

N I N T H E D I T I O N

Racial and Ethnic Relations

Census Update

Joe R. Feagin

Texas A&M University

Clairece Booher Feagin

Prentice Hall

Boston ■ Columbus ■ Indianapolis ■ New York ■ San Francisco ■ Upper Saddle River ■ Amsterdam
Cape Town ■ Dubai ■ London ■ Madrid ■ Milan ■ Munich ■ Paris ■ Montreal ■ Toronto ■ Delhi
Mexico City ■ Sao Paulo ■ Sydney ■ Hong Kong ■ Seoul ■ Singapore ■ Taipei ■ Tokyo

(2012)

Basic Concepts in the Study of Racial and Ethnic Relations



BIG PICTURE QUESTIONS

- *Why and how have human beings developed the powerful ideas of "race" and ethnicity?*
- *How does racial or ethnic discrimination become institutionalized?*
- *How do people respond to racial and ethnic oppression in the United States?*

In the 1980s, Susie Guillory Phipps, a woman living in Louisiana, went to court to try to get the racial designation on her birth certificate at the Louisiana Bureau of Vital Records changed from “colored” to “white.” A 1970 Louisiana “blood” law required that persons with one thirty-second (1/32) or more “Negro blood” (ancestry) were to be designated as “colored” on birth records; before 1970, “any traceable amount” of African ancestry had been used to define a person as colored. The light-skinned Phipps was the descendant of an eighteenth-century white plantation owner and an enslaved black American, and her small amount of African ancestry was enough to get her classified as “colored” on her official government birth certificate. Phipps lost her case.¹

This significant controversy raises the question of how a person comes to be defined as *white* or *not white* in U.S. society. Only under traditional racist assumptions does having one black ancestor make one black, whereas having one white ancestor does not make one white. If one white ancestor made a person white under Louisiana law, many black residents there—those who have at least one white ancestor (often a white slaveholder)—could be classified as *white*! This revealing case illustrates that racial categories are constructed and defined socially and politically, not scientifically.

A logical place to start in making sense out of this U.S. system of racial and ethnic categorization is with basic terms and concepts. People have often used such terms as *racial groups* and *prejudice* without specifying their meaning. Because these are basic concepts in the study of intergroup relations, we will analyze them in detail.

Issues of Race and Racism

Racial Groups and Racialized Hierarchies

Both *racial group* and *race* have been used in a number of senses in social science and popular writings. *Human race, Jewish race, white race*—such terms in the literature suggest a range of meanings. In sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe, the concept

*category of human beings with distinctive physical characteristics transmitted by descent, and set in a clearly racialized hierarchy.*²

Soon, **racial hierarchy**, a stratification of and substantial inequality among physically distinct groups, came to be widely accepted, with white Europeans at the top. The often darker-skinned people from African and Native American societies were relegated by European observers to the bottom, in part because of their physical characteristics and allegedly “primitive” cultures, but also because they were subordinated by Europeans. Economic and political oppression resulted in a low position in the white classification system, or what can be termed *racial subordination*.³

Immanuel Kant’s use of the German phrase for “races of mankind” in the 1770s was one of the early uses of the term *race* in the modern sense of biologically distinct, hierarchical categories of human beings. In 1795, Johann Blumenbach, a prominent German anatomist, established a racial classification system that became an influential typology. At the top of his racial hierarchy were the Caucasians (Europeans), followed in order by the Mongolians (Asians), the Ethiopians (Africans), the Americans (Native Americans), and the Malays (Polynesians). Blumenbach was the first to use the term *Caucasian*; he felt that the Europeans in the Caucasus Mountains of Russia were “the most beautiful race of men.” Ever since, people of European descent have been called by a racist term that originally applied only to a small area of Europe.⁴

The concept of race as a biologically distinctive, hierarchical category was fully developed by northern Europeans who, for much of their histories, had been largely isolated from contact with people who differed from them physically or culturally. Before the development of large sailing ships in the late 1400s, Europeans had little contact with people from Asia, Africa, or the Americas. Soon, however, colonizing Europeans established slave systems in the Americas. Slave colonies were rationalized by colonizing Europeans, including the English, who classified enslaved Africans as a “lesser race.” The idea of race was not developed from scientific observations of all human beings. Rather, it was a social

anthropologists, and other scientists accented this socially determined classification of what were seen as biologically distinctive groups. These scientists reflected their own racial prejudices and those of the white public. "The scientists themselves undertook efforts to document the existence of the differences that the European cultural worldview demanded and had already created."⁶ Basic to this increasingly prevalent racist framing and worldview was the theory of a specific number of biologically distinct "races" with differing physical characteristics and the belief that these characteristics were hereditary and thus created a "natural" hierarchy of groups. By the late nineteenth century, numerous European and U.S. scientists and popular writers were systematically downgrading all peoples *not* of northern European origin, including southern and eastern Europeans (such as Polish and Jewish Europeans), as inferior "races."⁷

Thus, for four centuries of North American development, **racialization** has been *the process by which those in the dominant white group, especially its elites, have defined and constructed certain groups as being racially inferior or superior for the purposes of societal placement and of group enrichment, segregation, or oppression*. Racialization has historically operated in somewhat different ways for particular groups, but the process has generally been under the control of the dominant group, which, from the late 1600s forward, defined itself as "white." Since the seventeenth century, the dominant racial group has put into place a pervasive racial hierarchy, with a racial-status continuum that places white Americans at the top and African Americans and other Americans of color at or near the bottom. Over time, as we will see in later chapters, the white elite, assisted by rank-and-file whites, has determined where new immigrant groups, such as Irish or Chinese immigrants, are placed and where they are racialized within that already established racial hierarchy.

The singling out of people within the human species in terms of a strongly biologized "race" hierarchy seems to have been a distinctively European and Euro-American idea that has spread across all continents over recent centuries. In contrast, many indigenous peoples "have observed and appreciated cultural diversity as variations on cosmological themes. As a rule, the indigenous worldview encompasses all humanity."⁸ In the

view of M. Annette Jaimes, many indigenous peoples across much of the globe have been more likely than Europeans to emphasize building alliances across various human groups. U.S. examples include the assistance in agricultural techniques given by indigenous Americans to early European colonists and later to Japanese Americans who were imprisoned during World War II (see Chapter 10) in U.S. concentration camps located near indigenous communities in the western United States.⁹

Q How has the concept of "race" as a biologically distinctive category changed, or not changed, over several centuries?

Ideological Racism

The early development of ideological racism is rooted in the European global expansion that began in earnest in the late 1400s. We can define **ideological racism** specifically as *an ideology that considers a group's unchangeable physical characteristics to be linked in a direct, causal way to psychological or intellectual characteristics and that, on this basis, distinguishes between superior and inferior racial groups*.¹⁰ The "scientific racism" of such European analysts as Blumenbach and Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, an influential French analyst in the nineteenth century, was used to justify the spread of European colonialism in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. A long line of racist theorists followed in Blumenbach's and Gobineau's footsteps, including the German Nazi leader Adolf Hitler. Sometimes they even applied the ideology of racial inferiority to culturally distinct European groups, such as Jewish Europeans. In a racist ideology, real or alleged physical characteristics are generally linked to *cultural* traits that the dominant group considers undesirable or inferior.

Significantly, the word *racism*, first used systematically in the 1930s by the German scholar Magnus Hirschfeld, is relatively new. Hirschfeld regularly used it for the ideology of biologically determined "races" accented by German Nazis and other Europeans to buttress their well-institutionalized system of racially oppressive practices. In its blatant and subtle forms, ideological racism has long been common in the United States. For example, in 1935, an

influential white University of Virginia professor wrote this blatantly racist analysis:

The size of the brain in the Black Race is below the medium both of the Whites and the Yellow-Browns, frequently with relatively more simple convolutions. The frontal lobes are often low and narrow. The parietal lobes voluminous, the occipital protruding. The psychic activities of the Black Race are a careless, jolly vivacity, emotions and passions of short duration, and a strong and somewhat irrational egoism. Idealism, ambition, and the cooperative faculties are weak. They love amusement and sport but have little initiative and adventurous spirit.¹¹

This example of crude ideological racism clearly links physical and personality characteristics. Although this extreme, biologized, racist portrait passed for science before World War II—and in today's white supremacist organizations, it still does—it is *pseudoscience*. Modern biologists and anthropologists have demonstrated the wild-eyed irrationality of this racist mythology.

Found in many versions today, including some much more subdued, ideological racism accepts as true various stereotyped characteristics traditionally applied by whites to “outsider” groups of color. The assumption of this commonplace racist thinking is that physical differences such as skin color are intrinsically, even unalterably, tied to meaningful differentials in intelligence, culture, or “civilization.” Yet, despite assertions of such a linkage by many people, including the pseudoscientists, no real scientific support for this assumed intrinsic linkage exists.

Indeed, there is *no* distinctive and enduring biological reality called “race” that can be determined by objective scientific procedures. Since at least the 1940s, the social, medical, and physical sciences have demonstrated this in numerous research studies. Nonetheless, in recent years a renewed insistence on the genetic reality of “races” has been triggered by a few dissenting white geneticists and social scientists. However, the older evidence and more recent research and analysis still strongly refute the notion of “races” being good categories for describing human

much overlapping of genetic characteristics across various human populations. Two randomly selected individuals from the world's population would have in common, on average, about 99.8 percent of their genetic material. Even more important is the fact that most of the genetic variation with regard to human populations “occurs *within* populations, not *between* them.”¹³ There are genetic differences between geographically scattered human populations, but these differences are slight and exist because of different histories and geographical locations. The racial importance of the modest dissimilarities such as skin color variations is *socially*, not scientifically, determined.

Human populations singled out as “races” are simply groups with visible differences that certain people have collectively decided to emphasize as important in traditional social, economic, and political relationships. Such racial categorizing is neither objective nor scientific, but highly subjective. There are *many* different ways of classifying human populations in terms of physical and genetic characteristics: “One such procedure would group Italians and Greeks with most African blacks. It would classify Xhosa—the South African ‘black’ group to which [former South African] President Nelson Mandela belongs—with Swedes rather than Nigerians.”¹⁴ For example, antimalarial genes are not found among the light-skinned Swedes or the dark-skinned southern African groups such as the Xhosas, but they are commonly found in northern African groups and among Europeans such as Italians and Greeks. These antimalarial genes are likely *much* more important for human beings than those that determine skin color variations, yet they are *not* used by biological-race thinkers, the pseudoscientists, for their persisting racial classifications.¹⁵

In effect, there is only one human race (*Homo sapiens*), to which we all belong. Every human being is, in fact, distantly related to every other human being on earth. The indigenous peoples' view of human beings, previously noted, is now accepted by most scientists.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the lack of scientific support has not lessened the popularity of blatantly racist ideologies of various types. Ashley

lay behind Nazi-generated killings of millions of European Jews (and other Europeans) during the 1930s and 1940s.

In the case of North America, over several centuries now, variations on an old racist ideology have long been incorporated as part of a *white racial framing* of an ever more diverse society, a concept to which we will return later.

Racial Groups

Today, social scientists view “race” not as a given biological reality but as a socially constructed reality. Sociologist Oliver Cox, one of the first to underscore this social construction perspective, defined a *race* as “any people who are distinguished, or consider themselves distinguished, in social relations with other peoples, by their physical characteristics.”¹⁸ Similarly, a *racial group* has been defined by Pierre van den Berghe as a “human group that defines itself and or is defined by other groups as different from other groups by virtue of innate and immutable physical characteristics.”¹⁹

Thus, a racial group is *not* something generated naturally as part of the self-evident order of societies. A person’s race is typically determined by, and important to, certain outsiders, although a group’s own self-definition can be important. Here we define a **racial group** as a *social group that persons inside or outside the group have decided is important to single out as inferior or superior, typically on the basis of real or alleged physical characteristics selected subjectively*. Racial group distinctions are rooted in ideological racism, which as noted previously links physical characteristics to “inferior” or “superior” cultural and intellectual characteristics.

In the United States, numerous groups fit this definition. Asian Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans have had their physical characteristics—such as skin color, facial features, and/or eye shape—singled out by the dominant white group as badges of social, cultural, and racial inferiority. In addition, this dominant group has generally viewed its own racially defined group as superior. Some groups once defined as racial groups, and as physically and mentally inferior groups, are no longer defined that way. In later chapters, we will see that Irish and Italian immigrants were for a time defined as inferior “races” by native-born white Anglo-Protestant Americans.

Later, the social definition of these European immigrants as distinctively inferior racial groups was replaced by a social construction of them as white and as *ethnic groups*, a term we examine later.

The examples of Irish and Italian Americans make clear that racial definitions are not necessarily fixed essences that last forever, but instead can be temporary social constructions shaped in sociopolitical struggles in particular times and places. Definitions of racial inferiority or superiority can and do change over time, albeit often slowly.

Why are some physical characteristics, such as skin color, selected as a basis for distinguishing racial groups, whereas certain other characteristics, such as eye color, seldom are? These questions cannot be answered in biological terms. They require historical and sociological analysis. Some have argued that such characteristics as skin color are “easily observed and ordered in the mind.”²⁰ More important than ease of observation, however, is the way economic or political subordination creates a need to identify the powerless group in a certain way. In justifying economic or other exploitation, the dominant group often defines the real (or alleged) physical characteristics that are singled out to typify the exploited group as distinctive and inferior racial characteristics. For example, technological differences in weaponry and firepower between European and African peoples facilitated the enslavement of Africans in the American colonies. In turn, the generally darker skin of the Africans and their descendants came to be used by self-defined “white” groups as an indicator of subordinate racial and cultural status. Skin-color characteristics have no inherent meaning; in group interaction, they become important because they can be used to classify members of the dominant and subordinate groups.

In addition, knowledge of one’s relatives often affects one’s assignment to a racial group, particularly for those who lack the socially emphasized physical characteristics. At various times in many societies, people have been distinguished not only on the basis of their own physical characteristics but also on the basis of a socially determined “rule of descent.”²¹ For example, in Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler’s officials often identified Jewish Germans mainly on the basis of their having one or more Jewish relatives.

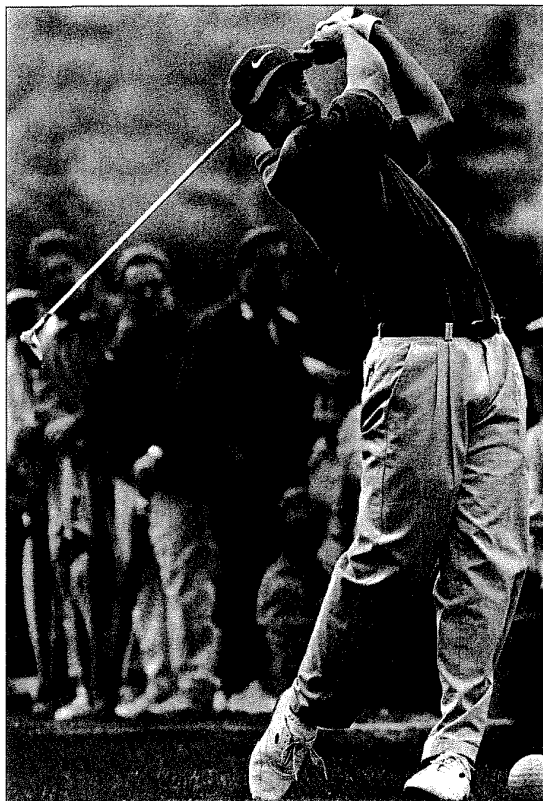
Q How is the concept of “race” understood presently by almost all social scientists?

Ancestry and Multiracial Realities

The socially applied rules of descent have varied greatly from society to society. For example, in some countries there are special categories or designations for mixed-ancestry groups, such as the “Coloureds” term once widely used for people with African and European ancestry in South Africa. Many Latin American countries recognize several mixed-ancestry categories. Mixed-ancestry distinctions have been rare in the United States, however. In the case of African Americans, interracial blending has, over time, caused dark skin color to become a less reliable characteristic for those determined to make racial distinctions, and the rule of descent has gained more importance as a mechanism of racial identification to perpetuate discrimination. Today, black Americans “evidence an unusually wide range of physical traits. Their skin color extends from ebony to a shade paler than many ‘whites.’”²² Indeed, relatively few black Americans are literally “black.” Most have a skin color that is some shade of brown.

In many U.S. communities, the social aspect of the defining process becomes obvious when a light-skinned person, say, of one-eighth African ancestry but with none of the physical traits most whites associate with African Americans, is regarded as “black” because one of his or her ancestors or relatives is known to be of African ancestry. Sometimes termed the “one drop of blood” rule, this odd rule of descent is found mainly in the United States. Indeed, in Caribbean countries and many parts of Africa, a person who is one-eighth African in ancestry and seven-eighths European would ordinarily be considered “white.”

Mixed racial ancestry does not fit neatly into traditional U.S. categorizing. Today, there are millions of children in interracial families, and growing numbers of interracial marriages take place annually. The existence and experiences of these Americans underscore the social construction of racial identities. Consider the case of Tiger Woods, a talented golfer who has won numerous major golf tournaments.²³ Woods has described his complex ancestry as one-eighth white, one-eighth Native American, one-fourth African American, one-fourth Thai, and



Golf star Tiger Woods hits a tee shot at a tournament.

one-fourth Chinese. However, the mass media have usually portrayed Woods as African American. Following his early golf victories, his father spoke of him as a black sports star, and Woods presented himself in early commercials as black. But later, Woods accented his mixed ancestry and seemed to some observers to play down his black ancestry and identity. After criticism by African Americans who were proud of his achievements and his African ancestry, Woods issued a statement that he was proud of his African American *and* other ancestry.²⁴

Nonetheless, many people in the media and elsewhere have continued to view Woods mainly as a black sports star, and it seems likely that far more Americans see him as African American than as multiracial. After Woods won his first Masters Tournament, a white golfer, Fuzzy Zoeller, spoke about “that little boy” and joked that he hoped Woods would not choose collard greens and fried chicken

for the Masters championship dinner.²⁵ Accenting foods that whites have long liked to associate with African Americans, Zoeller emphasized that Woods was indeed African American. He later apologized for his comments.²⁶

In the late 1990s, Congress debated the addition of a "multiracial" category in the U.S. census for the year 2000, a change supported by many people of mixed racial ancestry and by organizations representing their views. However, some critics suggested that the presence of such a multiracial box for people to check on the census form might reduce the count in other categories, such as "black," which would hurt civil rights enforcement in some areas. Congress decided against the creation of a specific multiracial category for the 2000 census. Instead, individuals were allowed to mark multiple ancestry groups. This debate continued for the 2010 census, but again no specific multiracial category was added for that census. This debate clearly indicates that racial designations are socially constructed and maintained. Interestingly, in the 2000 census only 6.8 million Americans—out of a total of 281 million—indicated by checking multiple categories that they had multiracial ancestry. (At the time of this writing, such data for the 2010 census have not been published.)²⁷

Of course, these 2000 census data represent only the tip of the iceberg; additional millions of Americans in fact have substantial multiracial backgrounds. Many Americans' ancestry is some mixture of European, African, Native American, Asian, Middle Eastern, or Latin American backgrounds, and today increasing numbers of people assert their multiracial (and/or multiethnic) identities. Attention to issues of multiracial ancestry, intermarriage, and interracial families will likely escalate as the United States becomes ever more diverse in future decades.

Ethnic Groups

What Is an Ethnic Group?

The term *ethnic group* has been used by social scientists in two different senses, one narrow and one broad. Some definitions of the term are broad enough to include socially defined racial groups. For example, in Milton Gordon's broad definition, an ethnic group is a social group distinguished

"by race, religion, or national origin."²⁸ Like the definition of *racial group*, this definition contains the notion of social set-apartness. However, here the distinctive characteristics can be physical or cultural, and language and religion are seen as critical markers or signs of ethnicity even when there is no physical distinctiveness. Today, a number of contemporary scholars, such as Werner Sollors, still view religious, national-origin, and racial groups as falling under the same umbrella term *ethnic group*.²⁹

Other scholars prefer a narrower definition of ethnic group, one that omits groups defined substantially in terms of physical characteristics (those called racial groups) and that is limited to groups distinguished primarily on the basis of cultural or national-origin characteristics. *Cultural characteristics* include language; *national origin* refers to the country (and national culture) from which the person or her or his ancestors came.

The English word *ethnic* comes from the Greek word *ethnos*, originally meaning "nation." In its earliest English usage, in the fifteenth century, the word referred to culturally different "heathen" countries—that is, those not Christian or Jewish. The first usage of *ethnic group* to denote national origin developed in the period of heavy immigration from southern and eastern European countries to the United States in the early twentieth century. Since the 1930s, a number of prominent social scientists have suggested that the narrower definition of *ethnic group*, more in line with the original Greek meaning of "nationality," makes the term more useful.³⁰

Social scientist W. Lloyd Warner, who was perhaps the first to use the term *ethnicity*, distinguished between ethnic groups—which he saw as characterized by cultural differences—and racial groups, characterized substantially by physical differences.³¹ More recent scholars have also preferred the narrower usage. In van den Berghe's view, for example, ethnic groups are "socially defined but on the basis of cultural criteria."³²

In this book, the usual meaning of *ethnic group* will be the narrower one—a group socially distinguished or set apart, by others or by itself, primarily on the basis of cultural and/or national-origin characteristics. Such set-apart groups, such as Irish Americans or German Americans, usually develop a sense of a common cultural heritage and ancestry. Some broad social categories, such as the religious category of "Baptists," have been considered by some

to be ethnic groups, but in the sense we use the term here, they are not. Religious groups that are open to relatively easy conversion are not, strictly speaking, ethnic, because ethnicity says something about socially accepted lines of common descent or national origin as well as about current cultural characteristics.

Many social analysts who use the broader definition that includes racial groups argue that the historical experiences of people defined as “nonwhite” are essentially similar to experiences of white groups. Some have argued that in the United States the situations and experiences of non-European groups such as African or Asian Americans are in broad ways similar to those of immigrants from Europe, especially with regard to the process of gradual integration into the Anglo-Protestant core society. Some social scientists further assume that the experiences of both European and non-European groups are adequately explained by the same theoretical framework—typically some type of assimilation framework (see Chapter 2).³³

In contrast, many analysts who prefer the narrower definition of *ethnic group* as a socially constructed category that differs in important ways from the term *racial group* view the historical and contemporary experiences of subordinated racial groups as distinctively different from those of white European ethnic groups.³⁴ Moreover, the public and scholarly use of the umbrella term *ethnic group* for all groups, including racial groups, in the past two decades has often had political and racial overtones: “Indeed, the substitution of ‘ethnicity’ for ‘race’ as a basis of categorization is accompanied by increasing unwillingness among the dominant group to accept responsibility for the problems of racism.”³⁵ Although this criticism is accurate for much popular and scholarly writing that views such groups as African Americans and Mexican Americans as “just” ethnic groups that are no different in their societal experiences from groups such as Italian Americans and Irish Americans, it does not apply to those scholars who prefer the term *ethnic group* because they feel its use indicates that all groups have genuine and significant cultural histories.³⁶

In addition, many scholars emphasize the point that all socially constructed racial groups include subgroups that can be seen as ethnic groups because they have distinctive cultural identities. Examples of this include Italian Americans within the white

racial group and Jamaican Americans within the black racial group.

Definitions of *racial group* and *ethnic group* that emphasize their social meaning and social construction directly reject the biological determinism that views such groups as self-evident and possessing unchanging physical or intellectual characteristics. People themselves, both outside and inside racial and ethnic groups, determine when certain physical or cultural characteristics are important enough to single out a group for social purposes, whether for good or for ill.

Thus, a given social group may be viewed by different outsiders or at different times as a racial group or an ethnic group (in the narrow sense). During the 1930s, for example, Jewish Germans were identified as a “race” in Nazi Germany, in part because of physical characteristics that were alleged to be different from those of other Germans. However, the actual identification of Jewish Germans for persecution and killing by Nazi bureaucrats and soldiers was based more on certain ethnic characteristics—cultural characteristics such as religion or language—and genealogical ties to known Jewish ancestors than on physical characteristics.

In their first contacts with European societies, darker-skinned Africans were viewed in cultural-ethnic rather than biological-racial terms. St. Clair Drake’s research on early African contacts with Europeans has shown that in the first centuries of historical contact—during the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman periods—European outsiders generally attached far greater significance to Africans’ culture and nationality than to their physical characteristics. Before the sixteenth century, “neither White Racism nor *racial slavery* existed.”³⁷ Similarly, Frank Snowden has demonstrated that the early encounters between African “blacks” and Mediterranean “whites” led to a generally favorable image of the Africans among Europeans and to substantial friendships and intermarriage—much different from the white-black relationships in modern race-conscious societies. Although some Europeans in these periods did express negative views of Africans’ color, these views never developed into an acute color consciousness linked to a racially framed view of Africans as an inferior species with intellectual deficits. Virulent color prejudice in the form of ideological racism emerged only in the modern world, primarily in the imperial expansion into

Africa and the Americas by European nations seeking colonies between the 1400s and the 1800s.³⁸ Historical conditions have shaped whether and how skin color becomes a marker—usually in the social processes of group exploitation and oppression.

Ancestry is important to the concept of *ethnic group* whether it is defined in a narrow or a broad sense. Perception of a common ancestry, real or mythical, has been part of outsiders' definitions and of ethnic groups' self-definitions. Sociologist Max Weber saw ethnic groups broadly as "human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent."³⁹ In addition to a sense of common ancestry, a consciousness of shared experiences and cultural patterns is typically important in shaping a group's identity.

A number of social scientists have focused on the ways in which people's constructions and conceptions of their own and others' ethnic identities change over time and from one situation to another. These social constructionists emphasize the importance of studying the "ways in which ethnic boundaries, identities, and cultures are negotiated, defined, and produced through social interaction inside and outside ethnic communities."⁴⁰ Drawing on field research, Mary Waters has shown the options white Americans have with regard to ethnic identity. A white person of English and Irish ancestry may choose either ethnic identity, both, or none, preferring in the latter case to identify only as "American."⁴¹ Waters has documented how

Afro-Caribbean immigrants sometimes view themselves as African Americans and sometimes as an ethnic group distinct from native-born people within the African American racial group.⁴² Nonetheless, Afro-Caribbean Americans generally have no choice in how they are viewed—as black Americans—by most people in the dominant white group.

Yet other terms for socially distinguished groups are used by some researchers. Among these are *majority group* and *minority group*.⁴³ For example, Louis Wirth defined a **minority group** as "a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination."⁴⁴ However, many scholars today consider it more accurate to use the term **dominant group** instead of *majority group* for the racial or ethnic group with the greatest power and resources in a societal setting, and the term **subordinate group** instead of *minority group* for a group that is singled out because of physical and/or cultural characteristics for differential and unequal treatment and whose members become objects of substantial discrimination. This usage is appropriate because a majority group can numerically be a minority, as was the case with white Europeans in numerous colonial societies. Indeed, if demographic trends continue, the white majority, in population terms, will likely become a statistical minority in the United States by 2050.



The United States is a racially and ethnically diverse society.

A Note on Cultures

Real cultural differences between groups are often at the heart of racial and ethnic conflict. Sociologists and anthropologists often define *culture* as the shared values, understandings, symbols, and practices of a group of people. The shared symbols are the means by which people “communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.”⁴⁵ There are cultural objects (the symbols and practices) as well as cultural creators and cultural receivers (the people who create and use the cultural objects).⁴⁶

In Chapter 2, we will observe the importance of culture in the process by which one group adapts to another. We will examine the concept of *dominant culture*, the understandings and symbols created and controlled by a powerful group, as well as the concept of an *immigrant culture*, the understandings and symbols of an immigrant group entering the sphere of the dominant culture. Milton Gordon, an assimilation theorist, argued that immigrant groups coming into North America after the English gave up much of their own cultural heritage to conform to a dominant core culture:

If there is anything in American life which can be described as an overall American culture which serves as a reference point for immigrants and their children, it can best be described, it seems to us, as the middle-class cultural patterns of, largely, white Protestant, Anglo-Saxon origins, leaving aside for the moment the question of minor reciprocal influences on this culture exercised by the cultures of later entry into the United States.⁴⁷

In subsequent chapters, we will also see how subordinated racial and ethnic groups have drawn on their well-developed cultures to resist discrimination and slavish adaptation to a dominant white Anglo-Protestant culture. Some analysts describe these as *cultures of resistance*.⁴⁸ The cultural heritage and present cultural understandings of subordinated groups, such as African Americans or American Indians, not only foster a positive sense of identity and pride but also facilitate the group’s survival and enhance its ability to resist oppression. Strong family and kinship values of Native American societies enabled them to survive the Euro-American invasions of their lands. Contrary to certain prevailing stereotypes, moreover,

the strong family ties of African Americans have generally fostered a sense of pride and identity and have provided crucial support for coping with racial discrimination.

A Racial Framing of Society

Central to the persistence of racial hierarchies in countries such as the United States is the development of a comprehensive racial frame, primarily by the dominant racial group. This broad racial framing typically includes more than the ideological racism discussed previously. We can define a **racial frame** as an *organized set of racial ideas, narratives, stereotypes, images, emotions, and inclinations to discriminate*. Today, as in the past, a racial frame provides an all-encompassing interpretive scheme that shapes evaluations of everyday events and encounters with people from various racialized groups. A racial frame is very important socially because it interprets everyday worlds and generates discriminatory actions in line with the frame. A strong racial frame captures territory in minds and thus shapes how people act.⁴⁹

In the case of North America, the European colonists and their descendants early developed a white racial framing of the new society to interpret and defend the increasingly institutionalized reality of white-on-black oppression and white-on-Indian oppression. This broad racial frame has been maintained, with some variation and periodic reworking, to the present day. Central to this frame is an interrelated set of emotionally charged understandings and narratives that whites (and others) have used to rationalize and legitimate racial oppression. Early political leaders, such as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington, participated actively, and often emotionally, in the development of this racial framing, including its ideological racism, in order to defend white power and privilege as natural for this society. Historically, variations on the white racial frame have regularly generated recurring discriminatory actions. Such racial framing of society has generated and rationalized anti-Indian genocide, African American slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and historical discrimination against Latinos and Asian Americans, as well as contemporary incarnations of racial discrimination targeting all these groups.

Historically and in the present, whites have combined racial stereotypes (the verbal-cognitive aspect), ideas and narratives (the deeper verbal-cognitive aspect), images (the visual aspect), emotions (feelings such as fear), and inclinations to take discriminatory action within a racial frame that is oriented to assessing and reacting to Americans of color in everyday situations. Learning racial framing typically begins at a young age. The language and framing of “race” that is picked up in social settings often becomes what psychologist Lev Vygotsky has called “inner speech”; that is, it is deeply internalized.⁵⁰ Racial words and terms that are learned as children usually carry complex understandings going well beyond their apparent denotative meanings. Particular racial words learned in childhood often embed and trigger an array of psychological linkages, emotions, and understandings. Our racialized language and broad racial framing thus shape and limit our thinking about this society.

Interestingly, there has been little research on the dominant white-generated framing, especially viewed as a whole. What evidence we do have suggests that there have been numerous variations on this white framing since the seventeenth century. Members of the dominant racial group in various regions of the country sometimes have accented different elements of the broad racial framing, although much of this old framing is shared across all subgroups and regions. From time to time in U.S. history, new immigrant groups, such as Asian and Latino Americans in the mid-nineteenth century, have been racialized and incorporated within the dominant framing. By constantly using the many elements of this old racial frame to rationalize and interpret this racialized society, by integrating new items into the frame periodically, and by applying learned stereotypes, images, and prejudicial interpretations in discriminatory actions, whites and others embed a racialized framing of the world deeply in their minds and, as well, the important societal institutions. Such deep embeddedness makes it difficult to alter or replace this centuries-old racial frame.

Q How has the racial framing of this society been maintained and reworked from the seventeenth century to the present day?

Prejudices and Stereotypes

Typically, a racial or ethnic framing of society in the minds of members of dominant groups, and of others influenced by them, includes negative stereotypes and prejudices concerning those in subordinate groups, as well as assertively positive views of the dominant group and its major institutions. These elements are centrally about the ways various racial and ethnic groups are represented, named, and discussed in the dominant framing of them. Let us now examine some of these important elements.

One often discussed element is *prejudice*, which in popular discourse is associated mostly with negative attitudes about members of racial and ethnic groups, especially subordinate groups. Some understanding of how and why these negative attitudes develop can be achieved by considering the concept of *ethnocentrism*, which was long ago described as the “view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it.”⁵¹ Individuals who develop *positive ethnocentrism* are characterized by a loyalty to the values, beliefs, and members of their own group. Ethnocentrism often prompts negative views of out-groups through a constant evaluation of out-groups in terms of in-group values and ways. Such negative views are manifested in prejudices and stereotypes that influence the social, economic, and political interaction among groups.⁵²

Prejudice has been defined by influential psychologist Gordon Allport as “thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant.”⁵³ The term *prejudice* comes from the Latin word *praejudicium*, meaning “a judgment made prior to knowledge or experience.” In English, the word evolved from meaning “hasty judgment” to the present connotation of unfavorable bias based on an unsupported judgment. Although prejudice can theoretically apply to favorable prejudgments, its current usage in both popular speech and social science analysis is usually negative. Thus, **prejudice** is, to closely paraphrase Allport, *an antipathy based on a faulty generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because she or he is a member of that group.*⁵⁴

As used in this text, *prejudice* has both an emotional and a verbal-cognitive aspect; it involves a negative feeling or attitude toward the out-group as well as an inaccurate belief or image. An example

might be “I, as a white person, hate black and Latino people because black and Latino people always smell worse than whites.” The first part of the sentence expresses the negative emotion (the hatred); the last part makes an inaccurate generalization. This latter cognitive aspect has been termed a **stereotype**—that is, *an overgeneralization associated with a racial or ethnic category that goes beyond existing evidence.*

Why do many people stereotype other people? Why have Irish Americans been stereotyped as lazy drunkards, African Americans and Latinos as indolent, Italian Americans as criminals with “Mafia” ties, and Asian Americans as “treacherous Orientals”? Such questions encourage us to examine the role that prejudices and stereotypes play in the history and daily lives of individuals and groups and in the society in which they live.

Stereotypes involve social representations of various groups and take different forms. For example, anthropologist Jane Hill has researched the widespread use of “mock Spanish” as part of the negative representations and images of U.S. Latinos. Many non-Latinos sprinkle their language with mock-Spanish terms such as “no problemo,” “el cheapo,” and “hasty banana,” and phrases such as “hasta la vista, baby.” Mock-Spanish terms appear on billboards, in movies, in cartoons, on items in gift shops, and in elite boardrooms—often in association with racial caricatures of Mexican Americans or other Latino groups. This widespread mocking of the Spanish language and of Latinos typically signals racialized stereotyping.⁵⁵ Such ridicule of Mexican Americans’ language or speech is racist because it has meaning mainly in relation to underlying racial stereotypes. Hill suggests that this mocking enables its (usually Anglo-white) perpetrators to support traditional hierarchies of racial privilege without seeming to be blatantly racist.

Recurring white attacks on certain distinctive language accents or on variants of English spoken by many Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans, or other Americans of color are not just concerned with language, for they reveal a “general unwillingness to accept the speakers of that language and social choices they have made as viable and functional. . . . We are ashamed of them.”⁵⁶ Language mocking and language subordination are not about standards for speaking as much as they are about determining that some people (usually people

of color) are not worth listening to and treating as equals. Thus, people who speak French-accented English rarely report such discrimination, whereas those who speak Spanish-accented English often do. Stereotyped language or accent mocking often becomes part of “hundreds of taken-for-granted commonplace utterances that function to ‘racialize’ their targets, constructing them as members of a human group represented as essentially inferior.”⁵⁷

Stereotyping operates at conscious and unconscious levels. For example, social psychologists have discovered that the overwhelming majority of whites who have taken a major test of unconscious stereotyping associate black Americans with negative words and traits, such as “evil character.” In these research studies, whites have often had more difficulty linking black faces than white faces to pleasant words and positive traits. In addition, when shown photos of black faces, even for a few milliseconds, key areas of white subjects’ brains that are designed to respond to perceived threats light up automatically when scanned. Such data suggest how deeply embedded in the brain traditional racial stereotypes can be. As a result, many whites do not approach new encounters with black Americans and other people of color with minds that are truly open to new information or interpretations.⁵⁸ In addition, social psychologists such as Patricia Devine have found that virtually all whites are aware of major racial stereotypes no matter what their personal inclinations to act on them may be. The reason: Automatic mental processing brings up such racial stereotypes for whites whenever an appropriate stimulus appears, such as a member of a racial outgroup. Moreover, the research shows that very prejudiced people are more inclined to act on the activated racial stereotypes, whereas less prejudiced people often engage in a type of mental processing that ignores or rejects the activated stereotype.⁵⁹

Explanations of Stereotyping and Prejudice

Sociological analysts of stereotyping and prejudice tend to emphasize group pressures on individuals for conformity or rationalization, whereas psychological analysts tend to stress individual irrationality or personality defects. Much research has highlighted the expressive function of prejudice for the individual. Frustration–aggression theories, psychoanalytic theories, and authoritarian personality

perspectives generally focus on the **externalization function of prejudice**—*the transfer of an individual's internal psychological problem onto an external object, such as a particular racial group, as a solution to that internal psychological problem.* Psychologically oriented interpretations sometimes attribute racial or ethnic prejudice to special emotional problems of "sick" or "abnormal" individuals, such as a deep hatred of their parents.⁶⁰

In a classic study of prejudice and personality, *The Authoritarian Personality*, T. W. Adorno and his colleagues argued that people who hate such groups as Jewish Americans typically differ from tolerant people with regard to central personality traits—specifically, that they tend to exhibit "authoritarian personalities."⁶¹ Those with **authoritarian personalities** are characterized by a high degree of submission to authority, a strong tendency to stereotype, great concern for social status, a view of the world as threatening, and an intolerance of outgroups that occupy socially subordinate positions.

Some scholars have raised questions about a too heavy stress on the expressive function of prejudice. They have suggested that social conformity may be a much more important factor for most prejudiced people. Most people accept their own social situations as given and hold the prejudices taught at home and school and by the mass media. The **conformity function of prejudice**—*holding prejudiced attitudes in order to conform to expectations of important social reference groups such as relatives and friends*—explains much individual prejudice. Many negative prejudices and stereotypes are formed from the informal lessons that people learn as children at home and in school and as adults as they absorb messages from the media and socialize with relatives, co-workers, and friends.⁶² In this conformity view, most racial and ethnic prejudices are not the result of deep psychological pathologies; rather, they reflect shared social definitions of out-groups. In such cases, prejudice functions as a means of social adjustment. Most of us can think of situations in which we, or our acquaintances, have adjusted to new racial beliefs in moving from one region or setting to another. As Schermerhorn notes, "Prejudice is a product of situations," not "a little demon that emerges in people simply because they are depraved."⁶³

An additional function of prejudice is to help rationalize a subordinate group's powerless position. Herbert Blumer suggested that prejudice is more

than a matter of negative feelings possessed by members of one group for another; it is also "rooted in a sense of group position."⁶⁴ The dominant group comes to defend and rationalize its privileged position. Modern prejudice, Oliver Cox has argued, "is a divisive attitude seeking to alienate dominant group sympathy from an 'inferior' race, a whole people, for the purpose of facilitating its exploitation."⁶⁵ When people are racially subordinated, as in the cases of white enslavement of Africans in the North American colonies or of restrictive quotas for Jewish Americans in U.S. colleges in the 1920s, those in power—in both cases, Anglo-Protestant whites—develop prejudices and stereotypes as part of a framing that helps them to rationalize the oppression of others.

Some analysts have suggested that certain members of dominant racial groups who today discriminate against subordinate groups are motivated just by a desire for economic or political gain. Such people strive to maintain their undeserved privileges, whether or not they rationalize that striving in terms of racial prejudices and stereotypes.⁶⁶ Such striving takes place within a societal system of inequality in which the dominant racial group benefits economically, politically, and psychologically—and acts to maintain its ill-gotten benefits. In the everyday world of racial discrimination, however, it is likely that the desire to protect racialized privileges will almost always be accompanied by negatively stereotyped views of the subordinate group targeted for discrimination.

Are Racial Attitudes and Performances Changing?

Stereotyped images and other stereotypes of people of color held by whites today have many similarities with stereotypes of the past. Still, some changes have occurred, especially since the 1960s. Public opinion surveys of white attitudes toward Americans of color have shown a significant decline in the public expression of certain old-fashioned racist attitudes since the 1940s.

Researchers David Sears and John McConahay have identified what they term **symbolic** or **modern racism**—that is, *white beliefs that serious racial discrimination does not exist today and that black Americans in particular are making illegitimate demands for social changes.* Using survey-type measures, these social

psychologists have suggested that, among whites, "old-fashioned racism" favoring rigid segregation and extreme stereotypes has largely been replaced by a modern racism whose white proponents accept modest racial desegregation but resist the large-scale changes necessary for full integration of U.S. society. Sociologist Lawrence Bobo has suggested that whites have an "ideology of bounded racial change"; that is, whites' support for changes in discrimination ends when such changes seriously endanger their standard of living.⁶⁷ Social psychologist Thomas Pettigrew has noted certain white reactions to black achievements in recent decades and suggested that an "ultimate attribution error" on the part of many whites includes not only blaming black victims for their failures but also discounting black successes by attributing the latter to luck or unfair advantages rather than intelligence and hard work.⁶⁸ Research on modern versions of whites' attitudinal racism has mostly examined attitudes toward black Americans, but these innovative concepts can likely be used to interpret whites' prejudices and stereotypes directed at other people of color.

Much social science research shows that many people today vary their presentations and performances of racial attitudes depending on the social setting. In a survey of white students on major college campuses, sociologists Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Tyrone Forman discovered that racial attitudes expressed on short-answer survey items were frequently different from those expressed to questions requiring extended commentary. For example, on a brief survey item, 80 percent of 451 white students indicated that they *approved* of marriages between white and black Americans. However, when a smaller but similar group of white college students was interviewed in depth, this figure dropped to only 30 percent. Given more time to answer and explain their views in in-depth interviews, the majority expressed significant reservations about marriage across the color line. Other attitudinal views showed a similar pattern of racial expression varying by setting. Moreover, in her research social psychologist Maria Krysan increased the privacy of the settings in which her respondents could express their racial views. As the privacy of settings increased, white respondents expressed more negative attitudes toward black Americans. Other psychological research has found that whites who reject some

stereotypes, such as in settings where their expression is easy to control, nonetheless reveal these deeply held stereotypes in other situations where they are less able to control, or less concerned about controlling their expression. Social conformity and desirability concerns constantly are factors.⁶⁹

Several social scientists have used qualitative research methods to explore the spatial and temporal variations in racist commentaries and performances. They too have demonstrated how whites vary commentaries and performances depending on whether they are in public or private social arenas. In research on interactions in an all-white country-and-western group, Nina Eliasoph found that overtly racist commentaries were critical for socially integrating whites when they were interacting with each other. Racist talk, or complacency about it, facilitated interaction. Whites were aware of when to engage in overtly racist discussions; they understood the setting was as important as the racist content. Researcher Karyn McKinney got college students to provide autobiographical journals about their private and public lives. One student pointed out that private settings were comfortable places for expressing attitudes: "I think that for people, other white people being around are a comfort zone to express any racist views. It is funny how some people assume that no white person will care about what they say or that they will even support their beliefs." Similarly, in an important and probing ethnographic study of "race talk," Kristen Myers and her associates recorded substantial comments made by ordinary people, both whites and people of color, in private places. Myers and her ethnographers found that many whites used blatantly racist slurs and categorizations—an often ritualistic degradation of people of color—in their everyday interactions.⁷⁰

Particularly significant is the finding of contemporary social scientists that many whites still make blatantly racist commentaries and do racist performances, such as racist joking or frequent use of racist epithets, when they are in settings with white friends and relatives. This behavior is termed *backstage racism* by Leslie Houts Picca and Joe Feagin, who draw on the ideas of Erving Goffman. Making use of thousands of journal accounts from hundreds of college students across the country, Picca and Feagin found that whites often seem to behave differently depending on whether they are in a backstage setting with white friends and relatives or in a frontstage setting

that includes people of color. They report this recent journal account from a white female college student about a night out with several other white students:

Three of my friends (a white girl and two white boys) and I went back to my house to drink a little more before we ended the night. My one friend, Dylan started telling jokes. . . . Dylan said: "What's the most confusing day of the year in Harlem?" "Father's Day . . . Who's your Daddy?" Dylan also referred to black people as "Porch Monkeys." Everyone laughed a little, but it was obvious that we all felt a little less comfortable when he was telling jokes like that. My friend Dylan is not a racist person. He has more black friends than I do, that's why I was surprised he so freely said something like that. Dylan would never have said something like that around anyone who was a minority.⁷¹

Here, a white student told racist jokes, and others laughed along with him. Although they reportedly felt uncomfortable, the other whites did not openly object. The journal writer has rationalized her friend's racist actions, noting that he would not make such racist "jokes" in a frontstage setting with people of color around.

Although there clearly have been some important shifts in whites' racist attitudes in recent decades, many of the older racial stereotypes and

prejudices, as well as much of the old racist framing of society, remain firmly embedded in many white minds and evident in many whites' everyday commentaries and performances.

Q What are common methods of developing and rationalizing stereotypes and prejudices?

Discrimination

Distinguishing Dimensions

Public discussions of racial and ethnic discrimination and of government programs to eradicate it (for example, affirmative action) are often confusing because important dimensions of that discrimination are not fully distinguished. As a first step in sorting out the confusion, we suggest Figure 1.1. Key dimensions of discrimination include (a) motivation, (b) discriminatory actions, (c) effects, (d) the relation between motivation and actions, (e) the relation between actions and effects, (f) the immediate institutional context, and (g) the larger societal context.⁷²

A given set of discriminatory acts—such as the exclusion of Jewish American applicants from Ivy League colleges in the 1920s or the exclusion of many children of color from numerous all-white

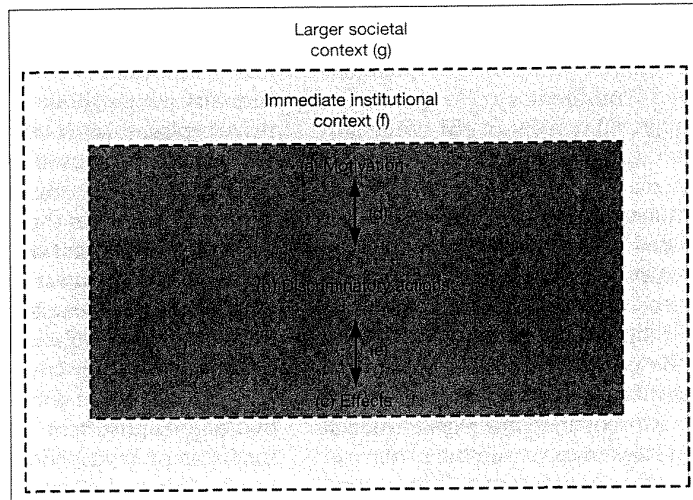


FIGURE 1.1 The Dimensions of Discrimination

Source: Adapted from Joe R. Feagin, "Affirmative Action in an Era of Reaction," *Consultations on the Affirmative Action Statement of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), pp. 44–48.

public schools until the mid-1960s—can be examined in terms of these important dimensions. One can ask what the motivation was for this discrimination. Was it prejudice, stereotyping, or another motive? One can also ask what form the exclusionary practices actually took. For example, in the case of segregated public schools in the South or West during earlier decades, white school administrators often refused, on overtly racist grounds, black, Latino, or Asian American children entrance into their buildings. Also of great importance are the many long-term effects of these discriminatory practices. For example, one effect was the much poorer school facilities that many black, Latino, and Asian American children encountered.

These historical practices were usually not just the actions of isolated white administrators. Rather, they were part of an institutionalized pattern of legally or customarily segregated education, the effects of which are still evident in society. Such patterns of official school segregation were part of a larger social context of the general subordination of black, Latino, and Asian Americans across various institutional areas. Indeed, today, as in the past, racial discrimination remains a multidimensional problem involving most institutional areas of U.S. society.

How do stereotypes and prejudices maintain racial or ethnic discrimination?

Research on Prejudice and Discrimination

Much social science research on discrimination has focused on one type of motivation—prejudice [(a) in Figure 1.1]. Many social scientists emphasize the relation between prejudice and discrimination [(d) in Figure 1.1], viewing racial and ethnic prejudice as the critical cause of discriminatory treatment of a singled-out group. Gordon Allport suggested that few prejudiced people keep their prejudices to themselves; they act out their feelings in discriminatory ways.⁷³ In his classic study, *An American Dilemma* (1944), Gunnar Myrdal saw racial prejudice as “the whole complex of valuations and beliefs which are behind discriminatory behavior on the part of white Americans.” Later, sociologist Robert K. Merton wrote that for some people, discrimination is motivated not by their own prejudices, but by fear of the prejudices of others in their social group.⁷⁴

Experimental studies by psychologists have focused on the relationship between prejudice and expressed discrimination. Numerous researchers have examined whether prejudiced people do, in fact, discriminate, and, if so, how that prejudice links to discrimination. Such studies have generally found only a weak positive correlation between expressed prejudice (for example, on questionnaires) and certain discriminatory behavior. Knowing how prejudiced a person is does not necessarily help predict the character of his or her actions.

Some experimenters have tried to develop nonobvious measures of discrimination. One such measure involved setting up an experimental situation in which whites encountered a person (an assistant of the researcher) who needed help with making a phone call at a public telephone. In this case, the researcher found that the racial identity of the person needing help often affected the type of white response. Whites were more likely to get assistance. One recent research project staged personal emergencies, one severe and one more moderate, and then assessed the quickness and quality of the helping actions that black and white victims got from black and white participants in the study. For the severe emergency setting, whites were slower on average in giving help and provided less help to black victims than to otherwise similar white victims. Whites who reacted this way were also found to interpret the black emergencies as less severe than identical white emergencies, as a way of dealing with their discriminatory responses in these situations. A related study found no such racial bias in helping behavior for black helpers, who treated black and white victims equally. As noted previously, public opinion surveys have shown a decline in public expression of blatantly racist attitudes among whites in recent decades. Thus, several experimental researchers have also asked whether whites responding to such surveys with relatively liberal racial answers are concealing many racial prejudices and stereotypes. Reviewing experimental studies that used less obvious measures of discrimination, such as the helping experiments, researchers have noted that experimental studies have found *much more* antiblack discrimination than they should have uncovered if the unprejudiced views that many whites express in surveys were their real views. As the backstage racism research cited previously also suggests, many whites do indeed hide their

traditionally racist views in more public settings—including in public opinion surveys.⁷⁵

Defining Institutional and Individual Discrimination

The emphasis on individual prejudice and bigoted individuals in traditional assessments of racial and ethnic discrimination has led some analysts to accent the institutionalization of discrimination. Stokely Carmichael (later, Kwame Ture) and Charles Hamilton distinguished between the concepts of individual racism and institutional racism. **Individual racism** involves *the racially hostile acts of an individual directed at members of another racial group* and is exemplified by the actions of a Klan-type terrorist bombing a black church. **Institutional racism** involves *the institutionalized practices that differentially and negatively affect members of a subordinate racial group*, such as the accumulating institutional practices that lead to large numbers of children of color suffering because of seriously inadequate health care facilities in most U.S. cities.⁷⁶ Carmichael and Hamilton moved beyond individual bigots. In their view, institutional racism often includes harmful actions in which many dominant group members have “no intention of subordinating others because of color, or are totally unaware of doing so.”⁷⁷

In his analysis of discrimination and mental health, Thomas Pettigrew has distinguished between *direct* and *indirect* racial discrimination. He has applied the latter term to restrictions in one institutional area (such as screening out job applicants because they do not have a college degree) that are shaped by racial discrimination in another area (such as the exclusion of Americans of color from adequate educational facilities, including colleges, in the past or present).⁷⁸

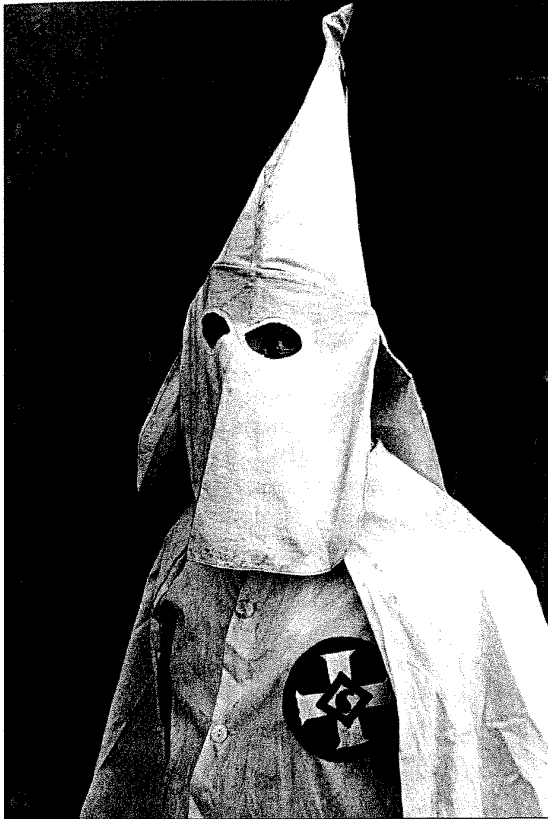
Some conceptual work on discrimination emphasizes the close relationship between its individual (“micro”) and institutional (“macro”) dimensions, which should be seen as two aspects of the same phenomenon. Social psychologist Philomena Essed has underscored the “mutual interdependence of the macro and micro dimensions” of discrimination. From the macroperspective, racism is “a system of structural inequalities and a historical process.” From a microperspective, racism involves individual discriminators whose specific actions are racist “only when they activate existing structural racial

inequalities in the system.”⁷⁹ In the U.S. case, the routine actions of discriminators are typically shaped and reinforced by an old hierarchical system of racial dominance and inequality.

The group context of discriminatory actions is very important. The working definition of the serious **discrimination** we emphasize in this book is as follows: *actions carried out by members of dominant groups, or their representatives, that have a differential and harmful effect on members of subordinate groups.* The dominant and subordinate groups we focus on are socially constructed racial and ethnic groups. From this perspective, the most extensive discrimination typically involves harmful practices taken by members of *powerful* racial and ethnic groups against those with much less power and fewer resources. (Those on the middle rungs of a racial-ethnic hierarchy can and do discriminate, especially against those below them in power.) Discrimination involves *actions* as well as one or more *discriminators* and one or more *victims*. A further distinction between *intentional* (motivated by prejudice or intent to harm) and *unintentional* (not motivated by prejudice or intent to harm) is useful for identifying different types of discrimination.⁸⁰

Drawing on the two dimensions of scale and intention, we suggest four major types of discrimination. Type A, **isolate discrimination**, is *harmful action taken intentionally by a member of a dominant racial or ethnic group against members of a subordinate group, without the support of other members of the dominant group in the immediate social or community context.* An example is a white Anglo police officer who implements anti-Latino hostility by beating up Mexican American prisoners at every opportunity, even though the majority of Anglo officers and department regulations specifically oppose such actions. (If the majority of Anglo officers in that department behaved in this fashion, the beatings would fall under the heading of type C discrimination.) The term *isolate* should not be taken to mean that type A discrimination is rare, for it is indeed common.

Type B, **small-group discrimination**, is *harmful action taken intentionally by a small number of dominant-group individuals acting in concert against members of subordinate racial and ethnic groups, without the direct support of the norms and of most other dominant group members in the immediate social or community context.* The bombing of Irish Catholic churches in the 1800s by small groups of British Americans and the



A current member of the Ku Klux Klan, a terrorist group originally created in the nineteenth century.

burning of crosses at the homes of people of color in several cities in recent years by members of white supremacist groups are likely examples.

Type C, **direct institutionalized discrimination**, is *organizationally prescribed or community-prescribed action that by intention has a differential and negative effect on members of subordinate racial and ethnic groups*. Typically, these actions are not sporadic but are carried out routinely by a large number of dominant-group individuals guided by the legal or informal norms of the immediate organizational or community context. Historical examples include the intentional exclusion, by law, of African and Jewish Americans from traditionally white neighborhoods and jobs. Type C discrimination can be seen today in the actions of those white real estate agents and owners who regularly create barriers for people of color seeking homes in traditionally white residential areas. These

discriminating whites are today acting in accord with *informal norms widely shared by many whites in their communities*.⁸¹

Type D, **indirect institutionalized discrimination**, consists of *dominant-group practices that have a harmful effect on members of subordinate racial and ethnic groups even though the organizational or community-prescribed norms or regulations guiding those actions have been established with no intent to harm*. For example, intentional discrimination institutionalized in the inadequate school facilities provided for subordinate-group members such as black, Latino, and Native Americans—resulting in inadequate educations for many—has often handicapped their attempts to compete with dominant-group members in the employment sphere, where hiring and promotion standards usually include certain advanced educational credentials.

In addition, the effects of *past* discrimination linger on strongly in the *present*: Current generations of racial groups that were once severely and openly subordinated usually have less inherited wealth and fewer sociocultural (for example, educational or social networking) resources than current generations of the dominant racial group.

Q What is the relevance of the four types of discrimination discussed to present-day racial relations in the United States?

The Sites and Range of Discrimination

Discrimination usually includes a spatial dimension. For instance, in a white-dominated society, a racially subordinated person's vulnerability to discrimination can vary significantly. If the latter is in a relatively protected site, such as with close friends at home, the probability of experiencing racial hostility or discrimination from dominant-group members is low. In contrast, if that same person—for example, a college professor—is in a moderately protected site, such as in a departmental setting within a once predominantly white university that has undergone significant desegregation, the probability of experiencing racial hostility and discrimination often increases, although the professional status of that professor will likely offer some protection there. The probability of overt racial hostility and discrimination often increases further as this person of color

moves into historically white hotels, restaurants, and stores, or into city streets patrolled by white police officers. As we will see in later chapters, members of subordinate groups who venture the most into settings once reserved for members of dominant groups, in the past or present, have often been the most likely to face substantial racial hostility.⁸²

In his classic book, *The Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon Allport notes that discrimination by members of a dominant group against those in a subordinate group ranges from antilocution (speaking against), to avoidance, to exclusion, to physical attack, and finally, to extermination.⁸³ For example, a dominant-group member, such as an English Protestant American, may still try to quietly exclude a Jewish American from his or her social club. Or a white American may hurl a racist epithet at a Chinese or Korean American walking nearby.

One can also distinguish subtle and covert categories of discrimination from the more blatant forms. **Subtle discrimination** can be defined as *unequal and harmful treatment of members of subordinate racial and ethnic groups that is obvious to the victim but not as overt as traditional, "door-slaming" varieties of discrimination*. In modern bureaucratic settings such as corporate workplaces, many white employers and managerial employees have internalized inclinations to subtle discriminatory behavior that they consider normal and acceptable. In such settings, subtle discrimination may not be noticed by nondiscriminating members of the dominant group, yet it is obvious to most people of color there.⁸⁴

For instance, in research on African American managers who have secured entry-level positions in corporations, Ed Jones found a predisposition among whites, both co-workers and senior managers, to assume the best about persons of their own color and the worst about people different from themselves in evaluating job performance. Like Pettigrew's "ultimate attribution error," this critical predisposition, which can be conscious or subconscious, can result in discrimination in promotions and other areas that is more subtle than the blatant discrimination of exclusion. The black managers interviewed by Jones and other researchers report that their achievements often are given less attention than their failures, while the failures of comparable white managers are more likely to be excused in terms of situational factors or just overlooked. This negative feedback on a black worker's performance

makes it more difficult for her or him to perform successfully in the future.⁸⁵

Covert discrimination, in contrast, is *harmful treatment of members of subordinate racial and ethnic groups that is hidden and difficult to document*. Covert discrimination includes acts of sabotage and tokenism. For example, in one research study, a black female mail carrier reported that white male co-workers were hiding some of her mail, so that when she returned from her route, there was still mail waiting to be delivered. Because of this sabotage, her white manager blamed her and gave her a less desirable route. Asian, African, and Latino Americans are hired sometimes as "tokens" or "window dressing": They are placed in certain conspicuous positions just to make an organization look good instead of being evaluated honestly in terms of their abilities for higher-level employment. Some employers hire a few for "front" positions to reduce pressures to expand the number of employees from racially or ethnically subordinated groups to more representative proportions. Tokenism can thereby become a serious barrier to individual and group advancement.⁸⁶

Cumulative and Systemic Discrimination

Various combinations of blatant, covert, and subtle forms of discrimination usually coexist in a given organization or community. *Well-institutionalized patterns of discrimination that cut across major political, economic, and social organizations in a society* can be termed **systemic discrimination**. One National Council of Churches group portrayed systemic racial discrimination this way: "Both consciously and unconsciously, racism is enforced and maintained by the legal, cultural, religious, educational, economic, political, environmental and military institutions of societies. Racism is more than just a personal attitude; it is the institutionalized form of that attitude."⁸⁷

Central to this systemic discrimination is the *cumulative* effect of much discrimination on its targets. Particular instances of racial or ethnic discrimination may seem minor to outside observers if considered in isolation. But when blatant actions, such as verbal harassment or physical attack, combine with subtle and covert slights, such as veiled sabotage, the cumulative effect of all this discrimination over months, years, and lifetimes is usually *far* greater than the sum of the individual instances.

Racial and ethnic oppression is typically both systemic and cumulative, and its targets usually pay a heavy price.

Responding to Discrimination

The responses of subordinate-group members to discrimination can range from deference or withdrawal to verbal and physical confrontation to legal action. Even when dominant-group members expect acquiescence in discrimination, some subordinate-group members may not oblige. The targets of discrimination often organize and fight back. Thus, a **civil rights movement** is a *collective movement to establish or improve the legal and political rights of a subordinate racial or ethnic group*. Such organized movements are exemplified by the black and Latino civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Sometimes however, the response is by individuals in everyday settings, especially if they are among those subordinate-group members with some monetary or legal resources. Discrimination that begins as one-way action may become two-way negotiation, often to the surprise of the discriminators.

Consider this example of a black woman manager in a U.S. corporation who describes a meeting with her white boss about her job performance:

We had a five scale rating, starting with outstanding, then very good, then good, then fair, and then less than satisfactory. I had gone into my evaluation interview anticipating that he would give me a "VG" (very good), feeling that I deserved an "outstanding" and prepared to fight for my outstanding rating. Knowing, you know, my past experience with him, and more his way toward females. But even beyond female, I happened to be the only black in my position within my branch. So the racial issue would also come into play. And he and I had some very frank discussions about race specifically. About females, but more about race when he and I talked. So I certainly knew that he had a lot of prejudices in terms of blacks. And [he] had some very strong feelings based on his upbringing about the abilities of blacks. He said to me on numerous occasions that he considered me to be an exception, that I certainly was not what he felt the abilities of an average black person [were]. While I was of course appalled and made it perfectly clear to him. . . . But, when I went into the evaluation interview, he gave me glowing comments that cited numerous achievements and accomplishments for me during the year, and then concluded it with, "so

I've given you a G." You know, which of course just floored me. . . . [I] maintained my emotions and basically just said, as unemotionally as I possibly could, that I found that unacceptable, I thought it was inconsistent with his remarks in terms of my performance, and I would not accept it. I think I kind of shocked him, because he sort of said, "Well I don't know what that means," you know, when I said I wouldn't accept it. I said, I'm not signing the evaluation. And at that point, here again knowing that the best way to deal with most issues is with facts and specifics, I had already come in prepared. . . . I had my list of objectives for the year where I was able to show him that I had achieved every objective and I exceeded all of them. I also had . . . my sales performance: the dollar amount, the products . . . both in total dollar sales and also a product mix. I sold every product in the line that we offered to our customers. I had exceeded all of my sales objectives. You know, as far as I was concerned, it was an outstanding performance.

Then she noted the final result:

So he basically said, "Well, we don't have to agree to agree," and that was the end of the session. I got up and left. Fifteen minutes later he called me back in and said, "I've thought about what you said, and you're right, you do have an O." So it's interesting how in fifteen minutes I went from a G to an O. But the interesting point is had I not fought it, had I just accepted it, I would have gotten a G rating for that year, which has many implications.⁸⁸

This example of employment discrimination is a common one and illustrates a number of points made in this chapter. Because of certain physical characteristics, this woman was viewed by her white supervisor as a member of a racial group he stereotypes as generally incapable. He discriminated against her by downplaying her accomplishments with a low evaluation. The one-way action that probably was expected by the boss soon became two-way negotiation. This savvy woman made tactical use of her resources to win a concession and a changed evaluation.

Over the past few decades, there has been an increase in the number of middle-class people of color who have the resources to contest racial discrimination more directly and, sometimes, successfully. Microlevel discrimination may only be the first stage in a two-way encounter. The initial discrimination, the counter-framing and countering actions,

and the discriminator's response, as well as the resources and perceptions of those involved, are important aspects of everyday racism.

Moreover, thinking broadly, we should recognize how important the individual and collective struggles against discrimination and for civil rights have been to the development of U.S. democracy. The United States has been an officially free country *only since the late 1960s*. Prior to the 1960s' civil rights acts (the last in 1968), this country had been substantially grounded either in slavery or in legal segregation since the 1600s. For more than three centuries, this country had a major portion of its population under such extreme oppression that describing the country generally as "free" was highly inaccurate. Over this period, moreover, the freedom struggles of African Americans and other Americans of color were central to creating the more democratic country that we live in today.

Conservative Reactions to Antidiscrimination Programs

Many conservative scholars and commentators have written about "reverse discrimination" and "reverse racism." They have intentionally tried to change the public discussion of traditional racial discrimination. Most argue that whites suffer seriously from the implementation of affirmative action and other remedial programs that attempt to redress the extensive discrimination historically faced by subordinated racial groups. (**Affirmative action programs** are *private and governmental programs that seek to improve the economic or educational opportunities for formerly excluded racial, ethnic, and gender groups*.) Conservatives and others often use the phrase *reverse discrimination* to deflect attention from the large-scale patterns of institutionalized discrimination still directed by whites against racially oppressed people.

Discrimination, as conceptualized by most social science scholars of racial and ethnic relations, emphasizes the dominant group-subordinate group context of discrimination. *Racial discrimination* usually refers to actions of members of dominant groups—for example, white Americans—that are made to harm members of subordinate groups, such as African, Latino, Asian, or Native Americans. Historically and today, systemic white discrimination is not just a matter of occasional white bigotry but involves the dominant group's power to enforce its

racial prejudices and stereotypes by means of discriminatory practices in most institutions.

On occasion, individual members of subordinated racial groups can be motivated by their prejudices and stereotypes to take action to harm those in the dominant white group. Yet, members of racially subordinate groups usually do not have the power or institutional position to express the prejudices they may hold about whites in the form of substantial and repeated everyday discrimination.

Think about the historical and contemporary patterns of discrimination directed by large numbers of whites against just one major group: African Americans. That mistreatment has meant, and still means, widespread blatant and subtle discrimination by whites against African Americans in most organizations in most institutions in society—in housing, employment, business, education, health services, and the legal system (see Chapter 7). For over four centuries, many millions of whites have participated directly in racial discrimination against many millions of African Americans. Judging from opinion polls and numerous research studies, a majority of whites currently hold some negative stereotypes of African Americans, and millions of these whites will discriminate under some circumstances. In addition, most whites still observe the antiblack discrimination that often takes place around them without working actively to stop it. This widespread and systemic discrimination has brought extraordinarily heavy social and economic losses for African Americans in many institutional sectors of society.⁸⁹

What would the *reverse* of this centuries-old antiblack discrimination really look like? The reverse of the institutionalized discrimination by whites against African Americans would mean reversing the power and resource inequalities for several hundred years. In the past and today, most organizations in major institutional areas such as housing, education, and employment would be managed at the top and middle levels by a very disproportionate number of powerful black managers and officials. These powerful black officials would have aimed much racial discrimination at whites, including many years of slavery and legal segregation. As a result, millions of whites would have suffered—and would still suffer—trillions of dollars in economic losses such as lower wages, as well as high rates of unemployment and political disenfranchisement for long periods, widespread housing segregation, inferior school

facilities, and violent lynchings. That societal condition would be something one could reasonably call a condition that “reversed the discrimination” against African Americans. It does not now exist, nor has it ever existed.

What is usually termed *reverse discrimination* is something much different from this fictional anti-white scenario. One usual reference is to private and public programs, such as affirmative action programs, that seek to remedy the past and present discrimination that has targeted Americans of color. These remedial programs, for a limited time and in certain places, have used racial screening criteria to overcome a small part of that past and present discrimination. Whatever modest costs a few years of these remedial programs have meant for whites, those costs do not add up to anything close to the total cost that inverting the historical and contemporary patterns of discrimination against people of color would involve.⁹⁰ A modest number of white men have occasionally paid some price for certain programs designed to remedy past and present discrimination. If such affirmative action is successful, it entails some cost to be paid by those who have benefited most from centuries of racial (and gender) discrimination. Yet, a white man who suffers as an individual from remedial programs such as affirmative action in employment or education suffers in just one area of his life (and often only once) and because he is an *exception* to his privileged racial group. A person of color who suffers from racial discrimination usually suffers *in many areas* of his or her life and primarily because the whole group has been and still is racially subordinated, not because he or she is an individual exception.⁹¹ Moreover, in spite of continuing high levels of discrimination targeting Americans of color, many private organizations and public agencies have, in recent decades, cut back on their modest affirmative action and similar remedial programs because of white protests and judicial backtracking.

Summary

In this chapter, we have examined an extensive array of basic social science concepts that are essential for making sense out of racial–ethnic contacts and conflicts. These concepts loom large in contemporary discussions of racial–ethnic issues. More than a

century of discussion of these concepts lies behind the voyage we have set out on here. We must carefully think through the meaning of such terms as *race* and *racial group*, because such concepts have historically been used in the shaping of racial contacts and racial oppression, as they still are today.

Ideas about “race” and racial groups have been particularly dangerous because they have played an active role in the triggering, or convenient rationalizing, of societal processes that have cost many millions of lives. Ideas do have a significant societal impact. The sharp cutting edge of “race,” in the context of theorizing about “racial inferiority,” can be seen in the enslavement by white Europeans of millions of Africans between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries and in the genocidal German Nazi actions taken against European Jews, Gypsies, and others in the 1930s and 1940s. Sometimes it is easy to consider such concepts as harmless abstractions. However, some reflection on both recent and distant Western history exposes the error in this view. The concept may not be “mightier than the sword,” to adapt an old cliché, but it can indeed be mighty.

Key Terms

race	5	institutional racism	20
racial hierarchy	5	discrimination	20
racialization	6	isolate	
ideological racism	6	discrimination	20
racial group	8	small-group	
ethnic group	10	discrimination	20
minority group	12	direct institutionalized	
dominant group	12	discrimination	21
subordinate group	12	indirect	
racial frame	13	institutionalized	
prejudice	14	discrimination	21
stereotype	15	subtle	
externalization		discrimination	22
function of		covert	
prejudice	16	discrimination	22
authoritarian		systemic	
personalities	16	discrimination	22
conformity function of		civil rights	
prejudice	16	movement	23
symbolic or modern		affirmative action	
racism	16	programs	24
individual racism	20		