Distinguishing three major eras of globalization over the past half-millenium, I address the variety of ways in which processes of globalization are likely to influence the nature and extent of discrimination against people on account of their racial or ethnic group identity. I then go on to consider the impact of the contemporary phase of globalization on efforts to counter discrimination via policies of affirmative action. I focus particular attention on identifying similarities and differences between the global "center" and the global "periphery" with respect to the way in which contemporary globalization is likely to affect discrimination and affirmative action.

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In this essay I take the opportunity to reflect in a speculative manner about the ways in which the process of globalization might affect the extent of discrimination against people on account of their (broadly-defined) ethnic group identity, as well as the extent of efforts to combat such discrimination via affirmative action. I begin by offering definitions of the key terms contained in the title of the paper. These terms can be and have been interpreted in many different ways, so it is important to make clear what I have in mind. In section 2 I address the question: how does globalization influence the propensity for ethnicity-based discrimination? In section 3 I consider how globalization might impinge on the propensity to counter such discrimination with policies of affirmative action. In the final section I offer a brief conclusion.

1. DEFINITIONS

Globalization refers to the process whereby regions and countries of the world, as well as their peoples and economies, become more and more closely connected to one another. It involves the reduction of impediments to the movement of goods, people, information, and finance across societal or national boundaries, with resulting increases in connections among – and mixing between – peoples throughout the world.

Globalization is a long-term trend in human history, but an uneven one. At various times – e.g., from the beginning of World War I through the end of World War II – it is interrupted or even reversed. It can be useful to distinguish three phases of globalization, since European explorers sailed the oceans in the late 15th century to Asia and to the Americas and began to chart the geography of a world recognized to be round:

- A first phase, from the late 15th to the late 18th centuries, characterized by European explorations and conquests of territories throughout the rest of the world;

- A second phase, from the end of the Napoleonic era (1815) to the beginning of World War I (1914), which featured European colonization of much of Asia and Africa as well as U.S. neo-colonization of much of South and Central America;

- A third phase, from roughly 1950 to the present, marked by an accelerated spread of capitalist institutions – markets, private property, etc. – across the world, at the expense of both pre-capitalist and socialist economic formations.

Discrimination involves making distinctions. There are many ways in which people can discriminate – some benign, others malign. The kind of discrimination that has greatest salience as a social problem is discrimination by members of a relatively well-off and powerful group in a given society against members of a relatively poorly-off and weaker group within that society. This involves the meting out of less favorable treatment to members of the weaker group, simply
by virtue of their group identity – as distinct from their capabilities, their actions or their achievements. “Less favorable” can range across a spectrum running from the imposition of a slight disadvantage in access to some valued opportunity, to second-class citizenship, to outright enslavement. “Group identity” is based on characteristics that are physical or cultural and rarely alterable – such as race, caste, gender and sexual preference. Discriminatory behavior by members of more powerful identity groups at the expense of members of weaker identity groups is best characterized as “negative discrimination,” to distinguish it from discrimination in favor of weaker groups; but I will drop the adjective except when the possibility of positive discrimination is also at issue.

In this essay I limit discussion to discrimination of the kind that is rooted in identity groups based on ethnicity, as opposed to gender or sexual preference. I define the term “ethnicity” in a broad sense to encompass any one – or any combination – of the following potentially identifying characteristics: race, caste, tribe, region of origin, mother tongue, and cultural tradition. I will not consider the important subject of discrimination against groups identified by gender or sexual preference, because the issues surrounding these groups are of a qualitatively different kind and deserve separate analysis.

It is important to recognize that discrimination by one group against others is only one of several basic possible sources of inter-group inequality. In principle, members of a group A can be better off (on average) than members of another group B for a variety of reasons, including (1) having greater per capita resource endowments, (2) expending greater per capita effort in work activities, (3) having devoted a larger share of available resources to investment (as opposed to consumption), and (4) benefiting from discrimination against members of group B. Current discrimination may not loom as a very important source of current inter-group inequality, at least in the contemporary era when the extent and impact of inter-group discrimination has significantly diminished as compared to past eras. However, past discrimination remains an important source of current inter-group inequality, because it is generally a very important source of current inter-group differentials in resource endowments, which in turn can also result in current inter-group differentials in the propensity to invest rather than consume.

Adding to the salience of discrimination as a source of inter-group inequality is the fact that it is likely to play a much larger role in generating intra-society inequality as distinct from inter-society inequality – and for that reason it generates also more significant political challenges. Inequalities between members of societies that are distant from one another and largely separate are plausibly explained primarily by differential initial endowments and other factors independent of inter-group discrimination; they are consequently likely to be accepted as in the more-or-less natural order of things. By contrast, inequalities between members of different groups within the same society are likely to be explained to a much greater extent – and (even more so) to be seen as explained – by discrimination against members of less-well-off groups. As a consequence, intra-society inter-group inequalities are far more likely to evoke strong feelings about the unfairness of the social order, and they are much more likely to lead to social and political tensions and divisions. Even where current discrimination has largely been curbed, ongoing inter-group inequalities can reasonably be seen as attributable in some considerable part to past discrimination; and the failure to address the unequal consequences of past discrimination can pose a continuing challenge to social and political stability.
Affirmative action has arisen as a policy response to the deleterious effects of past as well as present discrimination. A great variety of affirmative action policies have been proposed or implemented in various parts of the world. It will be useful to distinguish between the following two principal forms of affirmative action, which have qualitatively different objectives:

Elimination of ongoing discriminatory practices. The aim of this kind of affirmative action is to assure that access to valued positions or benefits in a society be influenced not arbitrarily by a person’s membership in any particular identity group, but only by qualifications and considerations relevant to the position or opportunity in question. It includes efforts to provide all potential applicants with equal access to information about available opportunities as well as efforts to insure that selection processes are procedurally non-discriminatory – i.e., oriented solely to a candidate's capacity to perform successfully. To assure in this way a "level playing field" requires not only strong anti-discrimination laws but also thorough monitoring and vigorous enforcement of the laws. This kind of affirmative action can be defended in terms of the efficient allocation of resources as well as social justice; and its desirability is not a matter of controversy.

Positive discrimination in favor of identity groups under-represented in desirable positions or in the distribution of scarce opportunities. This means the opposite of negative discrimination: more favorable treatment of people belonging to less well-off identity groups than of people belonging to better-off identity groups. The advocates of positive discrimination argue that the procedural fairness assured by anti-discrimination policies does not produce enough substantive fairness, because it fails to offset the adverse long-term effects of past negative discrimination.

Affirmative action in the form of positive discrimination involves the provision of some amount of preference, in processes of selection for access to scarce and desirable opportunities or benefits, to members of groups that are on average relatively poorly-off and under-represented (in proportion to their population) in society's desirable positions. The preference may be provided in various ways – e.g., reserving a significant proportion of the available opportunities or benefits for members of a less well-off group, or by providing a preferential boost to members of such a group in an open competition with others for access to the benefit or opportunity; but it always has the effect of increasing the number of members of an under-represented group selected.

Most of the direct beneficiaries of positive discrimination policies are likely to be relatively well-off members of their marginalized groups, because among group members they are the ones best able to compete for access to the opportunities or benefits made more accessible. Such policies cannot therefore be expected to do much to reduce overall socioeconomic inequalities in a society, but they can contribute significantly to a reduction in inter-group inequalities. In particular, positive discrimination policies can do much to integrate and diversify the upper strata of a society, with benefits extending well beyond the improved well-being of the direct beneficiaries. It can improve the well-being of many other members of the beneficiaries' communities, by improving their access to resources and to jobs and by providing greater motivation for young community members to work hard to better their future prospects. Ethnic diversification of the upper strata can also generate such society-wide benefits as greater
legitimacy for the political system and better performance of jobs requiring a good understanding of disadvantaged communities.10

Unlike efforts to eliminate discriminatory practices, the application of positive discrimination policies is highly controversial, because these policies do treat people differently depending on their identity group membership. They are therefore in tension with the fundamental liberal principle that people should be treated as autonomous individuals rather than as members of a community to which they happen to belong, independently of their own will or action. But positive discrimination policies are often defended on grounds of egalitarianism and/or social justice: in order to assure truly equal opportunity for all individuals, one must compensate for the disequalizing effects of past as well as present negative discrimination, and this cannot adequately be accomplished without taking account of the group identity of members of groups targeted by negative discrimination. This is precisely what was meant by implied by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun in stating that: "In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race...and in order to treat some persons equally, we must treat them differently."11

2. THE EFFECTS OF GLOBALIZATION ON DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination against particular ethnic groups is of course an age-old phenomenon, which predates globalization in any meaningful sense of the term. The prerequisite for such discrimination is simply the mingling within the same geographic and social space of ethnic groups with unequal power. As soon as members of a stronger ethnic group begin to take advantage of their greater power to limit systematically the opportunities available to members of a weaker group, discrimination is underway.

The question at hand, however, is whether globalization has served to exacerbate or to mitigate the phenomenon of discrimination that has been in evidence for millennia. By definition globalization brings into closer contact people of different ethnicities, and with different degrees of power, so it stands to reason that it increases the potential for ethnicity-based discrimination. But a useful assessment of whether or not globalization actually generates greater discrimination must move from such a high level of abstraction to examine particular historical circumstances. My primary interest is in the contemporary phase of globalization; but I will first address the question briefly in the context of each of the other two phases of globalization distinguished above.

Past phases of globalization

The first phase of globalization – beginning in the late 15th century and continuing through the late 18th century – was characterized by voyages, discoveries and conquests around the globe on the part of European explorers. This phase saw first the establishment of outposts of European powers in geopolitically or economically strategic areas and, later, the establishment of settler colonies in regions that were sparsely populated or where indigenous groups could be driven off some of their land (e.g., in the Americas and in Australasia). The forcible expansion of European power across the globe entailed in quantitative terms only a limited amount of
migration from Europe to the rest of the world; by 1800, even in the areas of white settlement, the populations of European origin were relatively small compared with what was to come (Held et al. 1999, p. 291). Far more significant in terms of long-distance human migration was the development of the transatlantic slave trade, which forcibly removed huge numbers of Africans from their continent of origin to regions in the Western hemisphere where their slave labor was instrumental in the development of plantation-based agricultural economies. Estimates of the total number of Africans transported to the Americas range widely but center around 10-12 million, and the lion's share – about 80% – took place before the end of the 18th century (Held et al. 1999, pp. 292-3).

The calamity visited by European conquerors upon indigenous peoples throughout the non-European world cannot be exaggerated; among many other things, European guns and germs decimated much of the original population of the Western hemisphere. The term “discrimination,” however, applies not to the interaction of ethnic groups across societal or national borders but to relations between ethnic groups that live side-by-side and form parts of the same society. It follows that the first phase of globalization generated discrimination in those places where it brought European settlers together with indigenous peoples within a common economic arena. This was most importantly the case with plantation and mining activities, where European settlers commanded large numbers of indigenous and/or enslaved workers. On a smaller scale, European military, missionary and trading outposts were likely arenas of discriminatory practice.

The second phase of globalization spanned the century from the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815 to the outbreak of World War I in 1914. This was the period in which the dominant European powers, whose explorers had established outposts around the world, took possession of much of the lands of Asia and Africa and established direct colonial rule over the territories they conquered. It was also the period of mass European migration to the Americas and – on a much smaller scale – to other areas of significant white settlement such as Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. It is estimated that roughly 45 million Europeans migrated to the Americas during this period, of which about two thirds arrived in the last two decades of the 19th century and the first decade and a half of the 20th century. As the slave trade declined in the 19th century, it was superseded by another significant wave of global migration involving not Africans but Asians, transported to work as "coolie" laborers under exploitative contracts for very low pay. The great bulk of such laborers came from India (then including what is now Pakistan and Bangladesh) and from China, to work in British and other European colonies and in the United States. Many of these laborers ultimately returned to their home countries, but the number of permanent migrants is estimated at around 12 million (Held et al. 1999, pp. 293-4 and 311). During the second phase of globalization most of the erstwhile colonies of Spain and Portugal in Central and South America became independent nations in which people of various ethnicities were ruled by an elite of predominantly European origin. By the end of the period, the United States had become a colonial power in its own right, ruling over the Philippines as well as some Caribbean and Pacific island territories; and it exercised neocolonial dominance over many nations in Central and South America.

The conquest of overseas territories obviously involved a great deal of violence perpetrated by the strong against the weak, but it was the subsequent establishment of colonial rule that created
the conditions for discrimination on a massive scale. Second-class citizenship – at best! – was of course the rule for indigenous populations in every colony; and even upper-class and/or Western-educated indigenous elites faced discrimination. During the 19th century there was very little immigration of natives from the colonized periphery to the colonial center, and hence little scope for discrimination against colonized peoples within the colonizing nations. But where important native or slave populations had earlier been incorporated into settler economies – as in the United States and many Central and South American countries – discrimination against these peoples remained rampant, if somewhat less violent in purely physical terms after slavery was finally abolished.

It is clear from the above account that each of the first two phases of globalization contributed very significantly to the growth of ethnicity-based discrimination across the world. Yet any account of the impact of globalization on discrimination must also take account of a countervailing force that became significant during the second phase and gained much greater strength during the 20th century. Against the violence and discrimination associated with European and American colonial conquest and enslavement there arose movements to abolish slavery, to end colonialism, and to reduce – if not eradicate – discrimination. These resistance movements developed not only among victims of the violent and discriminatory practices, but also among an enlightened segment of the populations of powerful nations who were the main perpetrators. The growth in communications and transport associated with globalization enabled ideas of freedom, equality and human rights to spread ever more quickly and comprehensively across the globe, providing encouragement and useful lessons in resistance that helped to sustain and support the resisters. Having contributed for centuries to the rise of discrimination around the world, globalization ultimately contributed also to the significant reduction in violence and discrimination associated with the abolition of slavery (in the 19th century) and the end of colonial rule in most of the world (in the 20th century).

Contemporary globalization

Consider now the case of the latest phase of globalization, beginning after World War II and gaining strength in the latter part of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Quantitatively speaking, this phase – like the others – has involved rapidly expanding economic links between national and/or regional economies; and it has now created a global economic system far more inter-connected than ever before. Qualitatively, however, it has had a rather different impact on the (previously colonized) periphery than on the (previously colonizing) center. Capitalism was already dominant in the center nations by the middle of the 20th century; and the latest era of globalization has merely strengthened the capitalist nature of their economies. In many parts of the periphery, however, non-capitalist economic formations remained quite significant at the beginning of the contemporary phase of globalization. This phase has therefore brought about more fundamental change in the periphery, as it has greatly reduced the significance of non-capitalist formations and transformed peripheral economies into capitalist formations that fit much more closely into the global capitalist system.

The contemporary phase of globalization differs from the earlier ones in a number of important respects. The migration of people from the rich countries of the capitalist center to the poorer countries and territories of the periphery is much less significant than in the past. It is true that
capital flows from center to periphery have been accompanied by the movement of highly-educated business-people and professionals; but they are most often only on temporary assignment. What has become far more important is the migration in the opposite direction, as impoverished people from the periphery seek better economic opportunities in the nations of the center. This flow of labor to the center constitutes the most powerful force currently bringing people of different ethnic identities – with highly unequal power – together. And it is tellingly captured by the remark of a black man in the U.K.: "I am here because you were there."\textsuperscript{15}

The magnitude of the migratory flow characteristic of contemporary globalization is far greater in numbers of people than that of any previous era; and as a proportion of the population of recipient countries, it is comparable to the mass migration of Europeans to the Americas in the late 19th and early 20th century. It is estimated that in the 50 years from the end of World War II to the mid-1990s, some 35 million immigrants – primarily from Latin America and Asia – entered the United States, and roughly 80 million – primarily from Africa and Asia – entered the nations of Western Europe, Australia and Canada (Held \textit{et al.} 1999, pp. 311-12). The proportion of foreign nationals living in the United States rose from 6% in the 1960s to at least 10% in the 1990s; comparable estimates for the major Western European nations show sharp increases to 8% in Germany, to 6% in France, and to 3% in the U.K.; and if citizens of foreign origin were included, the percentages would be considerably higher in the U.S., France and the U.K. (Held \textit{et al.} 1999, pp. 315-16). Some of the migrants into the center countries eventually return to their countries of origin, but most stay on; and the migratory inflow from the periphery to the center has been at least as great in the years since 1995. According to a report from the U.S. Government's Council of Economic Advisors (2007), foreign-born workers accounted for 15% of the U.S. labor force in 2006.

A second development that has become far more significant in the contemporary phase of globalization is the worldwide spread of information. As a result of the rapid development of communications technology and the expansion of transport networks in recent decades, people across the world are becoming much more aware of what is going on in other parts of the world than in any previous era. Exposure of inhabitants of poor societies to lifestyles in the rich societies – through television, the internet, visiting tourists, etc. – sets in motion powerful demonstration effects. This leads to growth in aspirations (especially among the middle and upper classes most exposed to the center) that are difficult to satisfy in the periphery, and it has intensified the flow of migrants from the periphery to the center.

A third characteristic of contemporary globalization worthy of mention here is a sharply intensified degree of international competition, as capital and labor markets have become much more closely interlinked across the world and technology has become much more widely diffused. Reductions in the costs of transport and communications, as well as reduction of tariffs and other barriers to trade, have led to greater international competition in each of the phases of globalization. What is qualitatively different in the contemporary phase, however, is the extent to which enterprises and workers in the richer countries find themselves in competition with enterprises and workers not only in other rich countries but also in poorer countries. Many countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa, which used to export primarily raw materials to the rich countries, are now increasingly capable of producing and exporting industrial goods as well as services that used to be produced mainly in the rich countries. And the collapse of the
communist regimes of the “Second World” – the former Soviet Union and its allied Eastern European nations – has opened up their economies to the rest of the world, bringing large numbers of new workers and substantial new productive potential into the global market system.

How may these developments have affected discriminatory practices around the world? The answer to this question is likely to be very different as between the center and the periphery of the new global system, since the two poles are very differently affected by the trends just delineated.

In the center

First of all, the nations of the center have experienced – and continue to experience – substantial inflows of migrants from the poorer countries to the richer countries. Those of the migrants who enter legally obtain typically a second-class status as resident aliens, at best; while the large numbers of undocumented migrants who enter illegally have no meaningful status at all. Some of the (legal) migrants are highly educated and gain access to good jobs, but the great majority of all migrants are relatively unskilled and find jobs at the lowest level of the occupation-wage hierarchy; many others (especially in continental Europe) simply join the ranks of the unemployed. The addition of large numbers of relatively unskilled migrants to the supply of labor puts pressure on the job opportunities and/or the wages of the least well-off national workers (who are often members of ethnic groups whose past victimization by discrimination accounts in part for their low socioeconomic status).

Not only the least skilled workers, but also many moderately skilled workers of the center have been confronting significant increases in the supply of their kind of labor. In this case the additions to the labor supply stem not so much from an inflow of migrant labor as from increased international competition in many sectors of the economy, as companies of the center find it ever easier – and more profitable – to move operations overseas in order to tap cheaper supplies of capable industrial or service workers in the periphery. The increasingly intense competition between lower-wage workers in poorer countries and higher-wage workers in richer countries puts great downward pressure on the wages, working conditions and job security of the latter (who are predominantly – but by no means exclusively – members of ethnic groups that have faced little discrimination in the past).

Contemporary globalization has of course also added to the effective supply of highly-educated and well-paid workers to the center nations. However the “analytical workers” (to use Robert Reich’s term) of the center do not suffer the kind of downward pressure on their economic status faced by less skilled workers, because – unlike the others – they are highly mobile. Their mobility makes them employable anywhere in the world, so the demand for their labor is not limited to companies and organizations operating in the center but is effectively world-wide.

In increasing the effective supply of low-skilled and semi-skilled labor to the center, and especially in enabling firms more easily to shift their operations from one country to another, contemporary globalization has strengthened the hand of capital in the center nations vis-à-vis all but highly-skilled labor. This has contributed significantly to the ongoing decline in bargaining power of trade unions in the center, which tend to represent primarily semi-skilled and – to a
lesser extent – low-skilled workers (see Choi 2006). The reduction in trade-union bargaining power has not only limited unions' ability to obtain wage and benefit increases for workers; it has also weakened their ability to fight in the political arena for social and economic programs benefiting workers. Furthermore, by easing the movement of highly skilled and well-remunerated workers across national frontiers, contemporary globalization has constrained the ability of national governments to tax these beneficiaries of globalization in order to compensate their compatriots who find themselves losing ground (see Bowles 2006).

All of the developments just described contribute to increasing economic inequalities within the center nations. But what is likely to be their overall impact on the incidence of ethnicity-based discrimination in the center? First of all, migrant workers themselves typically constitute a group that is discriminated against – as temporary residents at best, and as illegal workers at worst. Even to the extent that they become permanent residents or citizens, they are often afflicted by discriminatory treatment similar to that directed at temporary and illegal workers, because of their shared ethnic identity. Others – e.g., members of ethnic groups that are stronger within the national context – often lack the knowledge or the will to distinguish between different categories and legal statuses among members of ethnic groups that figure prominently in current migratory flows.

Adding significantly to the tendency toward discrimination against ethnic groups figuring prominently in immigration flows is the worsening life chances of wage-workers belonging to the dominant ethnic group(s) of the center nations. At the same time that these workers face intensified competition with workers of other ethnic identities, they find their unions less able to protect them and their governments less able to provide them with social and economic support. It is hardly surprising that worker insecurity generates suspicion and resentment of members of other ethnic groups, thereby aggravating tendencies toward discrimination.16

Contemporary globalization tends to exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities within center nations in a context in which the ranks of the poor include disproportionately members of those ethnic groups originating in the periphery that have historically been the most discriminated against – not only groups whose members have migrated to the center within the latest phase of globalization, but also groups whose origins in the periphery go back much further in time. The relegation of disproportionate numbers of people from such ethnic groups to low socioeconomic status leads often to the segregation of many of their members into ghetto-like residential conditions, which exacerbates social pathologies such as delinquency and thereby reinforces perceptions of these ethnic groups as undeserving of equal treatment.

Of course enlightened social policy in center nations can reduce – and perhaps even offset or reverse – the inequalities generated by globalization, thereby arresting the negative consequences that tend to exacerbate ethnicity-based discrimination. But the constraints on government revenue-raising noted just above make it more difficult for the needed social policies to be financed.17
In the periphery

The effects of contemporary globalization on the countries of the periphery are in important respects quite different than its effects on the center. In greatly increasing the sway of capitalist economic formations in the periphery, globalization has also strengthened institutions and ideas closely associated with capitalism – such as markets and private property, and the importance of the autonomous individual as opposed to the community or the state. At a very general level one would expect that the penetration of these institutions and ideas would tend to undermine the salience of ethnicity, thus weakening ethnicity-based discrimination, at the same time as they tend to increase inequalities linked to socioeconomic class.

A critical difference between the contemporary and the previous phase of globalization is that the flow of migrant labor is now predominantly in the opposite direction, out of the periphery rather than into it. And it is composed not primarily of people of the very lowest socioeconomic status, but of people from the lower middle or middle classes (who have sufficient personal and financial resources to be able to manage the generally challenging and expensive process of emigration) and – to a much lesser extent – the highly educated upper classes (whose emigration is often facilitated by having pursued higher education in the center). While the adventure of emigration from the periphery to the center can turn tragic for the poorest of the migrants, it does enable most of them to improve their material – if not their spiritual – well-being. It also contributes to greater economic well-being in their countries of origin, reducing rates of unemployment and increasing remittances from migrants to family members back home. Such remittances have become a more and more significant form of financial transfer from rich to poor countries; they are estimated to have amounted to more than three times the total value of world foreign aid in 2006 (DeParle 2007).

Contemporary globalization facilitates and encourages increased flows of physical and financial capital, as well as technological know-how, from the center to the periphery. This has led in many countries results to stepped-up economic activity and the creation of new employment opportunities (Bardhan 2006). It is true that, in a process characteristic of capitalist creative destruction, the expansion of new jobs is often accompanied by the destruction of old ones. And it is true that wages and working conditions in the new jobs are significantly inferior to those of comparable jobs in the center. However, the net employment effect of this process is more often positive than negative; and the comparatively low wages and poor working conditions generally prove to be rather more attractive to workers in the periphery than the alternatives available to them.

Finally, by requiring greater communication and engagement of individuals across national frontiers and – in particular – between the periphery and the center, contemporary globalization confers a premium on cosmopolitanism on the part of periphery workers. Those who can speak a language of the center, and whose education provides them with some understanding of the social, cultural and economic environment of the center, are in a far better position to take advantage of the new opportunities generated by the flow of capital and technology from center to periphery. As Newman and Deshpande (this volume) have found, social and cultural capital play a huge role in Indian formal labor markets, favoring upper-class and upper-caste graduates who are comfortable speaking English. In parallel with its disequalizing effects in the center,
globalization is thus likely to generate significant cleavages in the periphery between “cosmopolitans,” whose skills enable them to adapt easily to the global capitalist economy, and “provincials,” who are far less able to adapt (Bowles and Pagano 2006). This helps to explain the finding by Attewell and Madheswaran (this volume) that the returns to education are significantly greater for higher-caste than for lower-caste Indians.

The expanded flow of capital and technology from center to periphery clearly creates significant opportunities for improving the material welfare of people in the poorer countries of the world – including in particular some the most disadvantaged of them. Yet given the extent of the poverty and the excess labor supply that still characterizes much of the periphery, these improvements are unlikely in the foreseeable future to stem significantly the incentives for emigration – especially as demonstration effects become ever more powerful. The premium on cosmopolitanism tends to increase the social and economic distance between cosmopolitans and “provincials,” thereby strengthening the political power of the former (which is usually relatively strong to begin with). This reinforces pre-existing tendencies for governments to show much greater concern for those who already have better opportunities to become cosmopolitan than for those who are mired in provincialism. And of course this contributes to widening economic inequalities within peripheral nations.

What is likely to be the overall impact of these trends on the incidence of ethnicity-based discrimination in the periphery? I have already suggested that the growing dominance of capitalist economic institutions and ideas, by displacing traditional and more group-oriented social and economic patterns, tends to reduce the salience of ethnicity-based discrimination (while giving rise to other forms of inequality). More specifically, transnational corporations based in the center – and new domestic firms linked to them – are less likely to practice ethnicity-based discrimination than domestic firms entrenched in long-standing discriminatory patterns; and they may also help reduce discrimination by increasing the degree of competition for consumers and workers. But contemporary globalization has many other effects that also need to be taken into account.

In the periphery, as in the center, members of discriminated-against groups are disproportionately found among the lower socioeconomic classes. But the effect of contemporary globalization on economic opportunities for the poor and lower-middle classes is on the whole favorable in the periphery (the opposite of its effect in the center), and globalization can therefore be expected to reduce incentives for outright discrimination on behalf of people competing for jobs with members of marginalized communities in the periphery (unlike in the center). Moreover, the fact that upper-class cosmopolitans – and upper-middle-class potential cosmopolitans – in the periphery are advantaged by globalization is likely to make these groups less worried about competition from more provincial folks further down the socioeconomic ladder and hence perhaps less likely to rely on discriminatory practices to protect their interests.

One should, however, distinguish between two quite different segments of the lower classes in the periphery that are differentially affected by globalization. On the one hand, there are the people who can hope and expect to benefit from improved employment opportunities either at home (via capital inflows, etc.) or abroad (via emigration); on the other hand, there are those
who are most likely to be victimized by the creative destruction associated with capitalist development. The former tend to be of the urban lower-middle and perhaps lower classes; the latter tend to be of the rural and/or tribal lower classes, whose ties to and assets in land and natural resources are threatened by expansion of the global capitalist economy. There is likely to be intensified conflict between the predominantly lower-middle class workers who see their interest in the growth of employment opportunities in capitalist enterprise, and the more provincial and generally poorer people clinging to subsistence on the land. Since these cleavages are often also ethnic – for example, potential industrial and service workers tend to be ethnically distinct from “tribal” groups close to the land – the potential is great for increased ethnicity-based discrimination against the latter.

3. THE EFFECTS OF GLOBALIZATION ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Discrimination against members of particular groups on the basis of their ethnic identity naturally generates resentment and, sooner or later, organized resistance on the part of the victims. In societies without a formal commitment to individual rights independent of group identity, the first step in the struggle against negative discrimination usually takes the form of demands for legal recognition of equal rights for all individuals irrespective of their ethnicity. Nowadays most nations around the world are indeed legally committed to equal rights for all of their citizens, so efforts to end discriminatory practices generally include demands for enactment and vigorous enforcement of anti-discrimination laws. In many countries, however, the difficulty of ensuring that anti-discrimination laws will be respected, and the fact that such laws cannot alone do much to offset huge inter-group inequalities attributable in considerable part to past discrimination, have led to demands for positive discrimination in favor of marginalized ethnic groups. I will focus here on this strong form of affirmative action, which has proven to be far more contentious than the enactment and enforcement of anti-discrimination laws.

The history of positive discrimination policies goes back no further than 100 years; the earliest examples of such policies are to be found in British-ruled India in the first half of the 20th century. It is during the last 50 years, however, that positive discrimination policies have spread across many countries of the world – including several other South Asian nations, Malaysia, the United States and (more recently) South Africa and Brazil. In examining the possible effects of globalization on the propensity to pursue such policies, we can therefore confine ourselves to the contemporary phase of globalization, whose key characteristics were discussed in the previous section. In view of the differential impact of contemporary globalization on the center and on the periphery of the global system, I will address its impact on positive discrimination separately for the center and the periphery – just as I did earlier for its impact on negative discrimination.

In the center

The contemporary phase of globalization, in greatly increasing the inter-connectedness of national economies within a global market system, has made every national economy more sensitive to developments elsewhere in the global system. It has also greatly increased the mobility of various forms of capital and of highly-skilled labor, which can respond rapidly to differential opportunities as between home and abroad. All of this tends to limit the scope for
independent national economic policy-making – for example, by reducing the extent to which national macroeconomic policy actions affect aggregate demand for domestic products, and by constraining governments’ ability to tax mobile factors of production. Under these circumstances, policy interventions that seek to serve social goals inconsistent with market logic tend to become more difficult and/or more costly to carry out. To the extent that they impose additional costs on businesses operating within national borders, for example, they risk causing business firms to look for alternative settings beyond those borders.

Globalization can thus be a serious deterrent to national social policies that involve real trade-offs between economic efficiency and social desirability. Policies of positive discrimination, however, are not necessarily of this nature. First of all, they are not very costly. (Indeed, opportunity-shifting positive discrimination policies often appeal to law-makers more than resource-redistributing social programs, because their implementation requires much less in government outlays.) Second, policies of positive discrimination can, under certain circumstances, significantly improve the allocation of labor and increase economic efficiency. For example, the performance of organizations or enterprises that must interact with representative samples of the population as a whole – or disproportionately with marginalized groups therein – may well be improved if its upper ranks become ethnically more diverse. When and where it can be shown that integrating members of marginalized ethnic communities more proportionately into the middle or upper echelons of the society will boost productivity, political leaders even in the most individualistic and capitalist of societies may be persuaded to adopt policies of positive discrimination.

This latter possibility can explain why a conservative Supreme Court in the United States – one of the most individualistic and market-oriented nations of the world – ruled in the year 2003 that affirmative action on behalf of African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans and Native Americans in admissions to elite higher educational institutions can be justified, even though it appears inconsistent with the liberal tenets of the U.S. Constitution. In statements to the Court, a wide-ranging coalition of US corporate and military leaders argued forcefully that greater ethnic diversity at all levels of their institutions – achievable only via positive discrimination in education, if not in employment – was essential to the efficient achievement of their institutional missions. Indeed, U.S.-based companies and institutions may well find it difficult to prevail in an era of heightened competition across an increasingly multicultural world if their leadership ranks are populated predominantly by people of European-American identity.

There are, however, other forces at work that suggest that contemporary trends in globalization may not be so hospitable to positive discrimination. In general people are more likely to be willing to support policies that help others who are like themselves, only poorer, than people who are of different ethnicity. Substantial flows of immigrants from poorer into richer nations increase the ethnic diversity of the latter, and may well therefore erode the sense of common community that sustains the willingness of the well-off to help those who are not well-off (Soroka et al. 2006). This is all the more the case when the prospective beneficiaries are exclusively from minority ethnic communities; so ethnicity-based positive discrimination is particularly vulnerable to reduced public support as societies become ethnically more diverse.
The fact that contemporary globalization has been heightening the economic insecurity of wage workers in the center further undermines support for positive discrimination. First of all, when many people are suffering economically, it becomes much harder to make the case—and gain political support—for helping a particular group of people. Heightened economic insecurity on the part of many wage workers from long-time resident communities tends to generate increasing suspicion and resentment against immigrant workers and members of their ethnic communities. In many of the richer nations this has increased the power of right-wing populist ethnocentric political forces, stiffening political opposition to immigration and raising tensions more generally between the various ethnic groups whose economic fortunes are at risk. In an overall climate of increased economic insecurity, one would expect a decline in support for policies designed to aid members of marginalized ethnic groups—and not only those linked to recent waves of immigration from the periphery.

Polling data on attitudes toward affirmative action are often difficult to interpret, but there is evidence of declining public support for race- or ethnicity-based positive discrimination from the 1970s into the 1990s in the United States (Steeh and Krysan 1996). There are many possible reasons for this trend in public opinion, which is consistent with the concurrent rightward drift of public discourse and political life in the country. The visible success of a significant number of African Americans and Hispanic Americans in entering the “middle class”—and even the upper strata—of American society has led some to conclude that affirmative action policies are no longer needed to assure that members of such groups have sufficient opportunities to improve their lot. It stands to reason, however, that the increased economic insecurity of American wage workers, in the context of accelerated globalization in recent decades, has also contributed to the diminishing public support for positive discrimination.

In the periphery

As peripheral societies are integrated into the contemporary global system, capitalist institutions and principles increasingly displace non-capitalist ones, and as a general rule this tends to weaken the salience of community membership and group identity and shift the focus to the individual. In this context positive, as well as negative, ethnicity-based discrimination becomes harder to sustain. Ethnicity-based identity politics can certainly prolong and even intensify ethnic consciousness as well as support for ethnicity-based positive discrimination; but in the long run the spread of capitalism, with its underlying liberal individualist tenets, tends to undermine support for it.

Second, just as in case of the center, and for the same reasons, contemporary globalization tends to limit the scope for independent national economic policy-making in the periphery. Indeed, in many ways the poorer countries of the periphery are even more dependent on external economic forces than are the rich countries of the center; so their scope for pursuing policies that seek to serve social goals inconsistent with market logic is even narrower. And there appear to be fewer prospects in the periphery that political decision-makers can be persuaded that policies aiding members of marginalized communities will enhance overall economic efficiency and well-being. This is because globalization strengthens the economic salience of highly-skilled cosmopolitans in the periphery; and it is these cosmopolitans who are the key to the success of a peripheral country in capitalizing on the opportunities—and avoiding the pitfalls—associated with tighter
integration into the global economic system. Government policy-makers are therefore likely to be much more concerned with sustaining and promoting relatively elite individuals and groups, rather than catering to the needs of the most marginalized communities in their societies. By strengthening the political power of cosmopolitan forces in the periphery, globalization contributes to a political climate in which there is little inclination to intervene in favor of marginalized and discriminated-against groups.  

This helps to explain an interesting contrast in attitudes toward affirmative action as between Indian and U.S. business, military and educational leaders. In the United States, as noted above, many such leaders support affirmative action even in the form of positive discrimination. In India, however, such leaders – especially those representing the most elite institutions – line up firmly against positive discrimination policies (Weisskopf, 2004, chapter 2). They argue that these policies weaken India’s ability to compete in a globalized world, because they provide opportunities to typically under-prepared and culturally deprived members of marginal groups, who are likely to perform poorly, at the expense of well-prepared and culturally sophisticated members of mainstream groups, who are primed for success on the world stage. Indeed, Newman and Jodhka (this volume) found that all 25 of the human resource managers they interviewed in a study of contemporary Indian corporate employers firmly opposed positive discrimination policies in hiring – on the grounds that it would hinder Indian economic development. Globalization puts a high premium on the capacity to speak fluent and articulate English, so it is from the uppermost echelons of Indian society that effective players on the world stage are indeed most likely to be recruited. Moreover, India does not need to look for members of under-represented racial/ethnic groups in order to show the world an assemblage of leaders who reflect the diversity of the world’s population, rather than looking like members of a privileged club, and who can therefore be expected to inspire more confidence and less suspicion around the globe.

Support for positive discrimination in education and employment has remained strong among Indians from the lower classes and castes who are its potential beneficiaries; but for several decades now such support has been waning on the part of India's English-speaking upper classes and castes (Weisskopf, 2004, chapter 2). Elite opinion is not always so hostile to the long-standing affirmative action policies in place for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, but it is strongly opposed to continuing popular demands for the expansion of groups eligible for positive discrimination and for its extension from the public to the private sector. Moreover, as two scholars of India's positive discrimination policies have observed, "new elites from the middle order of castes along with the high castes have become more stridently opposed to reservations (quotas) in education and employment" (Patwardhan and Palshikar 1992, page 3).

The tendency for globalization to diminish the propensity to adopt affirmative action policies in the periphery will not be sufficient to prevent them from being introduced or expanded in situations where there are other forces strongly at work to promote such policies. This is most obviously the case in nations like South Africa and Malaysia, where the traditional elite is drawn from a small minority community and the great majority of the population consists of members of a previously marginalized community. When leaders representing the majority community come to power in such circumstances, they will surely have strong feelings of solidarity with the disadvantaged members of their community. They will also have substantial political interest in
pursuing policies that increase access of members of the majority community to opportunities and positions previously dominated by a privileged minority community. In this and other situations where ethnic identity provides a strong basis for political mobilization, positive discrimination in favor of members of marginalized communities can be expected to have a great deal of staying power, in spite of the contrary influence of contemporary globalization.

4. CONCLUSION

Adopting an approach to globalization that distinguishes three different phases of its modern history, I have addressed the changing ways in which successive phases of globalization have influenced the extent of negative ethnicity-based discrimination. I have focused particular attention on the different patterns of long-distance migration that have characterized the different phases of globalization, for these migratory patterns have major repercussions on the propensity of stronger ethnic groups to discriminate against weaker ones. Here I will briefly summarize my conclusions regarding the impact of the contemporary phase of globalization on negative discrimination, as well as efforts to counter it via positive discrimination, in the center and in the periphery of the global system.

Contemporary globalization is characterized by major migratory flows of people from the periphery to the center, reversing the direction of migration most characteristic of the previous phase. Although globalization tends to exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities within nations of both the center and the periphery, it seems far more likely to exacerbate negative ethnicity-based discrimination in nations of the center than in those of the periphery. I have identified several major ways in which contemporary globalization tends to intensify such discrimination in central nations, and no major way in which it is likely to reduce it. In the case of peripheral nations, however, several elements of globalization now tend to reduce negative discrimination, and only one seems likely to work in the other direction.

The effects of contemporary globalization on the pursuit of policies of positive discrimination in favor of marginalized ethnic groups are more complex and less predictable than its effects on negative discrimination against such groups. In the center globalization can be expected to strengthen support for positive discrimination among elites, but it seems more likely to weaken such support among the general public. In the periphery globalization seems most likely to reduce support for positive discrimination among elites, if not also among the general public. Where a marginalized and under-represented group constitutes a substantial majority of the population, however, positive discrimination policies in its favor are likely to be pursued when representatives of the group gain political power.
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6 Many scholars have distinguished three phases of globalization along the lines that I do here; see, for example, Papastergiadis (2000) and Cohen (2005). Held et al. (1999) also identify a prior phase of "premodern globalization."

7 Another basic possible source of inter-group inequality is differential average innate abilities; but I reject this possibility for lack of any persuasive empirical support.

8 Note that there are circumstances when one's group identity is in fact relevant to a candidate's capacity to perform a job successfully – for example, when policing or medical care can be better carried out by a person with the same group identity as the great majority of the community to be policed or provided with medical care. Under these circumstances, group identity becomes a relevant rather than an arbitrary characteristic of a candidate and can be taken into account without violating procedural fairness.

9 See Loury (2002), especially chapters 3&4, for a highly persuasive exposition of this argument. The distinction between the two forms of affirmative action highlighted here is actually not quite as sharp as I am suggesting. As Fryer and Loury (2005) have argued (in discussing what they label "Myth #1), efforts to eliminate negative discrimination may unavoidably entail some degree of positive discrimination.

10 This paragraph summarizes arguments I have made in greater detail in Weisskopf (2006).


12 Manning (2005, p. 146) estimates that roughly two-thirds of the transported slaves were headed for North America and the Caribbean and roughly one-third to South America.

13 Manning (2005, p. 146) estimates that almost 80% of the transatlantic European migrants were headed for North America and the Caribbean; the bulk of them settled in the United States. Manning also indicates that some 7 million Europeans migrated to Asia; many of them were Russians spreading into Siberia.

14 The broad dichotomization of the world into a dominant center, consisting of relatively wealthy nations whose populations are predominantly white) and a subordinate periphery (consisting of relatively poor
nations and territories whose populations are predominantly non-white) is a framework commonly adopted by globally-oriented social scientists, but of course it abstracts from a considerably more complex reality. Some parts of the world do not fit easily into the dichotomy – for example, wealthy Japan, the oil-rich countries of the Middle East, and the much less prosperous countries of the Southern Cone. My analysis in this paper applies most clearly and forcefully to a center defined to include the nations of Western Europe and North America with a history of colonial rule (and/or neo-colonial domination) and a periphery defined to include the nations and territories of Asia, Africa and Latin America with a history of colonization (and/or neo-colonial subordination) by center powers.

15 Quoted by Papastergiadas (2000, p. 196), at the beginning of his concluding chapter on "Clusters in the Diaspora."

16 I do not want to suggest that economic insecurity is paramount in generating anti-immigrant feeling among workers of the dominant ethnicity in center nations. Certainly perceptions of cultural differences, and possible threats to the majority culture, also play a significant role.

17 However, as Miguel Centeno has pointed out (at the conference), the world-wide spread of information associated with contemporary globalization shines more light on practices within any given country; and growing world-wide determination to eradicate racial and ethnic discrimination may well put pressure on governments in laggard countries to take action to reduce it.

18 In any overall evaluation of the economic impact on a peripheral nation of migration to center nations, the gains from the emigration of relatively poor citizens must be balanced against the losses resulting from the "brain drain" associated with the loss of highly-skilled workers.

19 This is not to say that the more modern firms are free from discriminatory practices; as Attewell, Thorat and Rivki (this volume) have shown, in India even modern firms posting open employment notices discriminate against low-caste and Muslim minority applicants.

20 However, Miguel Centeno has suggested (at the conference) that the growth in numbers of successful cosmopolitans – who tend to be relatively light-skinned – could increase the signaling salience of skin color in peripheral nations, thereby reinforcing tendencies for color-based discrimination against members of marginalized communities – who are typically darker-skinned.

21 This paragraph draws on Weisskopf (2003).

22 Yet the same kind of demonstration effect described in footnote 17 may operate also on governments of peripheral nations, pressuring them to take stronger measures against discrimination. The globalization of information encourages increasing cross-fertilization of resistance movements against racism and other forms of discrimination; and governments late to undertake affirmative action policies can draw on examples of affirmative action policies undertaken elsewhere.

23 India's affirmative action policies currently apply only to public sector enterprises and institutions, but there has recently been much discussion of the possibility of extending them to private enterprises and institutions as well.