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RACE AND RACISMS

A CRITICAL APPROACH

BRIEF SECOND EDITION

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2

Racial Ideologies and Sociological Theories of Racism

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Prejudice, Discrimination, and Institutional Racism 33
- **Voices:** Microaggressions 38
- Systemic Racism and Structural Racism 40
- Racial Ideologies 44
- Racial Formation 50
- White Supremacy and Seller Colonialism 50
- Intersectional Theories of Race and Racism 53
- White Privilege 54
- Whiteness, Class, Gender, and Sexuality 57
- Conclusion and Discussion 59
- **Thinking about Racial Justice** 60
- **Check Your Understanding** 61
- **Talking about Race** 63

Racial inequality is pervasive in the contemporary United States. We see it in the criminal justice system, where black and Latinx people are several times more likely to go to prison than whites. We can find racial inequality in employment as well: audit studies have shown that blacks are less likely than whites to be interviewed and, once interviewed, to get a job. Once blacks have jobs, they are less likely to get promoted. Black business owners have more trouble getting contracts. In education, the picture is equally bleak. Many schools in the United States are racially segregated, and the quality of education is lower at primarily black and Latinx schools. Within schools, white students are given preferential treatment. When white parents visit schools, they get more attention from staff members, and teachers are more likely to recommend white students for gifted programs. Sociologists and other researchers have carried out study upon study demonstrating such inequality. Yet how do we explain it?

This is where **sociological theories of racism** come into play; they are lenses that help make sense of patterns such as the overrepresentation of African Americans in the criminal justice system. Sociologists use evidence from their studies to develop explanations, known as the **ories**, for how racial inequality is created and reproduced.

Before we begin an examination of these theories, what do you think? How would you explain the racial disparities in the criminal justice system, for example? Do you think blacks commit more crimes? Do you think police officers spend more time policing black communities? Do you think police officers are biased against African Americans? All of these questions can be translated into hypotheses that can be tested through scientific studies. First, let's look at how racism can be the basis of an explanation for racial inequality.

PREJUDICE, DISCRIMINATION, AND INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Racism encompasses both **racial prejudice**—the belief that people belong to distinct races and that these racial groups have innate hierarchical differences that can be measured and judged—and **racial discrimination**—the practice of treating people differently on the basis of their race. For example, an employer can think African Americans are less competent than whites; this belief constitutes racial prejudice. When

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that employer decides to hire a white person instead of an equally qualified black person, that decision may be considered racial discrimination. Both prejudice and discrimination are widespread in U.S. society.

In one survey, Joe Feagin (2001) found that three-quarters of whites agreed with prejudicial statements about blacks, such as “blacks have less native intelligence” than whites (109). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2013) found that most whites use color-blind discourses that reproduce and rationalize racial inequality. In 1995, researchers conducted a study in which they asked participants to close their eyes for a second and imagine a drug user. Fully 95 percent of respondents reported imagining a black drug user (Alexander 2010). The reality is that African Americans account for only 15 percent of drug users in the United States and are just as likely as whites to use drugs. However, Americans have an unconscious bias against blacks and imagine them to be more likely than other groups to use drugs (Alexander 2010). These and other studies show the widespread nature of racial prejudice.

Many Americans, even those who do not believe they are racially prejudiced, have implicit biases that operate at the level of the subconscious. It is hard to avoid these biases because of the barrage of racialized messages we receive in the media and through our personal networks. Racial prejudice and implicit biases inevitably lead to racial discrimination. (Curious about your own implicit bias? Take the Implicit Association Test at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit>.)

In this chapter, we will focus on theories of race and racism. There is another set of scholars whose work focuses more on ethnicity, often through the lens of *assimilation*—understood as the incorporation of ethnic minority groups into the mainstream. This body of work considers how cultural characteristics, the labor market, and U.S. immigration policies shape the incorporation patterns of ethnic minorities (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). These scholars explain ethnic minority incorporation primarily as the result of the ethnic features and traits of a group and that group’s unique “context of reception” (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Valdez 2011).

As Howard Winant (2000) explains in an article on race theory, there are clear limits to approaches that focus on ethnicity. These include obstacles to integration and the undesirability of assimilation. As we will see in this chapter, approaches that place race and racism at the center of their analyses allow us to perceive these obstacles more clearly and to understand how and why racial hierarchies persist.

Assimilation theories can be further distinguished from race theories in that they tend to focus on group-level factors, whereas race theories look primarily at the individual or the social structure. Most theories of race and racism emphasize the social structure. However, as we will see in the next section, understanding racial discrimination at the individual level continues to be crucial.

Individual Racism

Discrimination can occur at the individual level when one person discriminates against another. Audit studies have consistently shown that blacks are less likely to be interviewed for jobs than whites and that black and Latinx people face housing discrimination on a regular basis (Feagin 2001; Pager, Western, and Bonikowski 2009). Racially discriminatory actions by individuals such as not calling back an interviewee for a job because of his race or telling a person on the phone that the apartment is taken because he or she has a Spanish accent or lives on a reservation constitute **individual racism**. Individual acts of racial discrimination and bigotry are commonplace in our society and help to reproduce racial inequalities.

How widespread is individual racism? Researchers have consistently found that racial discrimination is pervasive. One study of the Department of Defense employees revealed that nearly half of the black employees had heard racist jokes in the previous year (Feagin 2001). Another survey conducted by Feagin and McKinney (2003) revealed that 80 percent of black respondents had encountered racial hostility in public places. One African American secretary detailed the consequences of constant discrimination as follows: “I had to see several doctors because of the discrimination, and I went through a lot of stress. And, then, my blood pressure . . . went on the rise” (82). This woman, like many other African Americans interviewed in this study, displayed high levels of stress as a result of her mistreatment in the workplace and consequently developed health issues. In another study, Dwanna Robertson (2015) found that Native Americans constantly face the consequences of negative stereotypes about them. One of her participants told her, “I hear things like: ‘Show me an Indian, I’ll show you a drunk Indian.’ ‘Indians are lazy’” (130).

It is remarkable that individual racism is widespread in a society that usually condemns overt acts of racism. If a television announcer were to make a racially charged or overtly racist statement such as “African Americans are inherently more violent than whites,” we can be sure that

the following day, critics would forcefully condemn the racist statement. If racial discrimination is frowned upon, how can it be so widespread?

One way that individual racism persists, even in a society that decries racism, is through **racial microaggressions**—daily, commonplace insults and racial slights that cumulatively affect the psychological well-being of people of color. The consequences of these microaggressions can be severe, and studies of African Americans, Latinx Americans, and Asian Americans have uncovered the continued prevalence of microaggressions. One study of African Americans on college campuses, for example, found that white students and professors consistently doubted the academic potential of African Americans. One black student was presumed to have cheated after getting an “A” on a difficult math quiz. Another black student found that people assumed his scholarship was for sports, when, in fact, it was for his academic achievements. These students reported that the cumulative effect of these slights was to make them tired, discouraged, and frustrated—especially since they had expected more from their professors and peers (Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000). These microaggressions can have severe consequences: a recent study among African American college students found that certain types of racial microaggressions were associated with elevated levels of suicide ideation (Hollingsworth et al. 2016).

African Americans are not the only group to experience microaggressions. In a study of Asian Americans’ experiences of discrimination, Derald Wing Sue and his colleagues found that Asian Americans experienced a wide variety of microaggressions, ranging from the assumption of foreignness to exoticization of Asian women to invisibility. For example, Asian Americans reported that white Americans consistently asked them questions such as “Where are you from?” or made comments such as “You speak good English,” when the only indication that they might not be from the United States was their Asian appearance. Other Asian Americans pointed out that people presumed they were good at math and that men presumed Asian women would be submissive lovers. Asian Americans also reported that people presumed that they didn’t face discrimination. The Asian Americans in this study recounted that the constant barrage of microaggressions angered them but that they also felt disempowered to respond, as any single event could seem inconsequential by itself (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, and Torino. 2007). These experiences are commonplace: a recent study of 152 Asian Americans found that 78 percent of them

experienced microaggressions during a two-week period (Ong, Burrow, Fuller-Rowell, Ja, and Sue 2013).

Kevin Nadal and his colleagues conducted a study of multiracial people’s experiences of microaggressions and found them to be pervasive (Nadal et al. 2011). Their studies of both Asian Americans and multiracial individuals reveal that well-intentioned whites often deliver microaggressions because of their insensitivity toward and ignorance about nonwhites. This can be seen, for example, when a white person speaks Japanese to a Chinese American or tells a biracial woman with a black mother and a white father that being half-white makes it easier to get along with her. In the first instance, the white person may be trying to show a cultural interest in Asian people, although her act simultaneously tries to erase the differences between Japanese and Chinese people and reasserts the presumed foreignness of Asian Americans. In the second instance, this assertion reinforces white supremacy by implying that the biracial woman is better than other blacks because she has a white parent.

Microaggressions and other forms of individual racism continue to pose a problem on college campuses. Studies have consistently found that individual acts of bigotry are commonplace in institutions of higher learning (Harper and Hurtado 2007). In a recent study (Harper et al. 2011), higher education researchers interviewed fifty-two African American male resident assistants (RAs) on five college campuses and found that many of the participants reported that supervisors and fellow students consistently doubted their competence and stereotyped them as potential thugs or gangsters. The frequency of individual acts of racism on college campuses has led a number of scholars to argue that many primarily white campuses have hostile climates that are not conducive to learning for nonwhite students (Harper and Hurtado 2007). These issues came to a head at the University of Missouri amid a series of overtly racist incidents beginning in 2014. In April that year, freshman Bradley Becker inscribed a swastika and the word “heil” on a dormitory wall. In September, a group of young people near campus yelled the N-word at the student body president. When the administration did not respond to these incidents in a meaningful way, black students and allies organized and demanded the president’s resignation. As student protests mounted, racist incidents continued, including another swastika drawing. Finally, following the football team’s threatened boycott, President Tim Wolfe resigned in November 2015 (Izadi 2015).

voices

Microaggressions

Individuals who have had the following experiences and consider them to be racial microaggressions posted these reports on the website microaggressions.com. How do you feel as you read these reports? What would you say if you overheard such comments? What would you say if someone directed one of these comments at you?



- Often when I have dinner at people's houses, they ask me if I would prefer chopsticks, regardless of the meal!
- I am a registered nurse and always get told that I speak English so well. I was born in Australia and I am of Filipino background. I don't think about my appearance until a patient or their family member points it out, and they are quite amazed/baffled that someone who appears Asian "speaks so well" and could be considered a "real Australian."
- I always get asked to be an interpreter for patients who are not native English speakers, specifically for those of Asian background. Because I am of Asian background as well, there is this assumption that I speak every language in Asia or that there is only one language/country in Asia. Unbelievable.
- "Sorry, that must be my black coming out." [Said by] my biracial friend (African American and Mexican). Whenever she does or says something negative she blames it on the "Black" side of her. Makes me feel angry, belittled, resentful.
- I express that my brother attends a private university. Immediately a girl in the car responds in a very sure voice "Oh, he plays football?" This is the second time this has happened. As if a young black male can only attend a prestigious private college on a football scholarship.
- "You're really unimposing for a black guy." Said by white male. I am a freshman in college. Made me feel as though I should be intimidating because I'm black.
- Ohmygawd. You're totally not what people think of when they think of Muslim women. You're so cool.
- Wow. Don't get the Muslim mad, guys. We don't want a blown-up school tomorrow.
- Substitute teacher: Quiet down! You're acting like a bunch of wild Indians!

The presumption that Asian Americans use chopsticks at every meal is based on an idea of inherent cultural differences. We don't see these same presumptions applied to third-generation Italian Americans or Irish Americans.

- I express that my brother attends a private university. Immediately a girl in the car responds in a very sure voice "Oh, he plays football?" This is the second time this has happened. As if a young black male can only attend a prestigious private college on a football scholarship.
- "You're really unimposing for a black guy." Said by white male. I am a freshman in college. Made me feel as though I should be intimidating because I'm black.
- Ohmygawd. You're totally not what people think of when they think of Muslim women. You're so cool.
- Wow. Don't get the Muslim mad, guys. We don't want a blown-up school tomorrow.
- Substitute teacher: Quiet down! You're acting like a bunch of wild Indians!

voices

continued.

Microaggressions

- Oh, but you're Latin, so you must love the heat! While discussing the summer weather. I'm from Bogotá—the average temperature is 60°F. I feel like nobody in the States bothers to understand that Latinos are not just one monolithic entity.

Source: The Microaggressions Project.

Institutional Racism

In the late 1960s and 1970s, sociological thinking on racism moved away from a focus solely on prejudice and individual acts of racism toward an institutional approach. Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) introduced the idea of **institutional racism**—the policies, laws, and institutions that reproduce racial inequalities—in their book *Black Power*. They explained that the high rates of black infant mortality in Birmingham, Alabama, and the prevalence of black families in slums are best understood through an analysis of institutional racism.

In an essay published in 1979, Carol Camp Yeakey posited that research on institutional racism in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s represented a marked departure from previous research, which had not focused on “the attributes of the majority group and the institutional mechanisms by which majority and minority relations are created, sustained, and changed” (Yeakey 1979, 200). Yeakey then argued that racism operates on both a covert and an overt level and takes two related forms: “The first is on an individual level. The second is on an institutional level where racism as a normative, societal ideology operates within and among the organizations, institutions, and processes of the larger society. And the overt acts of individual racism and the more covert acts of institutional racism have a mutually reinforcing effect” (200).

Understanding the framework of institutional racism is essential for understanding racism in the United States, as racism amounts to more than individual acts of discrimination. An individual police officer may have prejudicial beliefs that blacks are more likely to be violent than whites. Based on this prejudice, the officer may be more likely to racially discriminate against blacks and more likely to use more physical force against blacks than whites. What do we call it, though, when

this kind of discrimination happens repeatedly? An analysis of the 1,217 U.S. police shootings between 2010 and 2012 found that young black males are twenty-one times more likely to be killed by police than are their white counterparts (Gabrielson, Grochowski) Jones, and Sagara 2014). How do we explain this statistic?

In overwhelmingly black neighborhoods in Washington, D.C., and Chicago, nearly three-quarters of black men have been incarcerated. In some states, black men go to jail on drug charges at fifty times the rate of white men. In seven states, blacks constitute over 80 percent of drug offenders sent to prison (Alexander 2010). These extraordinary disparities cannot be explained by individual acts of discrimination alone.

Instead, it makes sense to argue that racial discrimination has become institutionalized in the criminal justice system. This is because racial discrimination happens at every level of this system. The laws are written in ways that discriminate against blacks—the disparities in sentences for possession of crack and possession of cocaine are one example (Alexander 2010). Police officers are consistently more likely to pull over and arrest black men than they are white men. Blacks are more likely to get harsher sentences or even the death penalty (Gottschalk 2015). When we look at the system as a whole and see that the criminal justice apparatus more harshly affects blacks than whites, and when we can see that racial discrimination is consistent and systematic, we can say that the criminal justice system is a prime example of institutional racism. Institutional racism also exists in other institutions, including the educational system, housing, and the labor market.

SYSTEMIC RACISM AND STRUCTURAL RACISM

Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton (1967) developed the idea of institutional racism in the 1970s. Since that time, many thinkers have enhanced their conceptual models and developed more complex and integrative ways of thinking about institutional racism. In 1969, Samuel Robert Friedman (1969, 20) defined *structural racism* as a “pattern of action in which one or more of the institutions of society has the power to throw on more burdens and give less benefits to the members of one race than another on an on-going basis.” In 1979, Carol Camp Yeakey wrote about “the interrelated and cumulative nature of

systemic or institutional discrimination and racism,” the way racism works in “social systems” (203), and explained:

The resource allocation of city schools; residential segregation and housing quality; the location, structure, and placement of transport systems; hiring and promotion practices; academic underachievement of racial and ethnic minority youth; availability of decent health care; behavior of policemen and judges; a legal order that incarcerates more minorities than majorities; stereotypical images prevalent in the media and school curricula; price gouging in ghetto stores; morbidity, mortality, and longevity rates; lack of political clout and effective legislative representation—these and a myriad of other forms of social, political, and economic discrimination concurrently interlock to determine the status, welfare, and income of the racial and ethnic minorities of color.

Unfortunately, nearly forty years later, we can make the same assessment with regard to institutional racism. Fortunately, scholars of race and racism continue to refine these theories and approaches. In this section, we explore some of these current approaches.

Systemic Racism

Sociologist Joe Feagin defines **systemic racism** as “a diverse assortment of racist practices; the unjustly gained economic and political power of whites, the continuing resource inequalities; and the white-racist ideologies, attitudes, and institutions created to preserve white advantage and power” (2001, 16). He explains that systemic racism encompasses daily microaggressions, deep-seated inequalities, and antiblack ideologies. Taken together, systemic racism includes:

- Patterns of unjust impoverishment of nonwhites
- Vested group interests of whites to maintain racism
- Omnipresent and routinized discrimination against nonwhites
- The rationalization of racial oppression
- An imbalance of power whereby whites are able to reproduce inequality through control of major political and economic resources

Systemic racism theory gives primacy to history and to antiblackness: Feagin explains that systemic racism exists because of the history

of the United States as a slaveholding nation. Racial oppression was foundational to and is deeply ingrained in our nation's history. The legal system of the United States—based on the Constitution and Supreme Court cases—is rife with examples of entrenched racism. Systemic racism in history and the present day has created a “white racial frame” that shapes individuals and institutions in the United States. Feagin emphasizes that racism and racial inequality were created by whites and continue to be perpetuated by white individuals and white-owned institutions (2001).

The unjust enrichment of whites through slavery and privileged access to resources since the beginning of the United States is at the core of an understanding of systemic racism. This unjust enrichment has led to unjust impoverishment of African Americans. Past and continuing discrimination has created a situation in which African Americans have been denied resources many whites have come to take for granted, including good jobs, great schools, and nice neighborhoods (Feagin and McKinney 2003; Feagin 2001). The pervasiveness of everyday acts of discrimination, combined with a legacy of unequal distribution of resources throughout every aspect of U.S. society, constitutes systemic racism.

Structural Racism

Proponents of the idea of **structural racism** take a slightly different approach in their analysis of racial inequality. As we have seen, institutional racism focuses on practices within institutions, and systemic racism focuses on accumulated acts of racism across history and throughout one's lifetime. Structural racism differs by pointing to interinstitutional interactions across time and space. For example, racial inequality in housing leads to racial inequality in schooling, which in turn leads to racial inequality in the labor market. Across generations, this chain of events becomes a cycle because parents who are less well positioned in the labor market cannot afford housing in the better neighborhoods, which means that their children will be less likely to attend better schools. A structural understanding of racism underscores the “structural relationships that produce racialized outcomes” (powell 2008, 798). This emphasis on the relationships among structures of institutional inequality provides new insights into how racial inequality is reproduced across generations.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva proposes the concept of **racialized social systems**. By this term, he means “societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories” (1997, 469). Bonilla-Silva places particular emphasis on racial hierarchies and points to how these hierarchies influence all social relations. Societies that have racialized social systems differentially allocate “economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines” (442). Bonilla-Silva's framework reflects a structural racism perspective because he focuses on structures of inequality, hierarchies, and social relations and practices that reproduce and rationalize racial disparities.

Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro (2006) offer a keen analysis of the role of structural racism in reproducing wealth inequalities. They explain that wealth inequality “has been structured over many generations through the same systemic barriers that have hampered blacks throughout their history in American society: slavery, Jim Crow, so-called de jure discrimination, and institutionalized racism” (12–13). Oliver and Shapiro (2006) point to three instances of structural inequalities that work together: (1) blacks' transition from slavery to freedom without a material base, (2) the suburbanization of whites and the ghettoization of blacks, and (3) contemporary institutional racism in the lending and real estate markets. These three inequalities work together to create a situation in which the median net worth of one white household is ten times that of a Hispanic or Latinx household and thirteen times that of a black household (Kochhar and Fry 2014) (Figure 2-1).

FIGURE 2-1

MEDIAN NET WORTH OF WHITE, HISPANIC/LATINX, AND BLACK HOUSEHOLDS, 2013



Source: Pew Research Center (2014).

Oliver and Shapiro (2006) explain how laws and policies, even those that do not mention race, can still work to enhance racial inequality. Our tax policies provide one example. In the United States, capital gains are taxed at a lower rate than income, and tax deductions are offered for home mortgages. These policies are ostensibly designed to help the middle class and encourage economic growth. However, they provide many more advantages to whites than to blacks because blacks rarely have capital gains income, are less likely to own a home, and, when they do own a home, have houses that are worth less than whites' houses (Shapiro 2004). These state policies work to widen the wealth gap between blacks and whites by providing advantages to those who are already wealthier and who are more likely to be white.

RACIAL IDEOLOGIES

The work of Patricia Hill Collins (2004) is useful for understanding ideological shifts. As she explains: "When ideologies that defend racism become taken-for-granted and appear to be natural and inevitable, they become hegemonic. Few question them and the social hierarchies they defend" (96). When Collins explains that racial ideologies are *hegemonic*, she means they become so widely accepted that they become common sense. An ideology is more than an individual prejudice: it is a set of principles and ideas that embodies the interests of a societal group. A *racial ideology*, then, is a set of principles and ideas that (1) divides people into different racial groups and (2) serves the interests of one group. Ideologies are usually created by the dominant group and reflect the interests of that group. Both historically and today, the dominant racial group in the United States includes whites (Feagin 2001). Our individual prejudices and acts of discrimination are directly related to our acceptance (conscious or unconscious) of racial ideologies.

Many scholars make a distinction between old racism—which permitted the internment of the Japanese and the enslavement of Africans, for example—and a new but related ideology that perpetuates racism without such practices. In *new racism*, it is no longer acceptable to make overtly racist statements or to have overtly racist laws (P. H. Collins 2004; Bonilla-Silva 2013; Logan 2011; Wingfield and Feagin 2010). Racism did not disappear with the dismantling of slavery and **Jim Crow laws**, nor did the civil rights era mark the end of racism. Race

scholars generally agree that the post-1965 era is distinct. Theorists Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) explain that whereas the government could once be overtly violent toward nonwhites, "in the post-civil rights era, the racial state cannot merely dominate; it must seek *hegemony*" (147) (emphasis in original). By this statement Omi and Winant meant that policymakers must seek to make the current racial order seem natural and normal, as it is no longer viable to have laws and practices that are explicitly racist.

Racial inequality persists today both because of our history—colonialism, slavery, and Jim Crow—and because of ongoing practices of discrimination and exclusion. The new racism is an outgrowth of past racial inequality; mass media and popular beliefs "help manufacture the consent that makes the new racism appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable" (P. H. Collins 2004, 34). Racial inequality in the United States has become naturalized. We have come to think of it as normal that African American men are overrepresented among prisoners and that white men are overrepresented among the elite, even though we would never accept laws that overtly discriminated against African Americans.

In the United States, most people do not consider themselves to be racist, and laws are in place that prevent overt acts of discrimination. Despite this massive change in attitudes and laws over the past century, racial inequality persists. African Americans have, on average, a mere 10 percent of the wealth that whites have (Oliver and Shapiro 2006). African American men are seven times more likely than white men to go to prison (Feagin 2001). On almost any measure, black and Latinx people are doing worse socially and economically than white people in the United States (Logan 2011). How do we explain the persistence of racial inequality despite the social stigma associated with being a racist? One way is by looking at how different forms of racism operate. This allows us to see how some forms of racism are more acceptable than others, even though all racial ideologies serve the same purpose: to explain, rationalize, and normalize racial inequality and injustice.

Another reason to examine racial ideologies closely is that despite trends that demonstrate widespread racial inequality, a few prominent exceptions make it seem as if racism is a problem of the past. Most notably, the United States had an African American president, has a Latina and an African American serving on the Supreme Court, and has a woman of African American and Indian descent serving as

U.S. senator of California. How do we explain these developments? Clearly, we need new ways to think and talk about race and racism. In this section, we will discuss different forms of racism and consider the extent to which these racial ideologies persist.

Biological Racism

Biological racism is the idea that whites are genetically superior to nonwhites. This idea has its origins in the scientific racism of the nineteenth century, which set out to prove whites' superior innate intelligence. In the 1920s, the American lawyer Madison Grant argued that Nordics were the "master race" and that the United States should pass laws banning interracial marriages and ensuring the sterilization of inferior races. In the twenty-first century, it would be difficult to find people who openly advocate for the sterilization of blacks because of their biological inferiority. Nevertheless, these ideas have not completely disappeared.

One of the most prominent examples of biological racism in recent decades is a 1994 book called *The Bell Curve*. In this book, Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray argue that intelligence is quantifiable. For Herrnstein and Murray, as for a century of intelligence testers before them, the fact that blacks scored lower on intelligence tests than whites provided support for the idea that blacks are innately inferior to whites. More recently, Frank Miele and Vincent Sarich argued in *Race: The Reality of Human Differences* (2004) that races are a biological reality and that there are measurable intellectual differences among racial groups. The publication of *The Bell Curve*, *Race: The Reality of Human Differences*, and other books and articles in this vein provide evidence of the persistence of the belief that whites are genetically or biologically superior to nonwhites. However, most academics reject these views, and few Americans openly express such opinions in public spaces today. Biological racism still exists, but it is waning and is subject to virulent criticism whenever expressed.

Cultural Racism

Cultural racism is a way of thinking that attributes disadvantaged racial groups' lack of prosperity to their behavior and culture rather than to structural factors. Unlike biological racism, which claims that some races are inferior because of lower intelligence, cultural racism is the standpoint that a particular culture—African American or Latinx culture, for example—inhibits success.

The 1965 publication of a report by the U.S. politician Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1927–2003) planted the seeds for many of the ideas inherent in cultural racism. The document, which has come to be known as the Moynihan Report, acknowledged the pervasiveness of poverty in the black community and pointed to the breakdown of the black family as one of the principal causes of this poverty. Moynihan argued that the history of slavery and racism had had detrimental consequences for the black family. He made the gendered argument that the central problem of black America was that there were too many single black mothers who were incapable of raising children on their own. His proposed solution to black poverty was restoration of black men to their rightful place as breadwinners and heads of families. For Moynihan, the solution to black poverty was to "fix" black families. This stance—which ignores structural factors such as discriminatory employment policies and practices—is typical of cultural racism. Essentially, the cultural racism argument points to the behavioral patterns and culture of African Americans as the primary cause of their poverty. Cultural racism persists today. For example, pundits often blame blacks' educational failures on dysfunctional families or parenting styles rather than on failing schools and pervasive poverty.

Cultural racism also takes another form: teachers perceive children who invoke African American language and style as less intelligent than those who conform to the dominant culture. Ann Arnett Ferguson (2001) found in her research in an elementary school that black students were more likely to get into trouble at school because of the way teachers and school administrators responded to their body language, oral expressiveness, manners, and styles. She found that children who conformed to white, middle-class cultural norms were less likely to get into trouble and were more likely to do well in school, and that the use of African American forms of expressiveness in school was grounds for punishment. Ferguson also argues that when children are white or behave in a white middle-class way, they are perceived to be self-disciplined and good, while children who "behave black" are perceived as troublemakers. Ferguson's findings point to the persistence of cultural racism: whereas white, middle-class children are rewarded for behaving in school as they and their parents do at home, working-class and poor black children are punished for speaking and acting as their parents do.

Cultural racism also affects other racialized groups in the United States. Latinas are often portrayed as “pregnant breeders” who plan to have “anchor babies” in the United States (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1995). Asians feel the brunt of the “model minority” stereotype—the myth that Asians are smarter, harder-working, and more successful than other minorities. And Native Americans are perceived alternatively as “savages” or “wise men.” The racialized stereotypes of Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinx Americans are discussed further in Chapter Four.

Color-Blind Racism

Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva offers a framework for understanding how pervasive racial inequality exists even though no one wants to be called a racist. In his work, Bonilla-Silva (2013) presents the notion of **color-blind racism**, a racial ideology that explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics, such as market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and nonwhites’ supposed cultural limitations. This racial ideology ignores or marginalizes people of color’s distinctive needs, experiences, and identities. Bonilla-Silva argues that although race is a social construction, the idea of race is real in a social sense and has produced a racial structure that systematically privileges whites.

How is it possible that racial inequality is widespread when most whites claim there is no racism and that they are not racist? Bonilla-Silva offers an explanation in his book *Racism Without Racists* (2013). His research team interviewed whites and asked them questions about their views on race in the United States. He found that whites use several “frames” of color-blind racism to rationalize and reproduce racial inequality.

One frame Bonilla-Silva mentions is **abstract liberalism**. This frame involves using liberal ideas such as equality of opportunity or freedom of choice to explain or rationalize racial inequality. For example, when presented with the fact that African Americans still live in underserved, poorer neighborhoods than whites do, a person using this frame would explain this inequality by saying that people live in such neighborhoods because they choose to do so. Nothing prevents them from leaving, so their situation arises not because of racism but because of individual choices. This response, however, ignores the structural factors that have created segregation and continue to

perpetuate it. Similarly, the **naturalization** frame permits people to explain racial phenomena as if they were natural. The explanation for segregation would be that people like to be around others who are like them. Again, segregation develops not because of structural factors, but because it’s normal or natural.

The aforementioned frames represent explanations that whites consistently offered in interviews about their racial attitudes. In addition, Bonilla-Silva found that whites used specific **rhetorical strategies**, or ways of expressing ideas, to rationalize their own racial prejudices and discriminatory actions. These rhetorical strategies permit whites to reproduce racism without being labeled as racists. Bonilla-Silva argues that because post–civil rights racial norms do not permit the open expression of racial views, whites have developed hidden ways of voicing them.

As Bonilla-Silva found, one common rhetorical strategy is to preface discriminatory claims with “I am not a racist, but . . .” Alternatively, a white person would say, “Some of my best friends are black, but . . .” For example, when asked if he would mind if his daughter married a black man, a white person would respond, “I am not a racist, but I don’t think interracial marriages work.” Or the white person might use another rhetorical strategy called **projection**, according to which she would respond: “I don’t mind if my daughter marries a black man, but you have to think about the children.” These rhetorical strategies allow whites to express discriminatory or prejudiced ideas without seeming racist.

In his research, Bonilla-Silva found that color-blind racial ideology is used in everyday speech patterns to **rationalize** racial inequality. It influences rhetorical strategies, stories, and etiquette that allow whites to explain why racial inequality exists even though most people are not racist. In addition to rationalizing racial inequality, color-blind racism **reproduces** racial inequality by permitting people to engage in discriminatory actions without being labeled as racists.

Islamophobia and Anti-Arab Racism

Islam is a religion. Does it make sense, then, to define **Islamophobia**—the systematic marginalization of Muslims—as racism? Because race and religion are distinct phenomena, religious discrimination and racial discrimination are not identical. Nevertheless, it is clear that the United States is a Christian-centric society and that people who are not Christians face various forms of marginalization. To what extent should these forms of exclusion be considered racism?

Ramón Grosfoguel and Eric Mielants (2006) state that Islamophobia began as religious discrimination and has evolved into racial/ethnic discrimination. They point out that, at the same time that the Spaniards set out to colonize the Americas, they expelled Jews and Arabs from the Spanish peninsula. During this time, religious beliefs were the primary motivation for the marginalization of Jews and Arabs. Grosfoguel and Mielants argue that in more recent times, however, Islamophobia and anti-Arab sentiment have primarily taken the form of cultural racism—a concept discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. They explain that the tropes used to describe Muslims and Arabs such as “uncivilized,” “barbarian,” “savage,” “primitive,” “underdeveloped,” “authoritarian,” and “terrorist” (4) are markers of cultural racism.

For Grosfoguel and Mielants (2006), Islamophobia is a form of racism. Steven Salaita (2006) argues, however, that it is important to draw a distinction between Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism. Despite the American conflation of Arabs and Muslims, only one-fifth of the world's total Muslim population is Arab, and not all Arabs are Muslim (Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006). Salaita (2006) maintains that anti-Arab racism goes beyond dislike or distaste for Islam: it is used to rationalize U.S. military interventions in the Middle East.

RACIAL FORMATION

Whereas analyses of structural and systemic racism focus on racism itself, Michael Omi and Howard Winant consider racial meanings (1994). They introduce the concept of *racial formation* to help us understand how racial dynamics work in the United States. Omi and Winant define racial formation as “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed,” and as a “process or historically situated project” (56). They argue that the state (i.e., the national government) is the primary site where race is constructed and contested. According to this theory, the state can reproduce or alleviate racial inequality through its institutions and policies. Omi and Winant explore “how concepts of race are created and changed” and argue that “concepts of race structure both state and civil society” (vii).

When Omi and Winant's book was first published in 1986, it was a welcome change from earlier works that studied race as a variation of ethnicity, class, or nation. Instead, Omi and Winant presented race as

a topic worthy of study in itself. Their groundbreaking work has greatly enhanced our understanding of how race works in the United States.

Omi and Winant (1994) draw from the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci to argue that racial dynamics in the United States have changed from domination to hegemony. Domination refers to direct rule by coercion, whereas hegemony involves rule by both coercion and consent. For example, Omi and Winant contend that the United States prior to the civil rights era could be characterized as a racial dictatorship in which racial inequality was enforced through domination. During slavery and the Jim Crow era, white domination was legal, state-enforced, and difficult to contest openly. In the current era of racial hegemony, racial stratification and white dominance are achieved more subtly through coercion and consent. Omi and Winant argue that the United States is undergoing a slow, gradual, and contentious transition from a racial dictatorship to a racial democracy.

The concept of racial formation blends an understanding of social structures with an understanding of cultural representations. Omi and Winant use the concept of a *racial project*, which they define as being “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (1994, 56). Racial projects give meaning to racial categories through both cultural representations and social structures. For example, Doris Marie Provine and Roxanne Lynn Doty (2011) argue that the criminalization of immigrants through intensified immigration policy enforcement is a racial project. In this example, the state targets immigrants and draws attention to their vulnerable status. The increased law enforcement and resulting media attention reinforce the marginalization of immigrants as a racialized group.

For Omi and Winant, a racial project is defined as racist if it “creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race” (1994, 71). They are careful to distinguish between race and racism and to point out that not all racial projects are racist. Projects are racist only when they reproduce structures of domination and hegemony. For example, one could argue that the criminalization of Latinx immigrants is a racist project because it reinforces the marginalized status of this racialized group. Omi and Winant argue that every state institution is a racial institution. They don't go so far as to say that every state institution is *racist*. This is because they believe the state can also use racial schemas to promote racial equality.

WHITE SUPREMACY AND SETTLER COLONIALISM

What if we consider present-day racism in the United States from the perspective of indigenous studies? From this perspective, we are forced to contend with questions related to the meaning of white control of lands that once belonged to Native Americans. What would the end of racism look like for indigenous peoples? Native Americans' claims are different from those of African Americans.

Andrea Smith (2012) argues that there are three pillars of white supremacy: (1) antiblack racism, (2) genocide, and (3) orientalism (Table 4-1). Antiblack racism defines people as property, thereby rationalizing slavery and current forms of exploitation, and is rooted in a logic of capitalism—that is, designed to extract profit. Genocide is rooted in colonialism. This is the idea that native people are disappearing and must disappear, and that therefore non-native people have a right to everything that once belonged to native people. Orientalism is rooted in the idea that certain nations or peoples pose a permanent threat to Western civilization and is thereby used to rationalize war.

Although the United States is no longer engaged in the mass murder and expulsion of Native Americans, many indigenous scholars contend that the logics of genocide and settler colonialism endure (A. Smith 2012). Native Americans continue to have a unique legal position in the United States: they are citizens both of the United States and of the tribes to which they belong. Scholars such as Andrea Smith (2012) contend that capitalist ideas of property ownership and white supremacist ideas of indigenous inferiority work together to justify the expropriation (seizure) of indigenous lands. From this perspective, simply returning lands to Native Americans would not solve the

problem of indigenous expropriation. The more fundamental problem is the nation-state itself and the idea that people can control territory and keep other human beings out of it.

Once we recognize that the United States is a nation rooted in white supremacy, it becomes clear that the state will never grant native peoples self-determination. For some indigenous scholars, this recognition means that the struggle against racism requires a challenge to the very existence of the United States as a legitimate state (A. Smith 2012).

Joe Feagin (2001), in his systemic racism framework, contends that antiblack oppression is at the center of U.S. society, even though the United States was formed through genocide. Andrea Smith (2012) contests this framework, arguing that the United States exists precisely because of the disappearance of indigenous people and that this genocide continues today. One's framework for understanding the experience of native peoples is critical because it shapes how we view racial progress or regression. Smith points to the example of high rates of intermarriage between Native Americans and whites. Is this progress? Or is it a continuation of a pattern of genocide?

Using these perspectives, we can see how frameworks shape research questions and answers. From the perspective of settler colonialism, one might argue that the United States is an illegitimate state founded on genocide and must be dismantled. From a systemic racism perspective, one can argue that the United States is founded on a history of racism and that the Constitution must be rewritten. From a racial formation perspective, the United States is headed in the right direction and through more struggles for justice and civil rights will complete the transition from racial dictatorship to racial democracy.

INTERSECTIONAL THEORIES OF RACE AND RACISM

In what ways do race, class, and gender oppression work together? Some race scholars argue that we need to develop a concrete understanding of how race and racism work before we can understand other forms of oppression. Feminist scholars, however, often contend that we must look at race and gender oppression simultaneously—a concept known as **intersectionality**.

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) uses this concept in her work, making her point with the example of a group of black and Latina women in a battered women's shelter. Taken together, the factors of race, class, and

TABLE 2-1
Pillars of White Supremacy

BASIS	Antiblack Racism			Genocide		Orientalism	
	Capitalism	People can be property.	Native people are disappearing and must disappear.	Colonialism	Security	Certain nations or peoples pose a permanent threat to Western civilization.	War against such nations or peoples is justified.
POSITION							
CONCLUSION		Slavery and current forms of exploitation are justified.	Non-native people have a right to all that once belonged to native people.				

Source: Based on A. Smith 2012.

gender elucidate how these women ended up in the shelter. The women faced abuse in part because of gender oppression, but their economically vulnerable situation and race also help us understand their situation. If they had the economic resources, they likely would have gone elsewhere—not to a shelter. If they were white, they wouldn't face racial discrimination in employment, meaning that they may have had more resources. If they were men, their chances of being battered would be much lower. Any proposed method of helping these women must pay attention to their gender, class-based, and racial oppression. A narrow lens that focuses on just race, gender, or class would miss crucial aspects of these women's situations.

Similarly, Priya Kandaswamy (2012) contends that an intersectional perspective helps us better understand welfare policies. She argues that race scholars, Marxists, and feminists often look past one another. In contrast, she adopts an intersectional perspective to shed light on the 1996 welfare reforms. Interconnected ideas of gender, sexuality, race, and class influence public opinions about who deserves state assistance and who does not. The 1996 welfare reforms, which dramatically reduced public aid, did not mention race specifically. In contrast, the writers of the legislation had no qualms about promoting heteronormative ideas (the assumption that heterosexuality is or should be the norm): the first line of the 1996 law is: "Marriage is the foundation of a successful society." The 1996 law explicitly embraced marriage, was based on a public discussion of family values and personal responsibility, and was designed to reform the "welfare queen," a stereotypical figure who is often imagined as a black woman.

Kandaswamy (2012) explains how the idea that race is historically produced and constantly changing can complicate our understanding of intersectionality, as it forces us to look at how race and gender "are constituted in and through each other" (26). Race is a socially constructed idea that has developed in conjunction with ideas about gender, class, and sexuality. In this examination of welfare policy, Kandaswamy explains concretely how the adoption of an intersectional perspective can enhance a racial formation perspective.

WHITE PRIVILEGE

Whereas most studies of racism focus on oppression, those scholars who use a white privilege framework focus on privilege—the opposite side of oppression. **White privilege** refers to the advantages inherent

in being categorized as white. The concept derives from earlier work by African American sociologist W. E. B. DuBois (1868–1963), who observed that white workers in the United States over time came to see themselves as white like their bosses, as opposed to developing working-class solidarity with recently freed black slaves. DuBois argued in 1936 that white workers received a psychological "wage of whiteness" by aligning with the dominant group; they were poor, but at least they were white. Additionally, by reserving certain segments of the labor market for whites only, white laborers were able to reap material rewards from their whiteness. Other scholars, mostly historians, have built on DuBois's insights to explain how waves of European immigrants learned to be white and to reap the privileges of whiteness (Allen 1994; Jacobson 1998; Roediger 1999).

Prior to coming to the United States, European immigrants of the early twentieth century did not think of themselves as white. And, in some cases, people in the United States did not see them as white. Irish immigrants learned to capitalize on their whiteness by forming unions and excluding blacks from them. And although Jews faced discrimination during and after World War II, as whites, they were able to reap the benefits of the GI bills and Federal Housing Administration and Department of Veterans Affairs mortgages that were denied to blacks, which propelled many whites into the middle class (Brodtkin 2005). Whereas these European immigrants had to learn to be white, most whites today never have to think about whiteness.

In the contemporary United States, whiteness is an unmarked identity. Whereas African, Latinx, Asian, and Native Americans are constantly reminded of their race, European Americans easily can forget that they too have a race (Dalton 2005). When we talk about race (or, more recently, diversity), the focus is usually on nonwhites, as if white were not also a race (Lewis 2004). When we think of race in the United States, whiteness usually is not the first thing that comes to mind. The reason is that whiteness has become normalized—"whiteness makes itself invisible precisely by asserting its normalcy" (Frankenberg 1997, 6).

Privilege is often hard to notice. If you are white, it can be difficult to notice that you are not being followed around the store; that people are smiling at you on the street instead of clutching their purses; that no one asks you if you speak English; that you are not asked for identification when paying with a credit card. Instead, you are likely to think that these things are normal—that this is simply how things are. To notice these privileges as a white person, you likely would have to

walk down the street with an African American friend or accompany a Latinx friend to get a driver's license. Then, you may notice a difference in terms of how white people respond to you and your nonwhite friend. Few whites notice they are treated better than nonwhites, and most are unlikely to attribute that better treatment to privilege. Privilege is largely invisible to those who have it.

White privilege only becomes visible when people point it out. For example, in 2015, a white Stanford student by the name of Brock Allen Turner was found sexually assaulting an unconscious, semi-naked white woman behind a dumpster. She was taken to the hospital, where a nurse noted that significant trauma had been inflicted on the victim's genitalia. When the case went to trial, the jury found Turner guilty on three felony counts, and the prosecution argued he should get a six-year sentence. However, Judge Aaron Persky was hesitant to punish Turner this severely and gave him six months in county jail instead. The judge explained: "A prison sentence would have a severe impact on him." *Huffington Post* writer Alanna Vagianos wrote in response: "Turner's lenient punishment is the perfect example of what happens when rape culture and white privilege collide." By *rape culture*, Vagianos is referring to the normalization of sexual abuse of women in our society. Because of Turner's whiteness and class privilege, the judge had sympathy for him. Turner was held in protective custody and ultimately spent only three months behind bars (Vagianos 2016).

The case of Brock Turner, as well as many other cases of white privilege, makes it clear that white privilege doesn't simply exist—it is enacted. The judge gave Turner a light sentence because he did not believe Turner to be a dangerous man, despite the evidence that Turner had committed rape. When shopkeepers are not suspicious of white shoppers, the white shopper is the beneficiary of the privilege, but only because the shopkeeper has accepted the racist idea that whites are less likely to shoplift. White privilege, then, is related to white supremacy: white privilege exists because of past and current practices that reproduce racism.

We can also ask, however, whether racism can be harmful to whites even though white privilege exists. In *Whiteness: The Power of Privilege*, the antiracism activist and writer Tim Wise contends that "the price we pay to stay one step ahead of others is enormous" (2005, 120). The vast majority of working people could earn higher wages and have

better benefits if whites and nonwhites worked together to demand them as a common goal. Whites are less likely to go to prison than black or Latinx people, yet the enormous amount of resources the United States invests in the prison-industrial complex are resources that don't go into better schools, parks, libraries, and universities. For these reasons, W. E. B. DuBois and others have referred to the "psychological wage of whiteness": racism makes all whites *think* they are getting a better deal, but the reality is that racism affects all of us, albeit in different ways. DuBois argued that the psychological wage of whiteness drives a wedge between white and black laborers, who otherwise share an interest in working together to fight for better material conditions.

It is important to think about white privilege for several reasons. First of all, if we want to understand racial oppression, it is crucial to understand how it looks from the other side. Second, white privilege often remains invisible, and by bringing it to light we can develop a better understanding of how racism works in our society.

WHITENESS, CLASS, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

An important point to keep in mind when thinking about white privilege is that although it certainly benefits some whites, not all whites experience white privilege in the same way. When an employer gives a white applicant the benefit of the doubt because he is white, the applicant experiences white privilege, whether or not he is aware of it. However, a poor lesbian white woman in rural South Carolina, for example, will experience her whiteness—and her white privilege—in different ways than a wealthy white heterosexual male stockbroker in New York. The white stockbroker will have doors opened to him that will remain shut to a poor woman of any race.

White privilege can be hard to see. Similarly, class privilege also often remains invisible. In a study that compared middle-class white students with poor white students, Kirby Moss found that middle-class white students "overwhelmingly perceived class position as nearly nonexistent within White culture" (2003, 32). It was very difficult for these middle-class whites to see that they had advantages that working-class and poor whites did not. In contrast, the working-class and poor whites criticized the middle-class whites for being lazy and entitled and for not having to work for anything in life.

The privileges associated with being white were not the same for these two groups. The poor whites experienced a contradiction in their identities—whites were not supposed to be poor, yet they were. These poor whites found it difficult to envision taking advantage of their whiteness, as their poverty presented obstacles to enjoying the privileges of whiteness. Although they were white, they did not have the “set of cultural practices” (Frankenberg 1993, 43) associated with whiteness because of their class background. Moreover, many of these poor whites lived in poor, primarily nonwhite neighborhoods, where their whiteness presented obstacles to acceptance in their own neighborhoods.

Past and present-day practices of individual and institutional racism have created segregated neighborhoods in the United States. Whites’ privileged access to primarily white neighborhoods is part of white privilege. The other side of this coin is that working-class and poor whites cannot always afford to live in middle-class white neighborhoods and thus are unable to reap this particular benefit of whiteness. As Kirby Moss (2003) contends, poor whites sometimes live in primarily nonwhite neighborhoods because that is where they can afford to live. Living in those neighborhoods, poor whites encounter many of the same challenges that their nonwhite neighbors encounter, such as crime, violence, and lack of access to resources.

This is one example that makes it evident that white privilege does not always work in the same way for working-class and poor whites as it does for wealthier whites. It is important to note here, however, that most poor whites live in primarily white neighborhoods, just as most poor blacks live in primarily black neighborhoods (Bischoff and Reardon 2014). A white man who enters a primarily black neighborhood may be made aware of his whiteness once he finds himself surrounded by blacks and receiving stares (or even glares) from residents who want to know why a white person is in their neighborhood. In the narrow space of a primarily black neighborhood, a white person may not feel she is experiencing white privilege. However, a middle-class white man often can live his whole life without ever having to enter a space where his whiteness will present a challenge. He can avoid primarily black neighborhoods because there is no reason for him to ever go there. In contrast, a black man may need to go to a white neighborhood because that is where his job is located, or he may want to move into such a neighborhood because that is where the good schools are.

A black man may encounter problems with law enforcement or neighborhood watch associations if he walks around a middle-class white neighborhood.

Just as whiteness is linked to class, it is also defined by gender and sexuality. White womanhood has historically been linked to sexual virtuosity, and for women, white privilege can hinge on maintaining an appearance of sexual respectability. Amy Wilkins (2004) uses the case of Puerto Rican wannabes—white girls and young women who draw on Puerto Rican cultural styles to attract men of color—to explain how race, class, gender, and sexuality are co-constructed. Puerto Rican wannabes manipulate their gender and sexual identities to cross racial boundaries: by defying conceptions of white womanhood by dressing provocatively, they can claim to identify with Puerto Rican-ness. Notably, they reject whiteness through the rejection of mainstream notions of sexuality.

Catrin Lundström (2014) explored whiteness at the other end of the spectrum of white womanhood—Swedish whiteness. Through interviews with married female Swedish immigrants in the United States, Lundstrom found that their American husbands placed tremendous value on their wives’ Swedish heritage. These American men viewed Swedish women as representing an ideal form of whiteness that encompasses white purity, beauty, and sensuality. Lundstrom’s work adds nuance to sociological understandings of whiteness, as it allows us to see that there are degrees of whiteness in the United States and that these ideas of whiteness are intertwined with ideas of gender, sexuality, and white womanhood.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Theories of systemic, structural, and institutional racism provide us with different frameworks to understand the deep-seated nature of racial inequality in the United States. These analyses place the emphasis on racism; Feagin and Elias (2013) argue that only through an understanding of racial oppression can we grasp the true nature of racial meanings. In contrast, racial formation theory focuses on how race is constructed, and we can use these analyses to deepen our understanding of racism (Omi and Winant 1994). Analyses of white privilege focus on privilege to show how racial oppression works. Still other scholars

invoke settler colonialism as the primary framework for understanding racial oppression. Which perspective is the most valuable?

There is no right answer to this question. Instead, the usefulness of a perspective depends on the kind of question you are asking. For example, imagine you were examining why African Americans and Latinx Americans fared worse economically than whites in the aftermath of the Great Recession. An analysis based on systemic or structural racism would be especially useful in this case (Kochhar, Fry, and Taylor 2011). If you were considering why Indonesian women use whitening creams, even though they express no desire to be Caucasian, a racial formation perspective would offer valuable nuances (Saraswati 2010). Both of these studies are grounded in the field of racial and ethnic studies, but they have different research questions and goals and thus draw from different frameworks.

The frameworks set forth by indigenous and feminist scholars can also be more or less useful, depending on the kinds of questions you decide to ask. A consideration of Mayan migration to Houston would likely benefit from Andrea Smith's (2012) indigenous-settler framework, and an analysis of violence in youth gangs in Oakland would likely be enriched by an intersectional perspective that focuses on race, class, gender, and sexuality. A study of whiteness and class in an economically diverse white neighborhood would do well to interrogate the white privilege perspective. No theory can be expected to shed light on every aspect of our society. Moreover, sociologists and other thinkers continue to develop ways for us to understand inequality. Readers of these texts can decide for themselves which frameworks are most useful for understanding the questions that are important to them. What about you? What frameworks do you find most compelling, and why?

THINKING ABOUT RACIAL JUSTICE

THE UNITED STATES has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world. African American men are seven times more likely than white men to go to prison. Explain this statistic using two different perspectives from this chapter (e.g., cultural racism, institutional racism, structural racism, white privilege). Can either of these perspectives help us to understand this disparity? Is either of these perspectives useful in terms of racial justice?

Key Terms

sociological theory of racism	33	Jim Crow laws	44
prejudice	33	biological racism	46
discrimination	33	cultural racism	46
assimilation	34	color-blind racism	48
individual racism	35	abstract liberalism	17
racial microaggression	36	naturalization	49
institutional racism	39	rhetorical strategies	49
systemic racism	41	Islamophobia	49
structural racism	42	racial formation	50
racialized social systems	43	racial project	51
hegemonic ideology	44	intersectionality	53
racial ideology	44	white privilege	54
new racism	44	wage of whiteness	55

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

2.1 How is individual racism linked to institutional inequality?

Prejudice, discrimination, and institutional racism are interconnected and thus should not be studied in isolation. Prejudice refers to beliefs about racial difference; discrimination refers to actions; and institutional racism describes the larger context in which prejudice and discrimination occur.

- Q How widespread is individual racism, and how does it persist?
- Q What are some examples of racial microaggressions?
- Q What is the relationship between individual and institutional racism?

2.2 How do systemic racism and structural racism create racial disparities?

Systemic racism and structural racism are two theoretical frameworks that aim to explain how racism is deeply rooted in society. While systemic racism focuses on accumulated acts of racism across history and throughout one's lifetime, structural racism points to interinstitutional interactions across time and space.

- Q What is one key difference between systemic racism and structural racism?
- Q How does structural racism explain wealth inequalities?

2.3 What are racial ideologies, and how have they functioned and changed over time?

A racial ideology is a set of principles and ideas that (1) divides people into different racial groups and (2) serves the interests of one group. Racism has changed over the years yet continues to benefit whites.

- Q What is an example of racism pre-1965?
- Q What is an example of racism post-1965?
- Q What are the differences among biological, cultural, and color-blind racism?
- Q How is Islamophobia related to racism?

2.4 What is racial formation, and how does this concept inform our understanding of racial inequality?

Racial formation is one of the most influential theories of race and racism in the United States. It focuses on racial meanings—how racial categories are “created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed,” as Omi and Winant (1994) describe.

- Q What do Omi and Winant mean when they say the United States is transitioning from a racial dictatorship to a racial democracy?
- Q What is an example of a racial project?

2.5 What does the perspective of indigenous studies reveal about racism in the contemporary United States?

One way to consider how racism works is to examine it from the perspective of indigenous studies. This leads us to consider settler colonialism theory, which offers a broad critique of racism and capitalism.

- Q What are the three pillars of white supremacy?
- Q Why is it important to understand genocide in relation to contemporary race relations?

2.6 In what ways do race, class, and gender oppression work together?

Ideas of race, gender, class, and sexuality all shape how racism works, and intersectional scholars take these factors seriously as they build their frameworks.

- Q What is an example of a scenario that intersectional theory helps us understand?

2.7 What is white privilege, and how does it function?

White privilege refers to the advantages associated with being categorized as white and can be a useful analytic for understanding racial oppression. Whiteness and white privilege vary by class, gender, and sexuality.

- Q Who benefits from white privilege, and why?

Critical Thinking

1. Think of an issue related to racial inequality and use one of the frameworks discussed in this chapter to explain it. Justify your selection of this framework over the others.
2. What are some of the key differences between systemic racism and structural racism, and how might they shape your research agenda?
3. Most of the scholars cited in the section on intersectionality are women of color. Why do you think these scholars have been at the head of these debates and discussions?

Talking about Race

Structural ideas of racism help us understand how racial inequality can be reproduced even in the absence of overtly racist acts. What racial disparities in your community could be explained by a structural theory? How can you use what you have learned in this chapter to explain such disparities? Some examples might include a lack of green spaces in non-white neighborhoods, a preponderance of minorities in lower-quality schools, or a concentration of nonwhites in poorer areas of the city.