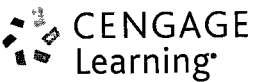


RACE AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

American and Global Perspectives

TENTH EDITION

Martin N. Marger



Australia • Brazil • Japan • Korea • Mexico • Singapore • Spain • United Kingdom • United States

**Race and Ethnic Relations:
American and Global
Perspectives, Tenth Edition**
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INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER

II

Some Basic Concepts

Every four years, January 20 is an important date in the United States, the day on which a new (or reelected) president is sworn into office. January 20 of 2008, however, carried even greater than usual significance, for it marked the beginning of what seemed like a new era in American history. Barack Obama, a self-identified African American, took the oath of office as the forty-fourth occupant of the White House. He had been elected with what had been, in the contemporary American political context, a solid majority of the vote. No more than a few years before Obama's election, national polls had indicated the improbability of such an occurrence; a black candidate winning the presidency, though perhaps inevitable, seemed many decades in the future. Obama's election, then, evinced a remarkable shift in American race and ethnic relations—the acceptance by a majority of voters of a black man as the nation's most powerful, prestigious, and celebrated figure. That Obama's election in 2008 was not a fluke or the result of unusual political circumstances was confirmed by his reelection—also by a comfortable majority of the vote—in 2012.

The symbolic importance of Obama's election and reelection cannot be overstated. Indeed, many Americans regarded them as milestones, the culmination of generations of struggles to eradicate the social and political inequalities founded on race and ethnicity that had been such a central part of America's heritage. Beneath the veneer of these historic accomplishments and obscured in their celebration, however, were deep and steadfast racial and ethnic divisions, on which the presidential elections of 2008 and 2012—undeniably momentous events—would have no tangible effect.

Despite the fact that an African American today occupies the highest political office in the land, the economic and social discrepancies between blacks and whites remain enormous. Consider that blacks earn, on average, about two-thirds of what whites earn, suffer an unemployment rate double that of whites, are almost three times more likely than whites to live below the poverty line, and are six times more likely to be incarcerated. Similar, if somewhat less severe, discrepancies are evident between whites and other racial and ethnic minorities, particularly Latinos.

Moreover, for the most part, blacks and whites (and to a lesser extent Latinos and whites) continue to live apart, attend segregated schools and churches, and intermarry at a low rate. Although all of these patterns are slowly changing, leading to a reduction of economic inequalities and a rise in social integration, clearly racial and ethnic divisions continue to create great strains in the social fabric of America.

Along with issues of economic inequality and social segregation that have traditionally plagued American society, new problems of ethnic division and conflict have arisen as the result of a veritable ethnic transformation that has been unfolding since the 1970s. Almost from its very beginnings, the United States was ethnically diverse. But for the past several decades, large-scale immigration has produced a vastly more heterogeneous nation. Literally dozens of new groups, varied in racial and ethnic characteristics, have reconfigured the U.S. population. Virtually no community or region of the country has been unaffected by this newest influx of immigrants. With growing ethnic populations, most of them non-European in origin, has come public debate—often passionate and shrill—over issues of affirmative action, multiculturalism, and immigration itself.

THE GLOBAL NATURE OF ETHNIC RELATIONS

In recognizing that racial and ethnic issues in the United States are deep-seated and thus not quickly or easily resolved, we should not think that they are uniquely American. Indeed, as we look at the contemporary world, it becomes evident that ethnic conflict and inequality are basic features of almost all modern societies with diverse populations.

RESURGENT ETHNICITY Social scientists had maintained for many years that industrialization and the forces of modernization would diminish the significance of race and ethnicity in heterogeneous societies (Deutsch, 1966). They felt that with the breakdown of small, particularistic social units and the emergence of large, impersonal bureaucratic institutions, people's loyalty and identity would be directed primarily to the national state rather than to internal racial and ethnic communities. The opposite trend, however, seems to have characterized the contemporary world. Indeed, the past sixty years have witnessed the emergence of ethnic consciousness and division around the globe on a scale unprecedented. The upshot has been an unleashing of ethnic-based conflict, usually contained at a low level, but at times fearsome and deadly.¹

In developed nations, ethnic groups thought to be well absorbed in the national society have reemphasized their cultural identity, and new groups have demanded political recognition. In Western Europe, ethnically based political movements have emerged in several countries. Throughout Eastern Europe, the late 1980s brought massive economic and political change, rekindling ethnic loyalties that had been suppressed for several decades. And in Canada, the traditional schism dividing English- and French-speaking groups has periodically threatened a breakup of the Canadian nation.

¹ The seriousness of ethnic conflict in the modern world is highlighted by the fact that, during the five decades from 1945 to 1994, perhaps as many as 20 million people died as a result of ethnic violence (Williams, 1994). In the past two decades, ethnic conflicts in every world region created additional millions of deaths and displacements.

Moreover, much of Europe, like the United States and Canada, has been affected in recent decades by a greatly increased flow of immigration, made up of people markedly different racially and ethnically from the native population. As these diverse ethnic communities have grown and become permanent parts of the social landscape, social tensions have arisen, sparking outbreaks of aggression and anti-immigrant political movements.

In the developing nations, too, the ethnic factor has emerged with great strength. World War II marked the end of several centuries of imperialist domination of non-Western peoples by European powers, and many new nations were created in Africa and Asia, the political boundaries of which were often carved out of the administrative districts of the old colonial states. Many of these artificial boundaries were drawn with little consideration of the areas' ethnic composition. As a result, the new nation-states often found themselves faced with the problem of integrating diverse cultural groups, speaking different languages and even maintaining different belief systems, into a single national society. The result has been numerous ongoing ethnic conflicts that have erupted periodically in horrendous violence.

In short, racial and ethnic forces have emerged with great power in the modern world. In all societies they are important—in many cases the *most* important—bases of both group solidarity and cleavage. As we look ahead, their impact is not likely to diminish throughout the twenty-first century.

RACE AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

Societies comprising numerous racial, religious, and cultural groups can be described as **multiethnic**. In the contemporary world, multiethnic societies are commonplace, not exceptional. Only a handful of the more than 190 member countries of the United Nations are ethnically homogeneous. "Multiethnicity," notes the sociologist Robin Williams, "is the rule" (1994:50). Moreover, the extent of diversity within many of these societies is very great. As can be seen in Table 1.1, societies that are multiethnic in some degree are found on every continent and in various stages of socioeconomic development.

The study of race and ethnic relations is concerned generally with the ways in which the various groups of a multiethnic society come together and interact over extended periods. As we proceed in our investigation, we will be looking specifically for answers to four key questions.

TABLE 1.1 | ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF SELECTED NATION-STATES

High	Medium	Low
United States	United Kingdom	Finland
Canada	Nigeria	Czech Republic
Australia	Malaysia	Egypt
Israel	Argentina	Japan

BASIC QUESTIONS

1. *What is the nature of intergroup relations in multiethnic societies?* Ethnic relations commonly take the form of conflict and competition. Indeed, we can easily observe this by following the popular media accounts of ethnic relations in the United States and other nations, which are usually descriptions of hostility and violence. However, intergroup relations are never totally conflictual. Ethnic groups do not exist in a perpetual whirlwind of discord and strife; cooperation and accommodation also characterize ethnic relations. Just as we will be concerned with understanding why conflict and competition are so common among diverse groups, we will also investigate harmonious conditions and the social factors that contribute to them.
2. *How are the various ethnic groups ranked, and what are the consequences of that ranking system?* In all multiethnic societies, members of various groups are treated differently and receive unequal amounts of the society's valued resources—wealth, prestige, and power. In short, some get more than others and are treated more favorably. Moreover, this inequality is not random but is well established and persists over many generations. A structure of inequality emerges in which one or a few ethnic groups, called the *dominant group* or groups, are automatically favored by the society's institutions, particularly the state and the economy, whereas other ethnic groups remain in lower positions. These subordinate groups are called ethnic *minorities*. We will be concerned with describing this hierarchy and determining how such systems of ethnic inequality come about.
3. *How does the dominant ethnic group in a multiethnic society maintain its place at the top of the ethnic hierarchy, and what attempts are made by subordinate groups to change their positions?* The dominant group employs a number of direct and indirect methods (various forms of prejudice and discrimination) to protect its power and privilege. This does not mean, however, that subordinate groups make no attempts to change this arrangement from time to time. In fact, organized movements—by African Americans in the United States or Catholics in Northern Ireland, for example—may challenge the ethnic hierarchy. One of our chief objectives, then, will be to examine the ways in which systems of ethnic inequality are maintained and how they change.
4. *What are the long-range outcomes of ethnic interrelations?* When ethnic groups exist side by side in the same society for long periods, either they move toward some form of unification or they maintain or even intensify their differences. These various forms of integration and separation are called *assimilation* and *pluralism*. Numerous outcomes are possible, extending from complete assimilation, involving the cultural and physical integration of the various groups, to extreme pluralism, including even expulsion or annihilation of groups. Usually, less extreme patterns are evident, and groups may display both integration and separation in different spheres of social life. Again, our concern is not only with discerning these outcomes but also with explaining the social forces that favor one or the other.

A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

The study of race and ethnic relations has a long tradition in American sociology, beginning in the 1920s with the research of Robert Park, Everett Hughes, and Louis Wirth. These scholars were among the first to focus attention on the relations among ethnic groups, particularly within the ethnic *mélange* of large U.S. cities such as New York and Chicago. The sociology of race and ethnic relations has progressed enormously since that time, and it now constitutes one of the chief subareas of the sociological discipline.

With few exceptions, however, American sociologists have continued to concentrate mainly on American groups and relations, often overlooking similarities and differences between the United States and other heterogeneous societies. But if we are to understand the general nature of race and ethnic relations, it is necessary to go beyond the United States—or any particular society—and place our analyses in a comparative, or cross-societal, framework. As we have already noted, ethnic diversity, conflict, and accommodation are worldwide phenomena, not unique to American society. However, because most research in race and ethnic relations has been the product of American sociologists dealing with the American experience, we are often led to assume that patterns evident in the United States are much the same in other societies.

This book adopts a comparative perspective in which the United States is seen as one among many contemporary multiethnic societies. Because readers are likely to be most familiar with American society, however, the center of attention will fall most intently on American groups and relations. Even in those chapters in which other societies are the major focus (Part III), we will draw attention to U.S. comparisons.

A comparative approach not only enables us to learn about race and ethnicity in other societies but also provides us with a sharper insight into race and ethnicity in the United States. It has often been observed that we cannot begin to truly understand our own society without some knowledge of other societies. Moreover, in addition to the differences revealed among societies, similarities may also become apparent. As the sociologists Tamotsu Shibutani and Kian Kwan have pointed out, comparing American ethnic relations with those of other societies “reveals that patterns of human experience, though infinitely varied, repeat themselves over and over in diverse cultural contexts” (1965:21). Discovering such generalizable patterns of the human experience is the ultimate aim of all sociological efforts.

ETHNIC GROUPS

Although they are now familiar and commonly used, the terms *ethnic group* and *ethnicity* are relatively new, not even appearing in standard English dictionaries until the 1960s (Glazer and Moynihan, 1975). Groups generally referred to today as “ethnic” were previously thought of as races or nations, but these terms clearly have different meanings.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ETHNIC GROUPS

UNIQUE CULTURAL TRAITS Basically, *ethnic groups* are *groups within a larger society that display a unique set of cultural traits*. The sociologist Melvin Tumin more

specifically describes an ethnic group as "a social group which, within a larger cultural and social system, claims or is accorded special status in terms of a complex of traits (ethnic traits) which it exhibits or is believed to exhibit" (1964:243). Ethnic groups, then, are subcultures, maintaining certain behavioral characteristics that, in some degree, set them off from other groups, creating cultural divisions within the larger society. Such unique cultural traits are not trivial but are fundamental features of social life such as language and religion.

Unique cultural traits, however, are not sufficient alone to delineate ethnic groups in a modern, complex society. Can we speak of physicians as an ethnic group? Or truck drivers? Or college students? Obviously, we would consider none of these categories "ethnic" even though they are composed of people who exhibit some common characteristics that identify them from others. Clearly, we need further qualifications for distinguishing ethnic groups.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY In addition to a common set of cultural traits, ethnic groups display a sense of community among members, that is, a consciousness of kind or an awareness of close association. In simple terms, a "we" feeling exists among members. Milton Gordon (1964) suggests that the ethnic group serves above all as a social-psychological referent in creating a "sense of peoplehood." This sense of community, or oneness, derives from an understanding of a shared ancestry, or heritage. Ethnic group members view themselves as having common roots, as it were. When people share what they believe to be common origins and experiences, "they feel an affinity for one another," writes sociologist Bob Blauner, "a 'comfort zone' that leads to congregating together, even when this is not forced by exclusionary barriers" (1992:61).

Such common ancestry, however, need not be real. As long as people regard themselves as alike by virtue of their perceived heritage, and as long as others in the society so regard them, they constitute an ethnic group, whether or not such a common background is genuine. Everett and Helen Hughes have perceptively recognized that "an ethnic group is not one because of the degree of measurable or observable difference from other groups; it is an ethnic group, on the contrary, because the people in it and the people out of it know that it is one; because both the ins and outs talk, feel, and act as if it were a separate group" (1952:156). Ethnic groups, then, are social creations wherein ethnic differences are basically a matter of group perception. Groups may be objectively quite similar but perceive themselves as very different, and the converse is equally true.

Sociologists have debated the relative significance of the cultural element and the sense of community as most critical to the formation of an ethnic group (Dorman, 1980). The argument boils down to a question of whether ethnic groups are objective social units that can be identified by their unique culture or merely collectivities that people themselves define as ethnic groups. Whereas some view the cultural features of the group as its key distinctive element, others argue that stressing its unique culture minimizes the importance of the subjective boundaries of the group that people themselves draw (Barth, 1969). Most simply, the latter maintain that if people define themselves and are defined by others as an ethnic group, they *are* an ethnic group, whether or not they display unique cultural patterns. If this is the case, the cultural stuff of which the ethnic group is composed is unimportant.

Although this point may seem like a relatively minor theoretical one, it is of importance when ethnic groups in a society begin to blend into the dominant cultural system. Sociologists have traditionally assumed that as groups integrate into the mainstream society, the basis of retention of ethnicity diminishes. But whether people continue to practice ethnic ways may matter little as long as they continue to define themselves and are defined by others in ethnic terms. Many Americans continue to think of and identify themselves as ethnics even though they exhibit little or no understanding of or interest in their ethnic culture. Do third- or fourth-generation Irish Americans, for example, really share a common culture with their first-generation ancestors? Wearing a button on St. Patrick's Day proclaiming "I'm proud to be Irish" is hardly a display of the traits of one's Irish American forebears. Yet an ethnic identity may remain intact for such people, and they may continue to recognize their uniqueness (and proudly acknowledge it) within the larger society. Thus, despite the lack of a strong cultural factor, the sense of Irish American identity may be sufficient to sustain an Irish American ethnic group.

We thus have two views of the ethnic group: (1) it is an objective unit that can be identified by a people's distinct cultural traits, or (2) it is merely the product of people's thinking of and proclaiming it as an ethnic group. To avoid the extreme of either of these views, sociologist Pierre van den Berghe defines the ethnic group as both an objective and a subjective unit: "An ethnic group is one that shares a cultural tradition *and* has some degree of consciousness of being different from other such groups" (1976:242). As he points out, it is foolish to think that ethnic groups simply arise when people so will it. Fans of a particular football team may feel a sense of commonality and even community, but they surely do not compose an ethnic group. In short, there must be some common cultural basis and sense of ancestry to which ethnic group members can relate. As van den Berghe notes, "There can be no ethnicity (or race) without some conception and consciousness of a distinction between 'them' and 'us.' But these subjective perceptions do not develop at random; they crystallize around clusters of objective characteristics that become badges of inclusion or exclusion" (1978:xvii). Although ethnic boundaries are very flexible, they are always founded on a cultural basis. At the same time, however, an ethnic group cannot exist in an objective sense independent of what its members think and believe. There must be a sense of commonality, and such a feeling of oneness arises generally through the perception of a unique cultural heritage.

ETHNOCENTRISM The "we" feeling of ethnic groups ordinarily leads naturally to **ethnocentrism**, *the tendency to judge other groups by the standards and values of one's own group*. Inevitably, this produces a view of one's own group as superior to others. The ways of one's own group (*in-group*) become "correct" and "natural," and the ways of other groups (*out-groups*) are seen as "odd," "immoral," or "unnatural." Sociologists and anthropologists have found the inclination to judge other groups by the standards of one's own and to view out-groups as inferior or deficient to be a universal practice.

In multiethnic societies, such feelings of group superiority become a basis for group solidarity. In addition to fostering cohesiveness within one group, however, ethnocentrism also serves as the basis of conflict between different groups. As Bonacich and Modell have explained, "Ethnicity is a communalistic form of social

affiliation, depending, first, upon an assumption of a special bond among people of like origins, and, second, upon the obverse, a disdain for people of dissimilar origins" (1980:1). Here we can begin to understand why conflict among ethnic groups is so pervasive and intractable.

ASCRIBED MEMBERSHIP Ethnic group membership is ordinarily ascribed. This means that one's ethnicity is a characteristic acquired at birth and not subject to basic change. Being born a member of an ethnic group, one does not leave it except in unusual circumstances. One might change ethnic affiliation by "passing"—that is, by changing one's name or other outward signs of ethnicity—or by denying group membership. But it is extremely difficult to divest oneself completely of one's ethnic heritage. Through the socialization process, individuals come to learn their group membership early and to understand the differences between themselves and members of other groups. So well internalized is this group identification that one comes to accept it almost as naturally as accepting one's gender. As Hughes and Hughes have suggested, "If it is easy to resign from the group, it is not truly an ethnic group" (1952:156). This understanding of ethnic descent is what creates such sharp and, at times, deadly ethnic divisions (Williams, 1994).

Those who attempt to shed their ethnic identity find that the society will rarely permit this fully. Gordon notes in this regard that in American society a person who attempts to relinquish his or her ethnic identity finds "that the institutional structure of the society and the set of built-in social and psychological categories with which most Americans are equipped to place him—to give him a 'name'—are loaded against him" (1964:29). Once the ethnic categories in a society are set, explains Gordon, placing people into them is almost automatic and is by no means subject entirely to people's volition.

In multiethnic societies where ethnic boundaries are not rigid and where there is much marriage across ethnic lines, like the United States and Canada, the voluntary nature of ethnicity becomes more salient. The ethnic origins of third- or fourth-generation Euro-Americans, for example, may be quite varied. Individuals therefore make decisions about "who they are" ethnically, some in a contrived fashion and others almost unconsciously. People whose family origins may contain Italian, Polish, and Irish elements might emphasize the Italian part and identify themselves as "Italian American," disregarding their other ancestral links. In such cases, the volitional component of ethnic identity is strong. For those whose ethnic identity is based also on physical, or racial, characteristics, however, the capacity to choose becomes more limited. For such people, ascription is paramount.

TERRITORIALITY Ethnic groups often occupy a distinct territory within the larger society. Most of the multiethnic societies of Europe consist of groups that are regionally concentrated. Basques and Catalans in Spain, Welsh and Scots in Britain, and Flemings and Walloons in Belgium are groups that maintain a definable territory within the greater society. Such multiethnic societies are quite different from the United States, Canada, or Australia, where ethnic groups have for the most part immigrated voluntarily and, though sometimes are concentrated in particular areas, are not regionally confined.

When ethnic groups occupy a definable territory, they also maintain or aspire to some degree of political autonomy. They are, in a sense, "nations within nations."

In some societies, the political status of ethnic groups is formally recognized. Each group's cultural integrity is acknowledged, and provision is made for its political representation in central governmental bodies. Such societies are best referred to not only as multiethnic but also as multinational (van den Berghe, 1981).

In other societies, where such multinationality is not formally recognized, certain ethnic groups may seek greater political autonomy or perhaps even full independence from the national state, usually dominated by other ethnic groups. The Basques in Spain represent such a case. With a culture and language distinct from other groups in Spain, the Basques have traditionally seen themselves as a separate nation and have negotiated with the Spanish government at various times to promote their sovereignty. A Basque nationalist movement has been evident since the late nineteenth century, but in recent decades it has taken on a particularly virulent and often violent form (Anderson, 2001; Kurlansky, 1999; Ramirez and Sullivan, 1987). Similar nationalist movements, perhaps not as hostile, have typified many modern multiethnic societies. We will look at one such movement, among French-speaking Canadians in Quebec, in Chapter 16.

Where ethnic groups do not continue to maintain significant aspects of culture (such as language) for many generations and where they are geographically dispersed rather than concentrated, such nationalist movements do not ordinarily arise. This is the case in the United States, where ethnic groups are scattered throughout the society, generally take on dominant cultural ways after a generation or two, and seek greater power within the prevailing political system.

ETHNICITY AS A VARIABLE

GROUP VARIABILITY Each of these characteristics—unique culture, sense of community, ethnocentrism, ascribed membership, and territoriality—is displayed in varying degree by different ethnic groups. These traits are variables that not only differ from group to group but also change at various historical times within any single ethnic group. Thus we should not expect to find all ethnic groups in a society equally unique in cultural ways, strongly self-conscious and recognized by out-groups, or even ethnocentric. The extent to which ethnic groups are noticeable and maintain a strong consciousness among members depends on both in-group and out-group responses. Some ethnic groups seek rapid assimilation and are accepted into society's mainstream relatively quickly. Others, however, may retain their group identity for many generations because of rejection by the dominant group, their own desire to maintain the ethnic community, or a combination of these two. Jews, for example, have maintained a strong group consciousness in most societies, largely as a result of the historically consistent hostility to which they have been subjected but also because they have consciously sought to preserve their group identity.

INDIVIDUAL VARIABILITY For people in multiethnic societies, the ethnic group becomes a key source of social-psychological attachment and serves as an important referent of self-identification. Put simply, people feel naturally allied with those who share their ethnicity and identify themselves with their ethnic group. Their behavior is thus influenced by ethnicity in various areas of social life. However, just as ethnicity differs in scope and intensity at the group level, it also plays a varying role for

individuals. For some, it is a major determinant of behavior, and most social relations will occur among those who are ethnically similar. For others, ethnicity may be insignificant, and they may remain essentially devoid of ethnic consciousness. For most people in multiethnic societies, however, the ethnic tie is important in shaping primary relations—those that occur within small, intimate social settings such as the family and the peer group. These relations include one's choice of close friends, marital partner, residence, and so on.

There are numerous other groups in modern societies to which people feel a sense of attachment and that provide a source of identification. These include one's social class, gender, age, and occupation. Like ethnic groups, these also become bases of solidarity and societal cleavage. But in multiethnic societies, ethnicity is a primary base of loyalty and consciousness for most people and thus serves as a strong catalyst for competition and conflict. Moreover, ethnicity is usually interrelated and overlaps with these other sources of group identification and attachment.

Most important, ethnicity is a basis of ranking, in which people are treated according to the status of their ethnic group. In no society do people receive an equal share of the society's rewards, and in multiethnic societies, ethnicity serves as an extremely critical determinant of who gets "what there is to get" and in what amounts. In this sense, ethnicity is a dominant force in people's lives whether or not they are strongly conscious of their ethnic identity and regardless of the degree to which ethnicity shapes their interrelations with others.

RACE

Without question, *race* is one of the most misunderstood, misused, and often dangerous concepts of the modern world. It is not applied dispassionately by laypeople or even, to a great extent, by social scientists. Rather, it can arouse emotions such as hate, fear, anger, loyalty, pride, and prejudice. It has also been used to justify some of the most appalling injustices and mistreatments of humans by other humans.

The idea of race has a long history, extending as far back as ancient civilizations. It is in the modern world, however—specifically, the last two centuries—that the notion has taken on real significance and fundamentally affected human relations. Unfortunately, the term has never been applied consistently and has meant different things to different people. In popular usage, it has been used to describe a wide variety of human categories, including people of a particular skin color (the Caucasian "race"), religion (the Jewish "race"), nationality (the British "race"), and even the entire human species (the human "race"). As we will see, none of these applications is accurate and meaningful from a social scientific standpoint. Much of the confusion surrounding the idea of race stems from the fact that it has both biological and social meanings. Although it is impossible to do justice to the controversies surrounding the notion of race in a few pages, several of the more apparent problems attached to this most elusive of ideas can be briefly explored.

RACE AS A BIOLOGICAL NOTION

The essential biological meaning of race is a population of humans classified on the basis of certain hereditary characteristics that differentiate them from other human

groups. Races are, in a sense, pigeonholes for categorizing human physical types. Historical efforts at classification, however, have yielded no accord among social and biological scientists. Over the years, the biological understanding of race has created an enormous variation in thought among biologists, geneticists, physical anthropologists, and physiologists concerning the term's meaning and significance.

GENETIC INTERCHANGEABILITY To begin with, the difficulty in trying to place people into racial categories on the basis of physical or genetic qualities stems from the fact that all members of the human species, *Homo sapiens*, operate within a genetically open system. This means that humans, regardless of physical type, can interbreed. If genes of different human groups were not interchangeable, the idea of race as a biological concept might have some useful meaning. But because this is not the case, we see an unbounded variety of physical types among the peoples of the world. As biologist James King has put it, "Nowhere in the world are there two populations of manlike creatures living in close proximity for any length of time with no interbreeding. Wherever and whenever human populations have come together, interbreeding has always taken place" (1981:135).

THE BASES OF RACIAL CLASSIFICATION That a person from one genetic population can interbreed with a person from any other population creates a second difficulty in dealing with the notion of race: answering the question "What are the characteristics that differentiate racial types?" Physical anthropologists distinguish major categories of human traits as either *phenotypes*—visible anatomical features such as skin color, hair texture, and body and facial shape—or *genotypes*—genetic specifications inherited from one's parents. Races have traditionally been classified chiefly on the basis of the most easily observable anatomical traits, like skin color; internal and blood traits have been deemphasized or disregarded. Today, the study of human biological diversity rejects the approach that stresses the classification of individuals into specific categories based on assumed common ancestry and emphasizes, instead, efforts to explain human differences (Kottak and Kozaitis, 1999). This has occurred mainly because there is simply no agreement on which traits should be used in defining races.

Attempts to clearly categorize humans have proved futile because differences among individuals of the same group (or "racial type") are greater than those found between groups (King, 1981; Marks, 1995). As biologist Daniel Blackburn (2000) has explained, all of the popularly used physical features to define races (for example, skin pigmentation, hair type, lip size) show gradients of distribution within population groups within which sharp distinctions cannot be drawn. Despite obvious physical differences between people from different geographic areas, most human genetic variation occurs *within* populations. Even the most inattentive person can see that the skin color of many people who are considered "black" is as light as that of those considered "white," and vice versa. Specific human populations can be distinguished, but, as geneticists Michael Bamshad and Steve Olson have explained, "individuals from different populations are, on average, just slightly more different from one another than are individuals from the same population" (2003:78).²

² The Human Genome Project, which has been mapping DNA, has drawn even sharper attention to the fact that diversity within so-called racial groups is greater than between them.

Physical differences among people obviously exist, and these differences are statistically clear among groups. It is true that, through a high degree of inbreeding over many generations and as adaptations to different physical environments, groups with distinctive gene frequencies and phenotypic traits are produced. There are evident differences, for example, between a "typical" black person and a "typical" white person in the United States. People may be said, therefore, to fall into statistical categories by physical type.

But these statistical categories should not be mistaken for actual human groupings founded on unmistakable hereditary traits. Racial categories form a continuum of gradual change, not a set of sharply demarcated types. Physical differences between groups are not clear-cut but instead tend to overlap and blend into one another at various points. Sociologist William Petersen aptly notes that humans are not unique in this regard: "It follows from the theory of evolution itself that all biological divisions, from phylum through subspecies, are always in the process of change, so there is almost never a sharp and permanent boundary setting one off from the next" (1980:236). Human subspecies, then, are not discrete units but, as King notes, are arbitrarily differentiated parts of one continuous unit, the human species. "No system of classification, no matter how clever, can give them a specificity and a separateness that they do not have" (1981:10).

Popular and uncomplicated racial divisions of the human population (for example, "Caucasoid-Mongoloid-Negroid") are thus overly simplified and essentially discretionary. Moreover, such schemes exclude large populations that do not easily fit into simple arrangements. Where, for example, are East Indians, a people with Caucasian features but with dark skin, placed? Or groups thoroughly mixed in ancestry, like most Indonesians? Because all human types are capable of interbreeding, there are simply too many marginal cases like these that do not easily conform to any particular racial scheme, regardless of its complexity. In studying human differences, most modern investigators have divided the human species into populations, or subpopulations, as the unit of analysis, not racial groupings (Gould, 1984; Marks, 1995; Tobias, 1995).

The anthropologist Ruth Benedict fittingly remarked that "in all modern science there is no field where authorities differ more than in the classifications of human races" (1959:22). If researchers are in agreement about anything concerning race, it is that racial classification systems are by and large arbitrary and depend on the specific objectives of the classifier. All agree that "pure" races do not exist today, and some question whether they have ever existed (Dunn, 1956; Fried, 1965; Graves, 2004; King, 1981; Tobias, 1995).

The notion of "mixed racial groups," a concept that has become increasingly popular in recent years, does nothing to clarify the issue. To speak of "mixed races" implies, erroneously, that there are "pure" races to begin with. As Blackburn notes, "The very notion of hybrid or mixed races is based on the false assumption that 'African' and 'Caucasian' are pure racial types available for hybridization" (2000:8).

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACE

Many popular ideas are of dubious scientific validity; race is certainly among these. But as André Béteille has pointed out, "Sociological analysis is concerned not so

much with the scientific accuracy of ideas as with their social and political consequences" (1969:54). Most social and biological scientists today agree that the idea of race is not meaningful in a biological sense, though this is hardly a settled issue (Morning, 2005). In fact, with recent advances in genetic research and knowledge of the human genome, the race concept is receiving renewed attention by many biological and medical scientists (Hochschild et al., 2012; Koenig et al., 2008). The importance of race for the study of intergroup relations, however, clearly lies in its social meaning. "Races" are socially constructed and that premise cannot be overemphasized. How does the process of the social construction of race work?

THE POPULAR BELIEF IN RACE Most simply, people attach significance to the concept of race and consider it a real and important division of humanity. And, as long as people *believe* that differences in selected physical traits are meaningful, they will act on those beliefs, thereby affecting their interrelations with others. In a famous maxim, the sociologist W. I. Thomas keenly asserted that "if men define situations as real they are real in their consequences" (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918:79). If, for example, those classified as black are deemed inherently less intelligent than those classified as white, people making this assumption will treat blacks accordingly. Employers thinking so will hesitate to place blacks in important occupational positions; school administrators thinking so will discourage blacks from pursuing difficult courses of study; white parents thinking so will hesitate to send their children to schools attended by blacks; and so on.

The creation of such categories and the beliefs attached to them generate what sociologists have called the **self-fulfilling prophecy** (Merton, 1968). This refers to *a process in which the false definition of a situation produces behavior that, in turn, makes real the originally falsely defined situation*. Consider the aforementioned case. If blacks are considered inherently less intelligent, fewer community resources will be used to support schools attended primarily by blacks on the assumption that such support would only be wasted. Poorer-quality schools, then, will inevitably turn out less capable students, who will score lower on intelligence tests. The poorer performance on these tests will "confirm" the original belief about black inferiority. Hence, the self-fulfilling prophecy. The notion of black inferiority is reinforced, and continued discriminatory treatment of this group is rationalized.³

The anthropologist Robert Redfield noted that "it is on the level of habit, custom, sentiment, and attitude that race, as a matter of practical significance, is to be understood. Race is, so to speak, a human invention" (1958:67). The scientific validity of race, then, is of little consequence; rather, it is the belief system of a society that provides its significance. As Benedict put it, "Any scientist can disprove all its facts and still leave the *belief* untouched" (1959:99).

THE ARBITRARY BOUNDARIES OF RACE Each heterogeneous society takes whatever are perceived as important physical differences among people and builds a set of racial categories into which those people are placed. But these categories are fully arbitrary. Different societies will use different criteria with which to assign people racially,

³ Such reasoning and its resultant consequences are precisely what characterized—and for whites, justified—the system of racially segregated schools in the U.S. southern states before the 1960s.

thereby creating classification systems that may have little or no correspondence from one society to the next. Michael Omi and Howard Winant use the term *racial formation* to describe "the process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings" (1994:61). The social meaning of race, they explain, is constantly subject to change through political struggle.

The arbitrariness of racial categorizing can be seen easily when we compare different societies, each with numerous physical types. The same individual categorized as "black" in the United States, for example, might be categorized as "white" in Brazil. The racial classification systems in these two societies do not coincide. As we will see in Chapter 15, Brazilians do not see or define races in the same way that Americans do, nor do they necessarily use the same physical characteristics as standards with which to categorize people. Obviously, different criteria and different categories of race are operative in each society.

So subject to cultural definition is the idea of race that the selected physical attributes used to classify people need not even be obvious, only the *belief* that they are evident. In Northern Ireland, for example, both Protestants and Catholics sometimes say they are able to identify members of the other group on the basis of physical differences, despite their objective similarity.

Even within societies, the definition of races has never been consistent. Consider the United States, where many European-origin ethnic groups that today are seen as racially the same (Italians, Poles, Jews, and so on) were defined as late as the 1920s as racially distinct. Also, "mulatto," "quadroon," and "octoroon," racial categories neither "black" nor "white," existed in the 1800s but were later discarded. As the historian Matthew Frye Jacobson has written, "[E]ntire races have disappeared from view, from public discussion and from modern memory, though their flesh-and-blood members still walk the earth" (1998:2).

What is perhaps most important regarding the social classification of races is that the perceived physical differences among groups are assumed to correspond to social or behavioral differences. Thus blacks are assumed to behave in certain ways and to achieve at certain levels because they are black; whites are assumed to behave and achieve in other ways because they are white; and so on. "What makes a society multiracial," notes van den Berghe, "is not the presence of physical differences between groups, but the attribution of social significance to such physical differences as may exist" (1970:10). Redfield has drawn an apt analogy: "If people took special notice of red automobiles, and believed that the redness of automobiles was connected inseparably with their mechanical effectiveness, then red automobiles would constitute a real and important category" (1958:67).

It is most critical, then, to look not simply at the racial categories that different societies employ but also at the social beliefs attached to those categories. Such beliefs are the product of racist thinking, which we will consider shortly.

RACE AND ETHNICITY: A SYNTHESIS

As should now be obvious, the term *race* is so charged and misconceived that it is very difficult to employ in a useful analytic manner. To add to the confusion, as

noted previously, many groups today defined as ethnic groups were in previous historical periods defined as races.

Because of its confusing usage and its questionable scientific validity, many sociologists and anthropologists have dispensed entirely with the term *race* and instead prefer *ethnic group* to describe those groups commonly defined as racial (Berreman, 1972; Gordon, 1964; Patterson, 1997; Schermerhorn, 1970; Shibutani and Kwan, 1965; Williams, 1979, 2003). In the United States, African Americans, American Indians, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, and Mexican Americans have all the earmarks of ethnic groups—unique culture, consciousness of kind, ascriptive membership, and in some cases even territoriality—at the same time that most members of these groups are physically distinct from Americans of European origin. Classifying all these groups as ethnic seems most reasonable because, in addition to their physical traits, consistent and significant cultural traits set them off from other groups.

Sociologist Richard Alba has offered a definition of race as a variant of ethnicity: “A racial group is . . . an ethnic group whose members are believed, by others if not also by themselves, to be physiologically distinctive” (1992:576). In the chapters that follow, we will subscribe to that definition. Thus ethnic groups can include groups identified by national origin, cultural distinctiveness, religious affiliation, or racial characteristics. As we will see, ethnic groups in most modern societies comprise combinations of these national, cultural, religious, and physical traits. For those groups that are particularly divergent physically from the dominant group, such as African Americans, Richard Burkey (1978) has suggested the term racial-ethnic groups, and that term will be used accordingly.

RACISM

Racist thinking involves principles that lead naturally and inevitably to the differential treatment of members of various ethnic groups. As we will see in Chapter 2, in no society are valued resources distributed equally; in all cases, some get more than others. In multiethnic societies, ethnicity is used as an important basis for determining the nature of that distribution. Ethnic groups are ranked in a hierarchy, and their members are rewarded accordingly, creating a system of ethnic inequality. Groups at the top compound their power and maintain dominance over those lower in the hierarchy. Such systems of ethnic inequality require a *belief system*, or *ideology*, to rationalize and legitimate these patterns of dominance and subordination, and racism has usually served that function.

THE IDEOLOGY OF RACISM

As a belief system, or ideology, racism is structured around three basic ideas:

- Humans are divided naturally into different physical types.
- Such physical traits as people display are intrinsically related to their culture, personality, and intelligence.
- The differences among groups are innate, not subject to change, and on the basis of their genetic inheritance, some groups are innately superior to others (Banton, 1970; Benedict, 1959; Montagu, 1972; Shibutani and Kwan, 1965).

In sum, racism is *the belief that humans are subdivided into distinct hereditary groups that are innately different in their social behavior and mental capacities and that can therefore be ranked as superior or inferior*. The presumed superiority of some groups and inferiority of others is subsequently used to legitimate the unequal distribution of the society's resources, specifically, various forms of wealth, prestige, and power.

Racist thinking presumes that differences among groups are innate and not subject to change. Intelligence, temperament, and other primary attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral traits are thus viewed as not significantly affected by the social environment. The failures of groups at the bottom of the social hierarchy are interpreted as a natural outcome of an inferior genetic inheritance rather than of social disadvantages that have accumulated for the group over many generations. In the same manner, the achievements of groups at the top of the social hierarchy are seen as a product of innate superiority, not of favorable social opportunities.

Racist thought is inherently ethnocentric. Those espousing racist ideas invariably view ethnic out-groups as inferior. Moreover, such thought naturally leads to the idea that ethnic groups must be kept socially and physically apart. To encourage social integration is to encourage physical integration, which, it follows, contributes to the degeneration of the superior group.

Ideologies do not necessarily reflect reality; indeed, they are largely mythical. They comprise beliefs that, through constant articulation, become accepted as descriptions of the true state of affairs. We have already discussed some of the scientifically erroneous or dubious principles concerning race. As the anthropologist Manning Nash (1962) has explained, racist ideologies depend on three logical confusions: (1) the identification of racial differences with cultural and social differences; (2) the assumption that cultural achievement is directly, and chiefly, determined by the racial characteristics of a population; and (3) the belief that physical characteristics of a population limit and define the sorts of culture and society they are able to create or participate in.

Racist thought is most prevalent in societies in which physical differences among groups are pronounced, such as differences between blacks and whites in the United States or South Africa. But racism describes any situation in which people's social behavior is imputed to innate, or hereditary, sources. Racist beliefs are therefore not limited to ideas about groups commonly referred to as "races" but can apply to any ethnic group, whether distinguishable by physical characteristics or culture. Jews in Germany during the 1930s, for example, were physically indistinct from other Germans, but this did not prevent the creation by the Nazis of an elaborate racial ideology pertaining to the Jews. Even in the United States, as we will see in Chapter 10, the prevalent view of Irish immigrants to America in the nineteenth century, and later, southern and eastern European immigrants, was that they were racially inferior.

Certain beliefs regarding behavioral and personality differences between men and women are based on the same mode of thinking as racism. Men are assumed to be innately better qualified for certain social roles on the basis of their masculinity, and women are seen as quite naturally occupying other roles suited to their femininity. Although most of the behavioral differences between men and women are attributable more to social learning than to biology, the beliefs regarding the congenital

nature of these differences are accepted uncritically by many. The belief in the innate behavioral differences between men and women has been referred to as sexism, but it is obvious that the foundation of this ideology is similar to that of racism.

In recent years, the term *racism* has often been used in a sweeping and imprecise fashion, describing almost any negative thought or action toward members of a racial-ethnic minority or any manifestation of ethnic inequality, not simply as an ideology. However, prejudice and discrimination directed at ethnic group members, as we will see in Chapter 3, take many different forms and need not involve or be based on racist thought.

THE FUNCTIONS OF RACISM

The belief in innate differences among groups is used to justify the unequal distribution of a society's rewards. The place of groups at the top of the social hierarchy and of those at the bottom is explained quite simply as "natural." Racist ideology, then, promotes an ethnic status quo in which one group predominates in the society's economy, polity, and other key institutions and thus receives the greatest share of the society's wealth and power.

Why, for example, do African Americans occupy a disproportionately low number of top positions in all important institutions and own a disproportionately low share of wealth by comparison with Euro-Americans? Racist ideology explains such inequalities as resulting primarily from the inherent inferiority of blacks and superiority of whites. It is asserted that something in the character of black people themselves is at the root of their socially subordinate position, just as something in the character of white people leads very naturally to their social dominance. The same explanation might be used by Protestants in Northern Ireland to account for their historical dominance over Catholics in various areas of social life or by South African whites to rationalize their past dominance of nonwhites.

In the racist mode of thought, the different social and cultural environments of groups are not of major importance in accounting for their differences in social achievement. And, as noted earlier, the perpetuation of beliefs in group superiority and inferiority gives rise to the substantiation of those beliefs through the self-fulfilling prophecy.

The belief in innate group differences leads naturally to actions and policies that are expressions of that belief. The sense of group difference, historian George Fredrickson writes, "provides a motive or rationale for using our power advantage to treat the ethnoracial Other in ways that we would regard as cruel or unjust if applied to members of our own group" (2002:9). If groups are effectively portrayed as inferior, they can not only be denied equal access to various life chances but in some cases enslaved, expelled, or even annihilated with justification. Slave systems of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Americas were rationalized by racial belief systems in which blacks were seen as incapable of ever attaining the level of civilization of whites. Similarly, the enactment in the 1920s of strict U.S. immigration quotas, favoring northwestern European groups and discriminating against those from southern and eastern Europe, was impelled by an intricate set of racist assumptions. Northwestern Europeans were seen as innately more adaptable to the American

social system, and other groups were viewed as naturally deficient in favorable social and moral qualities.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RACISM

Although beliefs in the superiority and inferiority of different groups have been historically persistent in human societies (recall the universality of ethnocentrism), the belief that such differences are linked to racial types is a relatively new idea, one that did not arise forcefully until the eighteenth century in Europe. Over the following century and a half, a number of political and scientific factors would contribute to the development of the ideology of racism.

EUROPEAN COLONIALISM During the Age of Discovery, starting in the fifteenth century, lands were conquered by Spain, Portugal, England, France, and Holland in the Americas and Africa, and white Europeans encountered peoples for the first time who were not only culturally alien but physically distinct as well. At first, the justification for subjecting these groups to enslavement or to colonial repression lay not so much in their evident physical differences as in what was seen as their cultural primitiveness, specifically, their non-Christian religions (Benedict, 1959; Fredrickson, 2002; Gossett, 1963). Even the United States engaged, to a lesser extent, in the colonial game, taking possession of the Philippines and several Caribbean islands following its war with Spain at the end of the nineteenth century.

"SCIENTIFIC" RACISM It was the later development of "scientific" racism, however, that gave impetus to the view that European peoples were superior to nonwhites because of their racial inheritance. Eighteenth-century scholars of various disciplines, including medicine, archaeology, and anthropology, had begun to debate the origin of the human species, specifically, the question of whether the species was one or many. Although inferiority of all non-European cultures was assumed, up to this time most had viewed all human types as subdivisions of a single genus (Rose, 1968; Smedley, 2007). Thought now turned to the much earlier but generally discounted theory of polygenesis, the notion that human groups might be derived from multiple evolutionary origins. No resolution of this debate came until the publication in 1859 of Darwin's theory of evolution, *The Origin of Species*. Darwin was clear in his explanation that differences among humans were superficial and that their more general similarities nullified any idea of originally distinct species or races (Benedict, 1959; Gossett, 1963).

SOCIAL DARWINISM Scientists of the nineteenth century investigating the idea of race were heavily influenced by Darwin even though he had said little about race per se. Many who studied his ideas, however, drew inferences to human societies from what he had postulated about lower animal species. Darwin's idea of natural selection was now seen as a mechanism for producing superior human societies, classes, and races. Expounded by sociologists such as Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner, these ideas became the basis of social Darwinism, popularly interpreted as "*survival of the fittest*." Early racist thought, then, was supported by an element of what was considered scientific validity.

"WHITE MAN'S BURDEN" With the scientifically endorsed belief that social achievement was mostly a matter of heredity, the colonial policies of the European powers were now justified. "Race," writes anthropologist Audrey Smedley, "had become a worldview that was extraordinarily comprehensive and compelling in its explanatory powers and its rationalization of social inequality" (2007:267). Native people of color were seen as innately primitive and incapable of reaching the level of civilization attained by Europeans. Economic exploitation was thus neatly rationalized. And, because nonwhites represented a supposedly less developed human evolutionary phase, the notion of a "white man's burden" arose as justification for imposing European cultural ways on these people.

In short, the idea of race appropriately complemented the political and economic designs of the European colonial powers. Sociologist Michael Banton notes that "the idea that the Saxon peoples might be biologically superior to Celts and Slavs, and white races to black, was seized upon, magnified, and publicized, because it was convenient to those who held power in the Europe of that day" (1970:20). Banton adds that the coincidental appearance of these theories with the demise of slavery in the early and mid-nineteenth century provided a new justification to some for subordinating former slaves.

Racism should not be thought of as an opportune invention of European colonialism. As van den Berghe explains, racist thinking "has been independently discovered and rediscovered by various peoples at various times in history" (1978:12). But it was in the colonial era that the idea was received most enthusiastically and firmly established as a social doctrine.

EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY RACIST THOUGHT The idea that race was immutably linked to social and psychological traits continued to be a generally accepted theory in Europe and North America during the early years of the twentieth century, aided by the unabashedly racist ideas of writers such as Houston Stewart Chamberlain and Count Arthur de Gobineau in Europe and Lothrop Stoddard and Madison Grant in the United States. Grant's book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, published in 1916, was essentially a diatribe aimed at restricting immigration of southern and eastern European groups, mainly Catholics and Jews, who were at that time most numerous among American immigrants. Grant divided the European population into three racial types—Alpines, Mediterraneans, and Nordics—and he attributed to the latter (from northwestern Europe) the most desirable physical and mental qualities. Consequently, he warned of the degeneration of the American population through the influx of southern and eastern Europeans, whom he classified as inferior Mediterranean and Alpine types.

The impact of Grant's and Stoddard's books was extended by the development of intelligence testing during World War I by American psychologists, whose findings seemed to confirm the notion of inherent racial differences. On these tests, Americans of northwestern European origin outscored, on average, all other ethnic groups. This result was taken by many as empirical evidence of the superiority of the Nordic "race." Intelligence was now seen as primarily hereditary even though little attention was paid to environmental factors in interpreting test results. That northern blacks outscored southern whites, for example, was attributed not to social factors such as better educational opportunities in the North but to the selective

migration of more intelligent blacks out of the South. This argument proved false, however, because the same differences were shown between northern and southern whites (Montagu, 1963; North, 1965; Rose, 1968).

BOAS AND THE BEGINNING OF CHANGE During the 1920s, cultural anthropologists began to question the biological theories of race and to maintain that social and cultural factors were far more critical in accounting for differences in mental ability. Chief among these theorists was Franz Boas, who pointed out the lack of evidence for any of the common racist assertions of the day. Gossett explains Boas's critical role in reversing social scientific thinking on the notion of race: "The racists among the historians and social scientists had always prided themselves on their willingness to accept the 'facts' and had dismissed their opponents as shallow humanitarians who glossed over unpleasant truths. Now there arose a man who asked them to produce their proof. Their answer was a flood of indignant rhetoric, but the turning point had been reached and from now on it would be the racists who were increasingly on the defensive" (1963:430).

RACE AND INTELLIGENCE: RECENT CONTROVERSIES By the 1950s, social scientists had, for the most part, discarded ideas linking race with intelligence and other social characteristics. But the issue was given new impetus in 1969 when educational psychologist Arthur Jensen (1969) published a report suggesting that heredity was the major determinant in accounting for the collective differences in IQ between blacks and whites. Jensen's theory, methods, and interpretation of findings were all quickly and thoroughly challenged (Alland, 2002; Montagu, 1975; Rose and Rose, 1978).

Twenty-five years after Jensen's report was issued, Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray published a book, *The Bell Curve*, which refueled the debate regarding the impact of race on mental ability and set off much controversy. Herrnstein and Murray presented a kind of social Darwinistic thesis: intelligence, as measured by IQ, is in large part genetic. They premised a strong relationship between IQ and various social pathologies. Following this thinking, those with lower IQs have a greater proclivity toward poverty, crime, illegitimacy, poor educational performance, and other social ills. Because IQ is mostly genetic, they argued, there is no way to change the condition of those with low intelligence through educational reforms or welfare programs. Because lower-intelligence people are reproducing much faster than higher-intelligence people, the society is faced with the possibility of a growing underclass, increasingly dependent on the more intelligent and productive classes.

Perhaps the most controversial aspects of Herrnstein and Murray's book concerned the linkage of IQ and race. The authors pointed out that the average IQ of blacks is fifteen points lower than the average IQ of whites—a differential, they claimed, that held up regardless of social class and even when change in average IQ for groups is taken into account. The implication, then, is clear: blacks are inferior to whites and are thus apt to remain in a state of dependency on the nonpoor and continue to engage in antisocial activities. Herrnstein and Murray therefore questioned the value of welfare payments, remedial educational programs, affirmative action, and other efforts designed to raise the social level of the poor, who, in the United States, are disproportionately black.

As with Jensen earlier, Herrnstein and Murray's thesis, findings, and conclusions were overwhelmingly rejected by mainstream social scientists, who claimed that the authors' methods were flawed and their reasoning specious (Fischer et al., 1996; Fraser, 1995; Jacoby and Glauber, 1995). Moreover, many viewed the book as much a statement of the political leanings of the authors as a work of social science. Specifically, Herrnstein and Murray were challenged on a number of points. For one, IQ has been shown to measure only certain kinds of intelligence. The developmental psychologist Howard Gardner (1983), for example, has postulated that humans possess at least eight relatively independent areas of intelligence, such as mathematical, musical, interpersonal, and so on. Furthermore, IQ is not fixed but is subject to variation within one's lifetime and, for groups, subject to change over generations. Perhaps most important, the authors did not place sufficient weight on the environmental factors that enable people to express their intelligence, regardless of IQ. Also, the authors reified "race," referring to whites and blacks as if these were clear-cut, distinct genetic groups, ignoring the countless variations within designated racial categories.

Theoretical views like Jensen's and Herrnstein and Murray's have appeared periodically, but the understanding that environment, not racial inheritance, is the key influence in shaping social behavior clearly predominates in social science thinking today (Graves, 2004; Marks, 1995; Nisbett, 2007, 2009). The preeminent view is that genetic differences among human groups are of minimal significance as far as behavior and intelligence are concerned. Those scholars not subscribing to this view have, in van den Berghe's words, "been voices in the wilderness . . . and their views have not been taken seriously" (1978:xxii). Yet as William Newman (1973) points out, ironically, science itself created the myth of race that it is today still attempting to dispel. Moreover, for many decades few sociologists questioned the prevailing ideas about racial inequality. "Both popular and educated beliefs," notes sociologist James McKee, "provided an unqualified confidence in the biological and cultural superiority of white people over all others not white" (1993:27).

CULTURAL RACISM

As scientific thinking on the issue of race has changed, a new, revised version of racist theory has become prevalent. What has been called **cultural racism** rests on the notion that *the discrepancies in social achievement among ethnic groups are the result of cultural differences rather than biogenetic ones* (Banton, 1970; Schuman, 1982). Because of an inability to adapt to the dominant culture, it is argued, economic and social handicaps persist among certain ethnic groups. These disabilities are traced to a people's way of life—its culture—which hinders conformity to the norms and values of the dominant group. Hence, these are seen as "dysfunctional cultures."

The focus on culture rather than physical characteristics has created a type of thinking that, although not racist in the classical sense, takes on some of the same basic features. The ideology of cultural deprivation or dysfunctional cultures is seemingly more benign than "old-fashioned" racism, which focuses on biological superiority and inferiority, but critics have pointed out that the difference between the two is not so sharp (Bobo and Smith, 1998; Ryan, 1975). They argue that cultural deprivation, like traditional racist notions, emphasizes individual and group shortcomings rather than a social system that, through subtle—perhaps even

unintentional—discrimination, prevents minority groups from attaining economic and social parity with the dominant group. The socioeconomic discrepancy between whites and blacks, for example, is, in this view, a failure of the latter to conform to the work ethic and to obey institutional authority, not inherent inferiority or racial discrimination (Sears, 2000).

Ali Rattansi points out the artful convergence of cultural racism with classical, biologically based racism in the implication that cultural differences are more or less immutable:

Thus the supposed avariciousness of Jews, the alleged aggressiveness of Africans and African Americans, the criminality of Afro-Caribbeans or the slyness of “Orientals,” become traits that are invariably attached to these groups over extremely long periods of time. The descriptions may then be drawn upon as part of a common-sense vocabulary of stereotypes that blur any strict distinction between culture and biology. (Rattansi, 2007:1045)

Most critical is the notion that such cultural deficiencies are, if not immutable, certainly rigid and not subject to rapid and straightforward change. As Fredrickson has explained, racism need not be limited to biological determinism per se, “but the positing, on whatever basis, of unbridgeable differences between ethnic or descent groups—distinctions that are then used to justify their differential treatment” (2002:137). As we will see in Part III, contemporary ethnic conflicts in various world regions are based primarily on cultural differences, not racial distinctions.

Recognizing cultural racism suggests that there is a wide range of racist thinking that can vary in form, substance, and effectiveness. It also demonstrates how the concepts of race and ethnicity can overlap in shaping the perception of groups and their members’ behavior and can, in turn, give rise to racist notions.

In sum, racism is a belief system that has proved tenacious, though modifiable in style and content, in multiethnic societies. Even though popular thinking has drifted away from the old biological racist ideas, more subtle racist notions have taken their place.⁴ Racism, then, is a social phenomenon that continues to render an effect where culturally and physically distinct groups meet.

SUMMARY

- The major aspects of the study of race and ethnic relations are (1) the nature of relations among ethnic groups of multiethnic societies; (2) the structure of inequality among ethnic groups; (3) the manner in which dominance and subordination among ethnic groups are maintained; and (4) the long-range outcomes of interethnic relations—that is, either greater integration or greater separation.
- An *ethnic group* is a group within a larger society that displays a common set of cultural traits, a sense of community among its members based on a presumed common heritage, a feeling of ethnocentrism among group members, ascribed group membership, and, in some cases, a distinct territory. Each of these

⁴ As new genetic information is revealed through studies of DNA, many scientists are concerned that people may begin to disregard environmental influences as they fixate on genetic ones, thereby creating the bases for a reenergized biological racism (Harmon, 2007).

characteristics is a variable, differing from group to group and among members of the same group.

- *Race* is an often misused notion having biological and social meanings. Biologically, a race is a human population displaying certain hereditary features distinguishing it from other populations. The idea is essentially devoid of significance, however, because there are no clear boundaries setting off one so-called race from another. Hence, there can be no agreement on what the distinguishing features of races are, much less how many races exist. Furthermore, the weight of scientific evidence refutes any meaningful relationship of social and mental characteristics and race.
- The sociological importance of race lies in the fact that people have imputed significance to the idea despite its questionable validity. Hence, races are always socially defined groupings and are meaningful only to the extent that people make them so.
- *Racism* is an ideology, or belief system, designed to justify and rationalize racial and ethnic inequality. The members of socially defined racial categories are believed to differ innately not only in physical traits but also in social behavior, personality, and intelligence. Some “races,” therefore, are viewed as superior to others.
- The ideology of racism emerged most forcefully in the age of colonialism, when white Europeans confronted nonwhites in situations of conquest and exploitation. The notion that race was linked to social and psychological traits was given pseudoscientific validity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by American and European observers, a view that was not reversed until the 1930s. Today, scientific thought gives little credence to racial explanations of human behavior, stressing instead environmental causes.
- Even though popular thinking has drifted away from the old biological racist ideas, more subtle racist notions have taken their place. The belief in immutable racial differences may no longer prevail, but the idea that differences in group achievement stem from cultural deficiencies or lack of effort by group members has become a compelling ideology with racist overtones.

CRITICAL THINKING

1. Look at some strongly multiethnic countries and some countries in which there is little ethnic diversity. What historical factors have created heterogeneity in the former and homogeneity in the latter? What accounts for the fact that almost all developed societies of the contemporary world are increasingly multiethnic?
2. Most Americans would not easily accept the idea that “races” are not real, but are social creations. How would you begin to explain this basic sociological postulate to a friend or family member who argues that “you only need to look around you to see that the United States is made up of people of different races”?
3. A few African American political commentators suggested during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign that Barack Obama was “not black enough.” What did they mean by this? Does this comment illustrate differences in the concepts of “race” and “ethnicity”?

4. The U.S. Census has, over the years, changed racial and ethnic categories used in counting the population. How does the creation of racial/ethnic categories by the U.S. Census in effect create "races?" Does the current census provision enabling people to choose more than one race in classifying themselves represent a step in erasing racial and ethnic boundaries, or does it merely create other racial categories and thereby create other boundaries?

PERSONAL/PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. How conscious are you of your ethnic origins? What role does your ethnic identity play in your life? Does it create any social barriers or, on the contrary, any social privileges?
2. Are your close friends similar to yourself in terms of ethnicity? Explain why this may or may not be the case. Might ethnicity be an unconscious consideration in choosing friendships?