, percentages do not sum to 100%.

16-30	29.4	10.6	35.6	19.3
30+50	38.2	31.2	36.8	30.9
50+	32.4	58.3	27.7	49.8
Nonmetropolitan residence	24.7	35.8	25.9	33.0

Table 1 (continued)

	English	French	English	French
Household type (%)				
Married couple	73.6	72.9	45.9	52.3
Female-headed	16.8	18.8	41.9	35.3
Male-headed	9.5	8.3	12.2	12.4
Marital Status (%)				
Married	63.7	68.8	37.0	47.1
Divorced/separated	9.7	7.9	16.0	13.9
Widowed	7.2	14.5	9.9	15.9
Single	18.9	8.7	37.0	23.2
N	95437	10974	39090	1674

of Household Income.

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7
White French speaker <sup>1</sup>	-10039.48** (291.68)	-8694.33** (293.90)	-8575.78** (291.24)	-7867.93** (289.73)	-6235.42** (312.15)	-2649.60** (297.64)	-2727.61** (671.85)
Black English speaker	-16790.04** (173.33)	-16946.04** (172.96)	-14573.71** (177.41)	-14550.97** (176.37)	-14615.11** (176.32)	-10367.09** (107.63)	-9397.80** (169.73)
Black French speaker	-20368.45** (714.25)	-19380.57** (711.75)	-17965.76** (705.79)	-17418.93** (700.29)	-15405.90** (714.46)	-8657.50** (680.28)	-8429.68** (671.85)
Age		-120.05** (4.15)	-160.89** (4.18)	-157.87** (4.18)	-154.99** (4.18)	-53.97** (4.04)	-4.55 (4.22)
Sex		-3036.68** (149.88)	-3570.48** (151.77)	-3561.45** (150.55)	-3562.35** (150.45)	-3746.92** (142.83)	-2298.25** (144.15)
Single male family			-7864.83** (385.79)	-7948.89** (382.83)	-7868.73** (382.63)	-6365.41** (363.41)	-5800.85** (359.04)
Single female family			-13311.19** (265.59)	-13336.36** (263.48)	-13321.08** (263.31)	-11726.97** (250.27)	-10865.95** (248.14)
Residential stability				3354.94** (313.40)	3111.62** (313.68)	5980.14** (298.62)	5756.63** (295.26)
Nonmetropolitan residence				-8163.20** (168.30)	-8215.43** (168.23)	-6241.18** (160.44)	-5727.38** (158.65)
Fluent English					5844.73** (417.60)	2459.86** (397.30)	2153.67** (392.37)
Educational attainment						8355.35** (65.19)	6376.22** (73.03)
Occupational level							1866.82** (50.97)
Unemployed							-6533.18** (314.33)
Out of labor force							-5133.04** (176.95)
N	149,763	149,763	149,763	149,763	149,763	149,763	149,763
Intercept	36326.07** (92.55)	43096.27** (211.90)	46104.34** (218.73)	44851.16** (348.69)	39223.73** (532.09)	18088.22** (531.34)	18077.38** (533.36)
R2	.064	.072	.089	.103	.105	.193	.213

\* p < .05  
 \*\* p < .01

<sup>1</sup> English-speaking whites used as the reference category.