The Effects of Immigrant Diversity and Ethnic Competition on Collective Conflict in Urban America: An Assessment of Two Moments of Mass Migration, 1869–1924 and 1965–1993

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IMMIGRATION AND CONFLICT IN THE UNITED STATES

While national mythology hails the United States as a country of well-integrated and assimilated immigrants, historical reality offers a very different account. Indeed, American national history has been marked by persistent episodes of ethnic collective conflict, exclusionary movements, and racial violence.¹ The mid-nineteenth century Know-Nothing movement, the anti-Chinese mobilization of the 1880s, turn-of-the-century nativism, the 1920s revitalization of the KKK, and the more recent “English Only” movement are but a few examples of social movements that sought to exclude immigrants. The existence of these movements offers a vivid counterpoint to national folklore, suggesting instead that contentious race relations characterize the American experience.

Just as the national mythology remains underexamined, so too do the common assumptions about the effects of immigration on American society. In particular, the relationship between immigration flows and racial or ethnic collective action remains both under-theorized and largely unexamined. In one promising line of investigation, the researcher found that surges of immigration from Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe increased rates of ethnic unrest at the turn of the century.² However, these new immigrants were not the central targets of ethnic conflict during this period. Furthermore, other research suggests that around the turn of the twentieth century, immigrants from a variety of countries assimilated to American culture, language, and citizenship. By the mid-twentieth century, the offspring of these immigrants seemed indistinguishable in measures of attainment when compared to the offspring of native-born or English-speaking immigrants.³ Are these processes of immigration and assimilation of diverse groups also related to patterns of
ethnic conflict? And if so, does this relationship hold across the past century of American race relations? To date, no one has examined these questions systematically with data on ethnic conflict over a long period of American history. This article takes up this challenge.

This article focuses on the relationship among immigration, diversity, and racial and ethnic collective mobilization in urban America in two distinct periods of immigration, 1869–1924 and 1965–1993. Building upon competitive perspectives of ethnic collective action and employing event history methods, we evaluate first the extent to which the size and ethnic diversity of these flows facilitates ethnic conflict. We offer an explanation of these patterns consistent with competition theory that can explain why nonwhites (both persons of African and Asian descent) were the main targets of these attacks. Finally, we have collected and analyzed data on ethnic conflict from the two peak periods of immigration in American history in order to evaluate the usefulness of our explanation.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON ETHNIC CONFLICT

The fact that episodes of ethnic violence followed in the wake of the first large wave of immigration in the United States seems to indicate that these two trends may be related. Indeed, there are good reasons to suspect that immigration escalated racial tensions. For instance, from 1877 to 1914, two thirds of all conflicts targeted the African American population. This group was disproportionately victimized by attacks that included beatings, lynchings, and firebombings of the houses of black residents. But, to be sure, African Americans were not the sole victims of ethnic attacks. Chinese, Japanese, and other immigrants were attacked, and even more of them were excluded from various citizenship rights, including the rights to own property, vote, be buried in the United States, and union memberships. Thus, the timing of peaks in immigration and conflict seem to coincide.

But doubts arise about this explanation when we examine the targets of ethnic conflict from this period. We know that while the majority of immigrants who arrived in the decades around the turn of the century were from Southern and Eastern Europe, these same immigrants were not the central targets of conflict during the peak periods of influx. How can we explain this apparent discrepancy?

In order to untangle this problem, we turn to competition theories of race and ethnic relations. Competition theories suggest that dynamics of
ethnic identities and collective action change over time with shifts in the composition of the population. We argue that in the first wave (from 1869–1924), immigrants reshaped America's ethnic national identity in fundamental ways that reinforced the existing white/nonwhite dichotomy of race. During the second wave of immigration (1965–1993), we argue that the dynamics of ethnic conflict have changed so that immigration by itself is no longer the main precipitant to conflict. Rather, in this second stage, the diversity of incoming immigrants provokes conflict more than the sheer size of immigration. Somewhat paradoxically, we are arguing that the diversity of immigration precipitated a renewed importance of the white/nonwhite boundary line.

But why did this dual caste line triumph? In raising this question, we are implicitly suggesting that a dual caste system based on race, while historically institutionalized, was not the only possible outcome of increasing immigrant diversity. We suggest that other group cleavages based on religion, nationality, or class might have dominated. Why didn't multiple categories emerge that combined race/ethnic/class characteristics, as they did in other countries? To answer this question we offer an explanation that links these historical themes to sociological theories of ethnic and race relations.

**ETHNIC COMPETITION AND THE PERIOD OF RACIAL CONSOLIDATION**

Our key argument is that mechanisms of competition reshaped ethnic boundaries in ways that reinforced a white/nonwhite color line. Adopting this theoretical perspective allows us to make sense out of these apparent contradictions regarding the composition of immigration flows and its impact on racial conflict. We offer the argument that immigration and ethnic diversity reorganized and reshaped ethnic boundaries that allowed racial consolidation to take place. The ethnic attacks on nonwhites reinforced the dual white/black boundary. We argue that ethnic violence is a dramatic manifestation of this same process of racial consolidation.

Competition theories suggest that as the diversity of the ethnic population increases, the relative importance of any one small-scale dialect, nationality, or cultural identity decreases in importance. Over time, a highly diversified immigrant population came to identify (and be identified) primarily as members of the white community. This is not to say that these identities disappeared entirely, only that the larger white bound-
ary increased in salience, while the small-scale or national identities declined in salience. Thus, the diversity of immigrants encourages assimilation processes within the advantaged “white” population. Our point here is that the familiar notion of these groups as distinctly “white ethnicities” was not a foregone conclusion in 1890. Instead, our argument is that this was forged by changes in the political and national context of race. Here we examine the extent to which these changes were propelled by the size and ethnic diversity of waves of immigration.

We argue that the three processes of immigration, ethnic diversity, and racial conflict against nonwhites initiated a pattern of racial consolidation. In particular, we argue that surges in immigration and the diversity of ethnic immigrants initiated competition and conflict over existing resources. In attempting to identify with the advantaged white population, immigrants reinforced the salience of a distinctly dual color caste line.

To the extent that ethnic competition is present, violence against nonwhite targets becomes more likely. Thus, racial consolidation in combination with competition produced collective action along a particular boundary marker based on race (in contrast with other markers, such as language, nationality, class, or religion). 7

This dimension of our argument suggests that racial mobilization against nonwhites resulted from an increase in competition caused by rising ethnic diversity. If this argument holds, the causes of events involving different ethnic/racial populations ought to differ. So too should the empirical relationship between location of destination of immigrants and the incidents of anti-white attacks.

A wide variety of historical sources support this claim. Despite the fact that many groups—Jews and Chinese among others—have been the target of vicious campaigns, some have argued that violence has been more systematically directed against African Americans than any other group in the United States. Our contention here is that “persons of color,” or racial minorities more broadly, are more subject to conflict and attack during both periods. We anticipate, then, a racial pattern of collective action which became institutionalized in the early period and which remains in place throughout the century.

If the ethnic composition of immigration matters, it seems reasonable to expect that class composition matters as well. Competition theories hold that an increase in the supply of unskilled laborers constitutes a major threat to the livelihood of native workers. This is because workers who are willing and eager to work at any price could undercut existing
wages. Split labor market theory offers the view that ethnic antagonism arose as unskilled workers precipitated competition. In response, native workers organized a wide variety of exclusionary methods to keep these new workers out. When this failed, violent collective action took place.\textsuperscript{8}

Immigration that increased the supply of low-wage workers might be expected to mobilize native-born workers even further. The split labor market theory informs us that when the proportion of immigrants who are laborers is high, competition intensifies.\textsuperscript{9} To maintain their standard of living, native-born workers or workers from earlier immigrant waves might reasonably be expected to mobilize in order to maintain their hard-won benefits in the workplace.

Our next task will be to evaluate this competition argument with data from two peak periods of immigration. We gathered information about the event histories of ethnic and racial conflict to assess the effect of immigration, ethnic diversity, and inter-ethnic (or racial) competition on the rate of ethnic and racial collective protest and conflict in urban America in two distinct periods, 1869 to 1924 and 1965 to 1993. Our argument also requires that we examine the effect of changes in the size of immigration flows and ethnic diversity on the level of ethnic conflict.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

*Historical Context.* The logic behind our choice of time frame is straightforward. We have selected two modern periods of globalization and mass migration: two moments where the flows of people, money and ideas across national boundaries were unprecedented.\textsuperscript{10} Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, in both periods the effects of immigration are the subject of considerable popular and public policy debate. Both folk and social scientific wisdom have generally posited an important link between these surges in immigration and ethnic unrest. Here we add a counterintuitive notion to this common sense belief, by trying to explain why mainly white immigrants raised rates of attacks on non-white residents in urban settings.

Our study begins in 1869, just after the Burlingame Treaty encouraging Chinese immigration to the United States and a year before the 1870 Naturalization Act. This act extended United States citizenship to persons of African descent, but in doing so, it ushered in a century-long debate about the racial and ethnic character of Americans. The late 1860s were a period of rapid economic expansion, especially in urban centers where immigration was still promoted in many parts of the
United States. During this period, the country’s borders remained tentatively open and faith in immigrant assimilability still dominated popular and social scientific beliefs.11

Between 1869 and 1924 these ideas would shift dramatically, as xenophobic movements and anti-black sentiment rose throughout the country. Mounting nativism and aggressive anti-immigrant sentiment led to the passage of twenty-four different immigration acts over this period. The final act, the 1924 National Origins Immigration Act, was an explicit attempt to buttress the Anglo heritage and Anglo lineage of the American people. The 1924 act dramatically curtailed the flow of immigrants to the United States, and the debates that surrounded it reaffirmed an ideology of race differences in American society.12

By the end of World War I, population diversity was generally understood to be a significant threat to the nation. Discussions throughout the interwar years warned against the dangers of a “mongrel” society. In this context, it is not surprising that diverse immigration was thought to represent a direct threat to the “American nation” and the “American spirit.” Homogeneity was understood to present a cure to social ills. “If that does not exist, there can not be homogeneousness of race; there can not be homogeneousness of purpose; there cannot be homogeneousness of ideals; and there cannot be a common patriotism.”13 In 1920, Congressman Box and others feared for the “de-Americanization” of the United States and the division of allegiances through the development of a “hyphenated population.”14 In the post-World War I context, hyphenation signaled a lack of allegiance. To consider oneself Irish-American or German-American was to commit “moral treason.” As naive as it might seem, it was not until after World War I that legislators fully realized the extent to which immigrant populations were actually quite distinct and not necessary fully “Americanized.” Mere habitation in the United States would not automatically assimilate diverse peoples. Nation-building and the maintenance of national boundaries would have to be a “deliberate formative process, not an ... accidental arrangement.”15

**Immigration Policy.** Images of threats from immigration can be analyzed directly in the political debates over immigration.16 While the first immigration period is often described as an era of regulation and restriction, the second period is often characterized as an era of policy liberalization.17 The second period begins with a dramatic shift in immigration policy: the erosion of the old national quota system, which concluded the first period. A healthy economy, coupled with the shifting national attitudes reinforced by civil rights, put immigration reform at the top of
many political agendas. The 1965 Immigration Act sought to directly rid policy of any hint of racial prejudice by creating a new standard for admission. "You judge a man by his worth and not by his birth. We honor the uniqueness of a man, the boundaries of his mind and his soul, not the geographical boundaries of his place of birth." To be sure, there was not complete agreement on the abolition of racial and ethnic immigration and naturalization exclusions. "There is no question of 'superior' or 'inferior' races . . . [but] Certain groups not only do not fuse easily, but consistently endeavor to keep alive their racial distinctions when they settle among us. They perpetuate the hyphen which is but another way of saying that they seek to create foreign blocs in our midst." Concerns also emerged that the United States was acting out of some misperceived sense of international norms. Citing the facts that neither Japan nor Switzerland allow any immigration, that Britain even limits access by its own colonists, that Israel has a Jews-only policy, Liberia has a no-whites statute, and Australia has a no-blacks act, a well-publicized survey concluded that the United States had misjudged the global liberalization of immigration controls and misperceived a loosening of borders. Senator McClellan, noting that discrimination "is a natural compulsion of the human kind," reminded the Senate that discriminating tastes in food and clothing were considered admirable traits. He implied that attempts to rid policy of any hint of discrimination were utopian. The significance of the act lay not in whether or not race was eradicated from policy but in the fact that explicit race could no longer be defended as a reason for or against admission. It is this historic moment of opening, if not welcoming, which marks the beginning of the second period.

The 1965 Immigration Act was followed in this period by some forty-seven other, largely minor, changes in immigration legislation. Other significant reforms were seen only in the 1986 and 1990 acts. Indeed, the 1990 Act has been nicknamed the "Diversity Act." Despite what appeared to be mounting popular concerns surrounding immigration, both acts constituted further liberalization of immigration policy. It seemed to some observers that migration to the United States had never been easier. By the end of this second period, annual immigration averaged more than 850,000 per year. Despite a flourishing economy in the 1990s, there is some scattered evidence of a return to more restrictive immigration rules. The 1996 Welfare Act for the first time limited social provisions to some immigrant populations. English-only referenda characterized many state-level elections. While not directly tack-
ling the issue of population flows, these events suggest that the United States has become an increasingly hostile environment for immigrants once again.

Thus in each of the two historical moments of mass migration, the United States has embraced very different policies. In the first era, we see swift measures to both limit surges in immigration and winnow the increasing diversification of immigrant flows. In the second period, we see a policy orientation that would be more open to a wide array of immigrant groups. Indeed, this constitutes a moment where—at least rhetorically—diversity is celebrated. In one period, diversity is deemed problematic; in the other, diversity is deemed an asset. How population diversity and the diversification of immigrant flows impact ethnic and racial collective mobilization will be the heart of the analyses which follow. We have now set the stage for asking our last question: Have the dynamics of ethnic and racial mobilization changed over the last century in America? In the next section we discuss our strategy for gathering and assessing the evidence on this question.

Sources of Information on Conflict Events. Following an established tradition in event analysis, our research design uses information from daily microfilm accounts from the *New York Times*. Our coding protocol tracks all instances of racial or ethnic collective action which occurred in any one of the seventy-six of the largest American urban areas in two periods: 1869–1924 and 1965–1993.23

We define racial or ethnic collective action as the public expression of racially- or ethnically-based grievances against a given ethnic or racial target. We gather information on a conflict event only if prejudices are carried out as public and collective displays of anger. It is important to recognize that we are not claiming to have captured the full universe of street actions that involve different race groups. In particular, we exclude interpersonal disputes, murder, or crimes, such as muggings, rapes, and other violence, where victims and perpetrators are from different racial and ethnic groups. Further, we are not capturing the incredible array of social protests across these two periods, which were particularly intense during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Our events include only public and collective events that are displays of ethnic hostility. Our data include a wide variety of forms: rallies, demonstrations, marches, attacks, and riots. Our coding rules (available upon request) require an ethnic conflict to be a public confrontation between two or more racial or ethnic groups. The target of a conflict is another racial or ethnic group.
We collected information on events from the *New York Times* in a two-stage process. First we identified "candidate events" from the *New York Times Index*. Second, from the daily paper, we coded event characteristics including, among others: the groups involved, timing and duration of the event, the existence of instigating factors, the number of participants or the size of the event, the organizations involved, and the degree of violence. As with any research strategy, our employment of the *New York Times* to gather information on the timing of events is subject to some degree of error. The analyses we have conducted on this problem demonstrate that most of the possible sources of bias are far less damaging to our event history analyses than might have been expected initially.

Although there has been an increase in the use of newspapers as the main source of information on the timing of collective action, this strategy has received some criticism. For instance, some observers have been skeptical that the *New York Times* would publish sufficient information on events that take place in regions far from New York, such as Los Angeles, Denver, or San Antonio. This issue might be especially problematic in the early period of American history before instantaneous transmission of news stories became commonplace. Others have reasonably suspected that newspapers contain various sources of bias, which influence the nature of our data in a variety of ways, including political bias, bias toward more dramatic or violent events, etc.

For our purposes, many of the problems related to newspaper or editorial bias are not relevant. This is because our analysis does not specifically characterize rhetoric or descriptive words used in newspaper reports, as would more traditional content analysis. Instead, our research focuses specifically on the timing of an event, and relies on a coder being able to identify the group or groups involved in a public and collective attack. While we acknowledge that our data set contains considerable measurement error (as do all data sets), there is new evidence that a national newspaper such as the *New York Times* captures dramatic events such as ethnic attacks and race riots relatively well when compared to local accounts. Thus, we limit our scope to large, collective, and public collective actions. We also require that a news report contain convincing evidence that ethnic or racial boundaries were the prime motivation for the attack.

These coding rules allow us to rely on exactly those kinds of events that are likely to be systematically covered in the *New York Times*. Recently, an enormous amount of scholarly research has examined local
and national newspaper accounts for evidence that one or more of these sources contain various forms of "selection bias." Such forms might include effects of proximity, size, violence, and editorial political bias. The results of these efforts are fairly straightforward. Events that have more participants are more likely to be reported in the New York Times than in local papers. Events in local papers are also likely to have more specific details, including personal addresses, ages, and names of participants. However, analyses of race riots and ethnic attacks that have compared various local papers to the New York Times find that a collective conflict event among ethnic groups is often reported in similar fashion in both accounts.

Although this research strategy has proven useful for the analysis of collective action, it gives us few assurances that newspaper accounts contain unbiased or full accounts of everyday individual attacks. Admittedly, these events are consequential and harmful, and they make up the majority of what have been labeled "hate crimes" in recent years. The methodological research on event analysis suggests that there are no infallible sources of information on hate crimes that would allow us to compare these two historical periods. Based on this body of research, our coding rules explicitly exclude reports of individual violence or crime. For information about incidents of local neighborhood conflicts among individual residents, we refer researchers to the many excellent qualitative accounts involving specific immigrant groups.

**Definition of the Dependent Variable.** Our analyses use information on the exact timing of ethnic and racial conflicts in large American cities in two discrete periods of peak immigration. Our dependent variable is the duration between instances of racial or ethnic collective conflict involving whites and nonwhites. In Tables 4 and 5 we account for the duration of nonwhite/white conflicts in two periods: 1869–1924 and 1965–1993.

**Modeling Technique.** We employ a standard event history modeling technique to estimate the effects of our two key variables, immigration and ethnic diversity, on a rate of conflict against nonwhites. The dependent variable is the rate of collective conflict, defined as the duration between conflict events. In common sense terms this means that a year (or a month) that experiences many events has a high rate of conflict. Conversely, the fact that many days have passed without any conflict events indicates a relatively low rate of conflict. Our task is to determine if immigration and ethnic diversity coincide with high rates of conflict, when other measures are included in the model. These measures include
economic fluctuation, wages, and other indicators suggested in prior research on collective violence. This technique allows us to estimate the effects of independent variables, net of other variables in the model. In other words, we hypothesize that immigration and diversity are systematically associated with the pace of attacks on nonwhites, even when other possible influences are taken into account in the same model.

Immigration and Ethnic Diversity. Immigration statistics and the timing of immigration legislation are drawn from *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* and the annual volumes of the *Immigration Statistical Yearbook*. Also calculated are the effects of annual change in immigration. We also include the annual number of incoming immigrants who listed their occupations as laborers or unskilled workers. In this way, we hope to test arguments about the effects of immigration flows and split labor markets.

In each model we also employ a measure of immigrant diversity where the immigrant population is divided according to country of origin. Our measure of diversity is the probability that randomly paired individuals in the population, k, will be different on a specified characteristic. A high level of this index indicates that immigrants were ethnically more heterogeneous, while a low level indicates relatively homogeneity of the country of origin. Data to calculate this index are drawn from *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* and from the annual volumes of the *Immigration Statistical Yearbook*. Our argument rests on evidence that will show whether or not immigration and ethnic diversity are systematically related to periods of peak conflict directed against the nonwhite population in urban America.

RESULTS

In a series of descriptive tables and figures we demonstrate changes in the timing and location of racial and ethnic unrest across more than a century. Moreover, we illustrate how the form and participants of collective action also change. Finally, we present the effects of our two key variables, immigration and ethnic diversity, on the rate of ethnic conflict against nonwhites.

Figures 1 and 2 compare the trends in immigration and conflict in each of our two periods. They provide a breakdown of all racial and ethnic collective conflict and immigration flow by year. The figures demonstrate the irregular flow of immigrants to the United States and
FIGURE 1
Immigration Flows and Racial and Ethnic Collective Conflict in Major American Cities, 1869–1924
Event counts and immigration in 100,000s.
the two important moments of mass migration, and also highlight variations in racial or ethnic conflict over this entire period.

For the early period (see Figure 1), there are two peaks of extensive conflict: in the early 1880s, and then again just prior to World War I. Each of these historical periods were times of intense public and governmental debate over immigration and immigration policy. These peak periods were dominated by anti-Chinese and anti-black conflicts, respectively. In the later period (see Figure 2), ethnic conflict shows similar peaks and valleys. However, in the second period, the major trend shows that there was a gradual decline in conflict at the same time that immigration increased over the observed twenty-eight-year period.

Taken together, these figures tell an interesting historical story, it suggesting that the temporal relationship of immigration and ethnic conflict is not straightforward. In the first wave of mass migration at the turn of the century, increases in immigrant flows paralleled increases in racial and ethnic collective conflict. And yet, in the more recent era, there is a marked increase in immigration associated with a marked decline in conflict.

For some clues to understanding these patterns, we now turn to the identifiable characteristics of our data on ethnic events. Table 1 identi-
TABLE 1
Changing Regional Patterns of Racial and Ethnic Collective Conflict

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>102 events 49%</td>
<td>354 events 59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>34 events 16%</td>
<td>73 events 13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>37 events 18%</td>
<td>34 events 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>36 events 17%</td>
<td>136 events 22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ifies the region of all the 209 collective events occurring in 76 large American cities between 1869 and 1924 and some 597 collective conflicts occurring in the same set of cities between 1965 and 1993. This table allows a comparison of regional and temporal patterns of events involving any race or ethnic group, including conflicts among minority groups. First, there are big differences in the scale of racial and ethnic collective mobilization between these two periods, with the second period experiencing twice as many conflicts as the first (despite the fact that the first period is almost twice as long in years). It should not be surprising, given our data source and given its population size, that the Northeast and, in particular, New York, was the most common site of collective action.29 In the first period almost half of all events occurred in major cities of the Northeast, including Boston, Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, D.C. In the second period almost 60 percent of all conflicts occurred within this same region. In the early period between 1869 and 1924 we see an almost equal distribution of conflict across the other regions: the South with 16 percent, the West with 18 percent, and the Midwest with 17 percent. In the second period, however, we see a key set of regional shifts. The percentage of conflict increases in the Midwest (from 17 to 22 percent), but drops off sharply in the West (from 18 to 6 percent of all conflicts). We see how the location of all conflicts shifted away from the West and toward both the Midwest and the Northeast. The Northeast, however, remained a key region for mobilization in both periods.

In Table 2 we identify a subset of conflicts that involved those groups most likely to participate in racial and ethnic collective mobilization. We focus on four groups: blacks, Asians, Latinos, and Jews. Table 2 excludes those categories of events that involved just white ethnic group (in inter-ethnic conflicts involving two or more groups) and/or events in which the majority white groups were targets of conflict. These residual categories of events were 11 percent of the total number of conflicts in
1869–1924 and 4.5 percent of the conflicts in 1965–1993. In other words, these events involved specific inter-ethnic conflicts (e.g., Irish vs. Italian conflicts), or involved attacks on the white majority group by some other aggrieved population.

In each period, the greatest majority of events (67 percent and 78 percent, respectively) involved persons of African American descent. Thus while more than two thirds of all collective conflicts involved blacks in the early period, more than three fourths of all collective conflicts involved blacks in this latter era. We see a continuation of earlier findings here that suggest that despite the increasing diversity of immigration flows, blacks are increasingly likely to be targets of conflict.

The most dramatic change is in the number of events involving the Asian population. While events involving Asians, often anti-Chinese in orientation, constituted some 21 percent of all events in the early period, such events accounted for less than 1 percent in the latter period. This finding is striking given that Asian immigrants benefited most from the 1965 Immigration Act and the abolition of national origin quotas. Throughout this later period there was considerable immigration from Asia, and yet there seemed to be much less opposition to such immigration than there was a century earlier. We know, however, that this does not mean that Asians are free from ethnic hostilities, since there has been evidence of substantial property damage of Asian establishments (in the Los Angeles riot of 1992, for example) as well as other forms of anti-Asian hostility. One way to interpret the relative decline in anti-Asian collective violence is to frame it in the context of immigrant adaptation and upward mobility. That is, James Loewen’s research on the Chinese in Mississippi suggests that hostilities against the Chinese in the South have largely disappeared, as Chinese assimilated to the white caste boundary. If this argument can be generalized, then we might expect to see a continuing decline in collective expressions of anti-Asian sentiment.

In contrast to events with Asian targets, there have been other changes in the groups involved in conflict. The proportion of collective events involving Jews increases in the latter period, rising from 1 percent to almost 10 percent. Furthermore, there is an increase in the number of events involving Latinos. However, these anti-Hispanic events still account for little of the total collective action, that is, around 7 percent of all collective conflicts. Finally, we see that the number of events involving one or more of these groups (Asians, blacks, Latinos, or Jews)
TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Period 1 Collective Conflict</th>
<th>Period 2 Collective Conflict</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Events Involving Blacks</td>
<td>139 67%</td>
<td>463 78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Involving Asians</td>
<td>45 21%</td>
<td>6 0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Involving Latinos</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>43 7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Involving Jews</td>
<td>2 1%</td>
<td>58 9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Events With These Minority Groups</td>
<td>186 89%</td>
<td>570 95.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Ethnic Conflicts Involving Any Race/Ethnic Group</td>
<td>209 100%</td>
<td>597 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Increases distinctly in the second period. Between 1965 and 1993, 95.5 percent of all collective conflicts involved one of these minority populations. That is, we see far more conflicts involving one of these groups in the second period as compared to the first.

In Table 3 we examine various characteristics of racial and ethnic conflict across these two periods, including the size of events, the level of violence, and the degree of organization. While both the size and organization of events are quite similar in the two periods, we see that collective conflicts in the latter period are much more violent. Over the last hundred years, the availability of weapons and the escalation of conflict may have contributed to this rise in violence. Indeed, 97 percent of all such conflicts in the 1965–1993 era involved some degree of violence as compared with only 54 percent in the earlier period.

Table 3 also addresses claims that ethnic conflict may now mobilize more participants, and that these participants may be more likely to be involved in specific ethnic or racial organizations (such as named ethnic movements, or hate groups). Neither of these conventional assumptions finds support in this table.

EFFECTS OF IMMIGRATION AND DIVERSITY ON THE RATE OF CONFLICT

The competition theory arguments outlined above suggest that the size and diversity of immigration will produce peaks in ethnic conflict—particularly conflict directed against nonwhites. How does our competition argument fare? As expected, Table 4 shows that periods of
peak ethnic immigration around the turn of the last century produced waves of conflict against nonwhites in urban America. However, for the second period, there is no systematic effect of the annual change in immigration. Indeed the coefficient for the effect of immigration is negative for the 1965–1993 period, but it is not statistically significant. How should we interpret these results?

One obvious explanation is that conflict involving nonwhites reflects different patterns in the two historical periods. Evidently, both immigration and its diversity affected ethnic tensions around the turn of the century. In contrast, in the latter period, ethnic diversity had this same effect on racial conflict. This suggests that while immigration and ethnic diversity increased the salience of a white/nonwhite boundary during the first period, only diversity has an enduring effect on this pattern in the second period.

We explore a more specific version of our immigration-conflict hypothesis in Table 5. Following the literature on split labor markets, we present another specification of this immigration effect in the next table. Table 5 specifies the effect of the annual variation on one specific group of immigrants—unskilled immigrants. Recall that earlier we hypothesized that unskilled labor might affect competition levels within the low-skilled niche. Does this effect of immigration hold up under scrutiny in both periods?

The split labor market argument finds support only in the early period: an increase in unskilled immigrants sharply increases the rate of conflicts against nonwhites. For the second period, the picture changes. In the second and more recent period, the effect of unskilled labor is
### TABLE 4
Impact of Immigration and Diversity on Rate of Conflict Against Nonwhites in Two Periods: 1869–1924 and 1965–1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First Period 1869–1924</th>
<th>Second Period 1965–1993</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual Change in</td>
<td>0.072**</td>
<td>−0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration (t−1)</td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(% multiplied x 100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Index of Ethnic</td>
<td>0.87**</td>
<td>0.66***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>(0.45)</td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 (one-tailed tests for directional hypotheses—see text)

Note: Estimates are from Piecewise Exponential Models. Full models include annual measures of wages of laborers, economic fluctuation, timing of immigration acts, logged number of conflicts against nonwhites, and size of unskilled immigration flow.

actually negative and significant. This result suggests that immigration of unskilled workers actually reduces conflict. How can this be the case? To understand this result, we remind readers that while immigration policies during the 1965–1993 period were quite open, they sharply restricted the numbers of incoming immigrants who were unskilled. So these effects represent only a very small proportion of all immigrants during this period. Also, we suspect that immigration had a different relationship with business cycles in the latter period when compared to the first period. Taken together, the results in Tables 4 and 5 imply that immigration had sharply divergent effects in the two periods.

Recall that the cornerstone of our competition argument concerned the impact of ethnic diversity. We argued that during periods in which many diverse groups made up the flow of immigrants, a process of competition reinforced the consolidation of ethnic boundaries along race lines. We suggested that if this argument were true, then ethnic diversity would be positively associated with periods experiencing a high number of attacks on nonwhites. In response to rising competition, native-born and immigrant whites mobilized against blacks and other nonwhites. The result was that a racial caste line became increasingly entrenched. We further argued that this relationship might also explain the rising xenophobia and anti-black conflict that continues in the United States. By this argument, we expected to see periods of high diversity associated with peak periods of conflict involving nonwhites.
TABLE 5
Impact of Unskilled Immigrants and Diversity on Rate of Conflict Against Nonwhites in Two Periods: 1869–1924 and 1965–1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual Number of Unskilled Immigrants (in 100,000s)</td>
<td>8.57*** (3.01)</td>
<td>−.030*** (.010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Index of Ethnic Diversity</td>
<td>1.24*** (0.60)</td>
<td>1.24*** (0.45)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 (one-tailed tests for directional hypotheses—see text)

Note: Estimates are from Piecewise Exponential Models. Full models include annual measures of wages of laborers, economic fluctuation, timing of immigration acts, logged number of conflicts against nonwhites, and the annual percentage change in immigration.

As can be seen in both tables, ethnic diversity has a strikingly similar and positive effect on the rate of conflict against nonwhites, and this holds up across both historical periods. Taken together, the effect of ethnic diversity has a strong, consistent, and statistically significant effect on the rate of conflict that holds up under both periods and a number of different model specifications. Thus, our ethnic diversity argument holds up under a variety of assumptions and conditions, lending credibility to our competition argument that the composition of immigration flows matter.

DISCUSSION

This article began with a central question presented by American history: What is the relationship between immigration and racial and ethnic unrest? We found that it is not immigration per se, but the ethnic diversity of immigration flows that raised rates of conflict around the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in America. Furthermore, we see evidence for a process of racial consolidation that is systematically related to rising ethnic diversity in America. Our results suggest that the enduring nature of racial animosity can be at least partly explained in terms of a racial consolidation process that began in the early twentieth century and continues to this day.
To this end, we compared patterns of racial and ethnic collective conflict in the United States during two key waves of mass immigration, 1869–1924 and 1965–1993. Building upon competitive perspectives of ethnic relations, we have offered an account of the dynamics of collective conflict that emphasizes the historic institutionalization of the white/nonwhite boundary in American history. The results suggest that factors that raise the overall level of competition among increasingly diverse groups result in a rising salience of one particular boundary: the boundary between whites and nonwhites. While this observation is not new, we find corroborating evidence for the idea that the sheer diversity of immigrants created the possibility for an enlarged definition of white ethnicity. On one side, there was a growing urban population of foreign-born whites who quickly learned that they would benefit to the extent that they emphasized the set of ethnic markers that assured them membership in a higher-status community. We speculated that membership inside this boundary was reinforced by participation in collective attacks on nonwhites. If ethnic boundaries are a function of normative activities sanctioned by both insider and outsider groups, then we suspect that these collective attacks on outsider groups help to sharpen the boundary distinctions.

We suggested the possibility that a causal link exists between ethnic diversity and racial duality. Previous research has emphasized only the effects of immigration flows, but we argued that the diversity of immigrants; also raised the salience of the white/nonwhite boundary at the turn of the century. Our results justify this new argument because our models take both immigration and diversity (and other measures) into account at the same time. That is, when all factors are considered, ethnic diversity shows the strongest and most consistent effects across a hundred years of American history.

Why does ethnic diversity encourage racial conflict? During periods in which highly diverse groups arrived in the United States, race and ethnic boundaries become more salient to all forms of interaction. Questions (and political debates) about who is and who is not “American” become more numerous and more contentious. Sometimes this debate spills over into the street, as mob attacks seek to identify those who are “others” and “not deserving of citizenship.” Ethnic diversity thus encourages a resurgence of the importance of race in both periods of peak immigration to the United States.

In cases that have been well documented by historians and sociolo-
gists, economic advantages and class mobility proved to be strong incentives for many immigrant groups to take on new identities.\textsuperscript{32} At the turn of the century the advantages of white identity were substantial, and remain so today. Many poor immigrants who entered the United States at the turn of the century had few skills, little education, and even less money. As noted above, it was not a foregone conclusion that these various groups would integrate easily, becoming a larger, white melting pot of immigrant America. Only by active identification, competition, and mobilization along the advantaged side of the white/nonwhite boundary would immigrants secure a foothold in American society during this period. Seen from the current vantage point, the reason for these choices seems obvious. On one side was a growing urban population of white foreign-born who emphasized the set of ethnic markers that assured them higher status, employment, and access to other rewards. On the other side was a historically outcast population that was burdened with a legacy of slavery and forced migration.

Are we destined to live with racial conflict in America? We wonder if W.E.B. DuBois was correct in claiming that “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.”\textsuperscript{33} Put differently, our research tried to find some answers to questions about why race seems to be such an enduring feature of contemporary American society. In this article, we explore some ideas about the social mechanisms that maintain this boundary.

We speculate here that collective attacks on nonwhite “others” served to reinforce this social boundary even further. Once consolidated, this boundary created an indelible fault line, fostering an enduring social logic and organizational form for twentieth-century ethnic and racial collective action. Thus, despite the “changing face” of recent immigration, patterns of racial discrimination, epithets, and stereotypes established decades before are still potent. Even as the nature of immigration changes in the contemporary era—as immigrants with different racial and ethnic backgrounds, better educational qualifications, higher occupational aspirations, and ready-made social and economic network ties migrate—institutionalized patterns of race relations remain in place. Thus as we continue to experience immigration flows that appear unprecedented and diverse, we might reasonably expect the white/nonwhite boundary to remain a source of considerable conflict in urban America.
CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

We conclude by considering whether these processes might also be relevant to other settings and other time periods. It seems reasonable to consider whether the relationship between immigration and conflict might be generalized to other settings as well. Does the size of immigration flows and/or ethnic diversity affect ethnic conflict in other countries? Can problems in Bosnia, Quebec, or even Rwanda be attributed to similar shifts in population composition and competition?

Only future research can adequately address the questions raised above. However, we think that our results have several implications for the study of ethnic relations in other settings and historical periods. Our general argument is flexible in that it can be tested using longitudinal data on immigration flows and ethnic diversity. Moreover, our method of collecting data on ethnic conflict can be easily transplanted to other settings (and can be used to study other forms of ethnic conflict).

The timing seems ripe for serious and systematic analyses of ethnic conflict across many settings. Indeed, the anti-foreigner attacks in Northern and Eastern Europe, the pogroms against refugees, and the ethnic cleansing attacks that occurred during the 1990s seem to be rising at an alarming rate. While the issue of ethnic conflict is a global concern, there has been relatively little systematic comparison of the sources of ethnic conflict. This is all the more surprising, given the explosion in international migration and immigration flows that has created diasporas, irredentist groups, and separatist movements in many settings. In 1993, the United Nations annual, *The State of the World’s Population*, warned, “The scale and diversity of today’s migration are beyond any previous experience. Responses to the questions they raise will help to determine the course of the twenty-first century” (p. 6). Thus the question which remains unanswered is the extent to which changes in policy immigration and citizenship policy—in particular—might impact this century-long pattern. How might proposals for changes in immigration law either reinforce or dilute what appears to be a fairly indelible boundary? It is toward these questions that this work will next turn.

NOTES

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4. Empirical support for this point can be found in *The Dynamics of Ethnic Competition and Conflict* and in Stewart Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *Festival of Violence* (Urbana, Ill., 1995).


6. See also *Whiteness of a Different Color*, for historical evidence supporting this argument.


8. Edna Bonacich suggests in her paper, “A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market,” *American Sociological Review*, 37 (1972): 547–59, that while black strikebreakers were often used as leverage against native workers, any group that threatens to undercut the livelihood of a dominant group can become the recipient of violence. Thus, this version of competition theory, applied to labor market competition, can begin to explain why white immigrants may have instigated conflict, but did not predominate as the targets of violence.


16. While space does not permit an adequate review of this topic, for an expanded treatment and evidence from archival sources, see Suzanne Shanahan, *The Taming of Difference: A Comparative History of Identity*, (Ph.D. Diss., Stanford University, 1997).


procedures) finds that only one characteristic of an event raises the likelihood that an event will be reported in the *New York Times*. This characteristic is the size of the event, with bigger events being significantly more likely to influence whether or not an event will be reported in the *New York Times*. However, the estimated threshold of the size of the event seems to vary widely across periods and over issues. For a review of this enlightening research, see John McCarthy, Clark McPhail, and Jackie Smith, "Images of Protest: Estimating Selection Bias in Media Coverage of Washington Demonstrations 1982 and 1991," *American Sociological Review*, 61: 478–499.


26. Two recently published books illustrate this point. See Pyong Gap Min’s study of Koreans in Los Angeles and New York, *Caught in the Middle* (Los Angeles and Berkeley, 1996), and Howard Pinderhughes’ account of youth violence among various ethnic and race groups in New York City, *Race in the Hood* (Minneapolis, 1997).

27. We have employed a linear piecewise exponential model to attain our results. For explanations of event-history techniques, see Nancy Brandon Tuma and Michael T. Hannan’s *Social Dynamics, Models and Methods* (New York, 1984), and Hans-Peter Blossfeld and Goertz Rohwer, *Techniques of Event-History Modeling* (Mahwah, N.J., 1995). For an example of using linear piecewise exponential models, see the article on the antibusing movement by Susan Olzak, Suzanne Shanahan, and Elizabeh West, “Antibusng Activity in Contemporary America,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 100: 196–241.

28. This index of immigration diversity, is specified by an index, \( A_w \), calculated following Lieberson (1969) summed over \( n \), which is defined as the number of \( k \) ethnic groups in the population:

\[
A_w = 1 - \sum_{k=1}^{k=n} (n_k)^2
\]

29. Did the location of the *New York Times* bias our findings in any way? One way to answer that question is compare results in samples that include and exclude New York City and New Jersey urban areas, to see if immigration and diversity had the same effect in cities outside the Metropolitan Area. Our analysis of non-New York events showed no differences with respect to our key explanatory process of immigration and ethnic diversity.


