as a biological, genetic, geographic, or cultural category, race has fluid and changeable boundaries. In this sense, race is constructed in the interests of groups that wish to maintain power and social exclusion. To the sociologist, understanding racial differences—including income, educational attainment, crime rates, and teen pregnancy—means treating differences not just as personal matters but as pieces of a larger social picture. Having grown up as a "honey" in the housing projects of New York City's Lower East Side, a fish out of water, I've been looking at race with the sociological imagination ever since my failed kidnapping. Now it's your turn.

THE MYTH OF RACE

Perhaps you have heard claims that race is fake, that it's just a myth. Race refers to a group of people who share a set of characteristics—typically, but not always, physical ones—and are said to share a common bloodline. People obviously have different physical appearances, including eye color, hair texture, and skin color, so it's perhaps puzzling to hear that (biological) racial differences somehow do not exist. To speak of the myth of race is to say that it is largely a social construction, a set of stories we tell ourselves to organize reality and make sense of the world, rather than a fixed biological or natural reality. We tell the set of stories over and over and collectively, believe in it and act on it, therefore making it real through such practices as largely separate marriage and reproductive communities. But we can organize our social distinctions a different way (for example, based on foot size or hair color), and indeed, throughout history, we have told it myriad ways.

Take, for example, the following excerpt from an 1851 issue of Harper's Weekly Magazine, in which the author describes the physiognomy of a certain racial group. Try to guess which race the author is describing:

[They are] distinctly marked—the small and somewhat upturned nose, the black tint of the skin...[They] are ignorant, and as a consequence thereof, are idle, thriftless, poor, intemperate, and barbarian....Of course they will violate our laws, these wild bison leaping over the fences which easily restrain the civilised domestic cattle, will commit great crimes of violence, even capital offences, which certainly have increased as of late.

Most people would guess that the minority group in question here is African Americans. This passage was written, in fact, about Irish immigrants, who in late-nineteenth-century Boston struggled to assimilate in America amid fierce and widespread racism (Knobel, 1986). It was believed that the Irish were a distinct category of people who carried innate differences in their blood, differences that made them permanently inferior to their white American neighbors.

When the term race comes up in America today, we usually think in two colors: black and white. But, at the turn of the century, Americans categorized themselves into anywhere from 36 to 75 different races that they organized into hierarchies, with Anglo-Saxon at the top followed by Slav, Mediterranean, Hebrew, and so on down the list (Jacobson, 1998). Americans doubted whether "civic stock," such as the Irish, were fit for self-governance in the new democracy.

In 1790, Congress passed the first naturalization law, conferring citizenship to "free white persons." This law should strike us today as both restrictive and inclusive: restrictive because it granted naturalization only to free whites, thereby coloring American citizenship. Yet it also set up an initially broad understanding of "whiteness," an umbrella term that could include not just Anglo but also Slavic, Celtic, and Teutonic (German) Europeans. However, as millions of immigrants surged to the shores of America—between 1880 and World War I, 25 million European immigrants arrived—the notion of "free white persons" was reconsidered. With an Irish-born population of more than 1 million in 1860, Americans began to theorize racial differences within the white populace. Questions arose in the popular press and imagination, such as "Who should count as white?" "Who do we want to be future generations of Americans?" "Who is fit for self-governance?" The inclusiveness of "white persons" splintered into a range of Anglos and "barbarous" others, and Americans began to distinguish among Teutons, Slavs, Celts, and even the "swarthy" Swedes.

The Immigration Act of 1924 formalized the exclusive definition of whiteness by imposing immigration restrictions based on a national origins quota system that limited the yearly number of immigrants from each country (Table 13.1; see p. 494). The law set an annual ceiling of 18,493 immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, following the recommendation of a report stating that northern and western Europeans were of "higher intelligence" and thus ideal "material for American citizenship" (Jacobson, 1998).

A racist ideology can be seen in this early line of thinking about whiteness. Racism is the belief that members of separate races possess different and unequal traits. Racist thinking is characterized by three key beliefs: that humans are divided into distinct bloodlines and/or physical types; that these
Table 13.1 | Annual Immigration Quotas under the Immigration Act of 1924

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Quota</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Quota</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Quota</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Quota</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>51,227</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>5,382</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>2,248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain &amp; Ireland</td>
<td>34,007</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>3,845</td>
<td>(other than Egypt)</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2,248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>6,453</td>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>9,561</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>3,854</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>2,879</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>2,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>1,648</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>New Zealand &amp; Pacific Islands</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1,648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>Austria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>785</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

European immigration slowed nearly to a halt during World War I, while internal African American migration from the rural South to the industrial North skyrocketed. These shifts, along with the solidification of the one-drop rule (see below), shifted national attention away from white–nonwhite relations toward white–black relations. Whites of "ethnic stock" were drawn back into the earlier, broad category of white, thereby reuniting Anglos and other Europeans. Public horror at Nazi crimes following the conclusion of World War II also strengthened the idea of whiteness as an inclusive racial category.

Today being Irish descent is a matter of ethnicity—no racial—identification, a reason to celebrate on St. Patrick's Day. I know this firsthand: Being one-eighth Irish and having an Irish-WASP name like Dalton Conley entitles me to free drinks on the Irish holiday. It no longer poses the constraints of a racial category as once was the case. Whiteness today is something we take for granted, a natural part of the landscape. But dig just a hundred years back into the unnaturally history of race, and you might not even recognize it. Not only have groups of people been categorized differently over time, showing that there is nothing natural about how we classify groups into races today, but the very concept of what a race is has changed over time.

THE CONCEPT OF RACE FROM THE ANCIENTS TO ALLELES

The idea of race, some scholars have claimed, did not exist in the ancient world (Fredrickson, 2002; Hannaford, 1996; Smekley, 1999; Snowden, 1985). Well, it did and it didn't. It did in the sense that the ancients recognized physical differences and grouped people accordingly. In ancient Egypt, for example, physical markers were linked to geography. Believing that people who looked a certain way came from a certain part of the world, they spoke for instance of the "Pale Degraded Race of Arvad," whereas their darker-skinned neighbors were designated the "Evil Race of Ish." The Chinese also linked physical variation to geography, as laid out in a Chinese creation myth. As the ancient tale goes, a goddess cooked human beings in an oven. Some humans were burnt black and sent to live in Africa. The underdone ones turned out white and were sent to Europe. Those humans cooked just right, a perfect golden brown, were the Chinese.

However, in the ancient worlds of Greece, Rome, and early Christendom, the idea of race did not exist as we know it today, as a biological package of traits carried in the bloodlines of distinct groups, each with a separate way of being (culture), acting (behavior), thinking (intelligence), and looking (appearance). The Greek philosopher Hippocrates, for instance, believed that physical markers such as skin color were the result of different environmental factors, much as the surface of a plant reflects the constitution of its soil and the amount of sunlight and water it receives. To be sure, the Greeks liked the looks of their fellow Greeks the best, but the very notion of race goes against Aristotle's principle of civic association, on which Greek society was based. The true test of a person was to be found in his (women were excluded) civic actions. Similarly, the Romans maintained a brutal slavery system, but their slaves, as well as their citizens, represented various skin colors and geographic origins. The ancients may have used skin color to tell one person from the next—they weren't color-blind—but they didn't discriminate in the sense of making judgments about people on the basis of their racial category without regard to their individual merit (Hannaford, 1996). The notion has been so thoroughly displaced by racialized thinking that to us moderns, it is impossibly idealistic to imagine a society without our race concept.
Race in the Early Modern World

Modern racial thinking developed in the mid-seventeenth century in parallel with global changes such as the Protestant Reformation in Europe, the Age of Exploration, and the rise of capitalism. For example, European colonizers, confronted with people living in newly discovered lands, interpreted human physical differences first with biblical and later with scientific explanations, and race proved to be a rather handy organizing principle to legitimate the imperial adventure of conquest, exploitation, and colonialism. To make sense of what they considered the “primitive” and “degraded” races of Africa, Europeans turned to a story in the book of Genesis 9, the curse of Ham. According to this obscure passage, when Noah had safely navigated his ark over the flood, he got drunk and passed out naked in his tent. When he woke from his stupor, Noah learned that his youngest son, Ham, had seen him naked, whereas his other sons had respectfully refused to behold the spectacle. Noah decided to curse Ham’s descendants, saying, “A slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers” (Gourevitch, 1998). European Christians and scientists interpreted this tale to mean that Ham was the original black man, and all black people were his unfortunate, degraded descendants. For an expanding Europe and America, the Hamitic myth justified colonialism and slavery.

When the divine right of conquest lost its sway, science led the way as an authority behind racial thinking, legitimating race by scientific mandate. Scientific racism, what today we call the nineteenth-century theories of race, brought a period of feverish investigation into the origins, explanations, and classifications of race. In 1864, François Bernier (1625–88) proposed a new geography based not on topography or even political borders but on the body, from facial lineaments to bodily configurations. Bernier devised a scheme of four or five races based on the following geographic regions:

Europe (excluding Lapland), South Asia, North Africa, and America: people who shared climates and complexions
Africa proper: people who had thick lips, flat noses, black skin, and a scanty beard
Asia proper: people who had white skin, broad shoulders, flat faces, little eyes, and no beard
Lapps (small traditional communities living around the northern corners of Finland and Russia): people who were ugly, squat, small, and animal-like

Scientific racism sought to make sense of people who were different from white Europeans—who constituted the norm, according to the French scientist Comte de Buffon (1707–88). This way of thinking, called ethnocentrism, the judgment of other groups by one’s own standards and values, has plagued scientific studies of “otherness.” In Buffon’s classification schemes, anyone different from Europeans was a deviation from the norm. His pseudoscientific research, like all racial thinking of the time, justified imperial exploits by automatically classifying nonwhites as abnormal, improper, and inferior.

With the publication of On the Natural Varieties of Mankind in 1775, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), widely considered the founder of anthropology, cataloged variation by race, including differences in head formation, a pseudoscience called phrenology. Blumenbach’s aim was to classify the world based on the different types of bumps he could measure on people’s skulls. Based on these skull measurements, he came up with five principal varieties of humans: Caucasian, Mongoloid, Ethiopian, American, and Malay. Caucasians (named after the people who live in the southern slopes of the Georgian region of Eastern Europe), he decided, were the superlative of the races based on their excellent skull qualities.

Another eighteenth-century thinker, the Swiss theologian Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801), popularized physiognomy, which correlated outside appearances to inner virtues. Not surprisingly, light skin and small features signified high intellect and worthy character. Political philosophers were also on board with racial thinking. Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, had already made the connection between climate and certain forms of government in The Spirit of the Laws (1748).

Race was now considered not just a set of physical traits but something that comes with social implications. Emmanuel Kant argued for a link between inner character and outside physiognomy and further claimed that these individual markers were also imprinted on an entire nation’s moral life.

However, racial differences were still believed by many to be the product of climate (and therefore not immutable or innate to the soul). In fact, in 1787 the Reverend Minister Samuel Stanhope Smith, who was president of what is now Princeton, wrote an essay in which he proposed that dark skin should be thought of as a “universal freckle.” Differences in skin shade, he

Charts like this one helped phrenologists interpret the shapes of human skulls. How did nineteenth-century theorists use this sort of pseudoscience to justify racism?
maintained, were really just like different levels of sultans. It was his belief that if an African from the sub-Sahara were transplanted to Scandinavia, his dark brown skin would turn lighter over the course of generations (and perhaps the underlying social and cognitive characteristics associated with race would change as well). Notice how Smith’s pitable view of race captures the spirit of ontological equality: We are all the same deep beneath our skin; it just so happens that some of us have been out in the sun a bit longer than others. Ontological equality is the notion that all people are created equally under the eyes of God.

Reverend Smith’s line of thinking also demonstrates the scientific influence of Lamarckism, now a discredited footnote in the history of scientific thought. The basic tenet of Lamarckism is that acquired traits can be passed down across generations. For example, an acquired attribute such as flexibility, language skill, or sun exposure can be passed down to a person’s offspring, affecting generations to come.

Lamarckism was debunked by Charles Darwin, who in 1859 published his theory of natural selection. Darwin argued that acquired attributes could not be transmitted; instead, change can only occur through the positive selection of mutations. Darwin’s theory had an enormous impact on how people thought of race. In effect, it called into question the popular belief that climate influenced racial difference and instead offered an account in which racial lineages were much more deeply rooted and longstanding. What’s more, humankind was now seen as being on a trajectory in which some groups have advanced (or evolved) more than others. The popular nineteenth-century notion of social Darwinism was the application of Darwinian ideas to society, namely, the evolutionary “survival of the fittest.” Social theorist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) promulgated the idea that some people, defined by their race, are better fit for survival than others and therefore intended by nature to dominate inferior races. A new puzzle arose with Darwinian ideas: What, if not inherited climate change, could explain the development of humans along such radically different lines?

**Eugenics**

Scientists now had to arrive at a new explanation of physical difference among humans, and the scientific community confronted a growing debate: monogenism versus polygenism. The notion of ontological equality had faded in the late nineteenth century; now the debate turned on the origins of the various races of humans. Were humans a united species, or did we come from separate origins? Monogenists, including religious traditionalists, believed that humans were one species, united under God. Polygenists believed that different races were, in fact, distinct species. Darwin sided with the monogenists, claiming that the notion of different species was absurd. (Politics, it is said, makes for strange bedfellows. It certainly did in this case, as Darwinists and religious traditionalists, usually opposed, became allies in arguing that all humans were one species.)

Even though the monogenists won the debate, the notion of separate roots and distinct reproductive genetic histories has had a lasting impact on how we think of human difference. Under the model of natural selection, human difference must have evolved over tens or hundreds of thousands of years (if not millions), not just over a few generations in relative sun or shade. Such a vast time frame was used as evidence that races were very different (and not simply superficially so).

A new movement, eugenics, took the idea of very distant origins and ran with it. Eugenacists, led by Sir Francis Galton (1822–1911), claimed that each race had a separate package of social and psychological traits transmitted through bloodlines. Eugenics literally means “well born”; it is the pseudoscience of genetic lines and the inheritable traits they pass on from generation to generation. Everything from criminality and feeblemindedness to disease and intelligence, Galton asserted, could be traced through bloodlines and selectively bred out of or into populations. One of his followers, the American psychologist H. H. Goddard (1866–1957), applied eugenic thinking to generalize findings from his intelligence tests in America. He tested a handful of immigrants arriving at Ellis Island in the early twentieth century and generalized their test scores to whole populations, claiming—and garnering many believers, too—that around 70 percent of the immigrants sailing from Eastern and Southern Europe were, in his phrenology, “morons” who posed a serious threat to the good of the nation (New River Media, 2003). Goddard supported the immigration exclusion acts that in 1924 largely blocked...
non-anglos from immigrating, intended to improve the "stock" of the nation. This concern about the new and objectionable stock of immigrants, as opposed to "native," more desirable immigrants of an earlier epoch, was the crux of nativism, the movement to protect and preserve indigenous land or culture from the so-called dangerous and polluting effects of new immigrants. Madison Grant (1865-1937), an influential writer, epitomized the spirit of nativism when he argued that not restricting the immigration of Southern and Eastern Europeans was "racial suicide" for the white race.

The problem with race, for eugenicists, scientists, and politicians, has always been that if race is such an obvious, natural means of dividing the world, why does no foolproof way of determining racial boundaries exist? According to the social historian Ian Haney Lopez, the U.S. Supreme Court grappled with this question in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Haney Lopez, 1999). In a landmark case in 1923, for example, Dr. Bhagat Singh Thind, a high-caste Hindu of full Indian blood, was denied American citizenship. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that he did not qualify as a "free white person," despite being the first Indian Sikh to be inducted into the U.S. Army in World War I. In previous cases, the Court relied on a combination of scientific evidence and "common knowledge" to decide who counted as white. But the Thind case posed a particular challenge because leading anthropologists at the time uniformly classified Asian Indians as members of the Caucasian race. The very notion of whiteness was at stake: If the anthropologists were right, then the commonly accepted conception of whiteness would be radically changed to include dark-skinned immigrants like Thind. The Court therefore decied science as failing to distinguish human difference sufficiently, relying on common knowledge alone to deny Thind's claims to whiteness. As the Court put it, "The words 'free white persons' are words of common speech, to be interpreted in accordance with the understandings of the common man" (Lopez, 1999).

Twentieth-Century Concepts of Race

The judges in the Thind case were not the only people who attempted to define whiteness and nonwhiteness in the absence of a stable scientific taxonomy of race. In Nazi Germany, for example, race posed certain key questions: How can Jewishness be detected? Are Jews a race or a religious group? Both, actually: They are a religious group that has been racialized. Scholars have pointed out that the seeds of racism may be traced to anti-Semitism among early Christians, who forced Jews to convert. Anti-Semitism grew in the eleventh century and was based on the belief that getting rid of Jews was preferable to converting them. But Jewishness was still a social identity at this point—a matter of having religious beliefs that differed from the norm. Anti-Semitism did not turn into racism until the idea took hold that Jews were intrinsically inferior, having innate differences that separated them from their Christian neighbors (Fredrickson, 2002; Smelley, 1999). In Nazi Germany, where Jews were believed to have such innate and inherited differences, the problem remained: How can a person be identified as Jewish? This became an obsession during the Nazis' program of racial purification. They devised a science to detect Jewishness by measuring ratios of forehead to nose size to face length, but they had little luck in nailing down a reliable strategy for making such a determination (hence, Jews in Nazi-occupied countries were forced to wear a yellow Star of David as a marker of their identity).

In the 1960s, many whites in rural parts of America similarly failed in trying to distinguish themselves from their mixed Native American and black neighbors (known as "tri-racial isolates") by searching for distinguishing signs on the body, such as differences in fingernails, feet, gums, and lines on the palm of a hand. In exasperation, some whites reported just having to rely on old-fashioned "instinct" to distinguish themselves from nonwhites (Berry, 1963).

One means (but still not foolproof) of drawing sharp racial boundaries in America was the one-drop rule, asserting that just one "drop" of black blood makes a person black. The rule developed out of the laws throughout the United States forbidding miscegenation or interracial marriage. By 1910, most whites in the United States had accepted this doctrine. The one-drop rule was integral in maintaining the Jim Crow system of segregation upheld in the 1896 Supreme Court decision in Plessy v. Ferguson. In the American South, it was clear that anyone of black lineage fell on the unfortunate side of the racial divide, and the rule essentially cleaved America into two societies: one black, one white. This meant again lumping together all "white ethnics" into a unified category. As F. James Davis notes (1991), the one-drop rule was highly efficient, not least because it completely erased stratification within the black community that had previously been based on skin tone.

Scientific racial thought slowly passed out of vogue as theories of cultural difference gained momentum among American intellectuals from the 1920s to the 1940s. Anthropologist Franz Boas dismissed the biological bases of discreet races, and sociologists such as Robert Park advanced new ideas about culture's importance in determining human behavior. Race, these thinkers argued, was less about fixed inherited traits than particular social circumstances. Furthermore, when World War II exposed the kind of atrocities to which scientific racism could lead, it became socially and scientifically inappropriate to discuss race in biological terms, and eugenics came to be
considered a dangerous way of thinking. With the decline of scientific racism and the shift toward cultural theories of race and ethnicity, the Immigration Act of 1924 was gradually chipped away at starting in 1959 and then completely repealed in 1965. Don’t let the formal denouncement of racial thinking fool you, however. Cultural explanations of race often reflect a disguised racist ideology just as much as biological ones do.

Despite the ideas of scholars such as Boas and Park, the old idea of fixed, biological racial differences remains alive and well today, although in modified form. The search for racial boundaries continues into the twentieth century with the rise of molecular genetics. DNA research now allows us to look deeper than the bumps on our heads, deeper than skin tone or palm lines. A Florida-based company called DNA Print Genomics, Inc., offers you an inside look at your heritage. You send in $199; the testing kit arrives in the mail; you swab your mouth according to the directions and then send the swab to the company. Your “real” identity comes back from the lab in about seven weeks.

Wayne Joseph, a 53-year-old Louisiana high-school principal with Creole roots, did just that. Born and raised black, but having light skin, Joseph was mildly curious about the percentages in his veins. He received some unexpected results: His genetic make-up is 57 percent Indo-European, 39 percent Native American, 4 percent East Asian, and zero percent African (Kaplan, 2005). Despite the findings, Joseph continues to embrace his ethnic identity as black. As he put it to reporters, “The question ultimately is, are you who you say you are, or are you who you are genetically?”

Cells, alleles, and gene sequences have become the new tools of science that promise to reveal our racial truths, but the old idea hasn’t much changed—that there is a biological and social package of traits inside our bodies which can be traced through our lineage—despite our knowledge that humans are biologically one species. There is no doubt that there exists genetic variation that corresponds to the general geographic origins of what we call race, but the amount of variation is nowhere nearly as great as most people believe. Further, relationships between genes and complex social behavior (i.e., intelligence) is not very well understood. Yet when the 2004 General Social Survey asked respondents why, on average, African Americans have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people, about 80 of the 888 respondents, or 9 percent, responded that blacks “have less in-born ability to learn.” (Moreover, a whopping 49.7 percent of respondents believed that blacks are worse off because they “just don’t have the motivation or will power to pull themselves up out of poverty.”) The historical search for difference affects our belief system today.

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**Racial Realities**

The biological validity of discreet racial categories—he it the bumps on your skull or DNA in your blood—is debatable, because in social life, race is real, with real consequences. Just ask someone of the Burakumin race in Japan. Today approximately 3 percent of the Japanese population, the Burakumin originated as a group of displaced people during fourteenth-century feudal wars. With no connection other than being Japanese, the Burakumin suddenly shared something undesirable—they were homeless, destitute, and forced to wander the countryside together. Imagine all the homeless people today in Miami or Los Angeles suddenly uniting. The Burakumin formed a distinct social category, with complete social closure, their own reproductive pool, their own occupational pool, and so on, although they were not a distinct group genetically. Today, however, it is commonly believed that the Burakumin “are descendants of a less human ‘race’ than the stock that fathered the Japanese nation as a whole” (De Vos & Wagatsuna, 1966). Six hundred years later, the Burakumin still display no physical distinctions from their fellow Japanese citizens. For those people in Japan wishing to avoid interrelations with the Burakumin, this lack of distinctiveness poses a dilemma. Happily for racists in Japan, an industry has emerged to investigate hereditary lines. For a hefty price, a private investigator will confirm the pedigree of your prospective employee, tenant, or future son-in-law.

In Japan, the Burakumin live in ghettos, called burakus, and score lower on health, educational achievement, and income compared with their fellow Japanese citizens. Yet when Japanese and Burakumin immigrate to America, the scoring gap narrows dramatically. The distinction between Burakumin and Japanese is meaningless outside of the significance bestowed on it in their
home country. Again, we see that race is not necessarily just about physical or biological differences.

To take another example of racial realities closer to home, consider the consequences of being Arab—or perhaps I should say being perceived as Muslim—in post-9/11 America. In the United States, Muslims are often identified with Islamo-terrorists. Followers of Islam these days are lumped into a fixed racial category as a dangerous “other,” seen as separate from, and inferior and hostile to, Christians and democracy. As one anthropologist put it, “Muslims are the new Jews” (Kuruvil, 2006).

Incidents of anti-Muslim backlash have been on the rise since 9/11, as in the story of Zain Ismail, a car salesman in Florida. Things were going fine for Ismail until his new manager took to calling him “little terrorist.” One day, while in the restroom, Ismail heard someone knock on the door, asking, “Hey, are you making bombs in there?” Ismail, a Palestinian American, even found a note on his car telling him to go back to the Middle East or face death. “I’m an American like everyone else,” he told reporters. “It’s not right” (Moskovitz, 2006).

In the wake of terrorist anxiety, and several years into the war on terror, Muslims in America have undergone what scholars call racialization, the formation of a new racial identity, in which new ideological boundaries of difference are drawn around a formerly unnoticed group of people. These days, any brown-skinned man with a beard or woman with a headscarf is subject to threats, violence, and harassment. And men with turbans bear some of the worst discrimination, although nearly all men who wear turbans in the United States are Sikh or Punjabi, members of the world’s fifth largest religion, which originated in India. Four days after 9/11, Balbir Singh Sohi, a Sikh living in Mesa, Arizona, was shot five times and killed in the gas station he owned. He was the first victim of an anti-Muslim epidemic, and he wasn’t even Muslim. In one representative Harvard study, 83 percent of Sikhs interviewed said they or someone they knew personally had experienced a hate crime or incident, and another 64 percent felt fear or danger for their family and themselves (Han, 2006). Even more striking is what has happened to one Caucasian American woman who is a convert to Islam. Despite having fair skin and green eyes, when she wears the Muslim headscarf, called the hijab, people categorize her as Palestinian. She’s even been told, “Go back to your own country,” although she was born and raised in California (Kuruvil, 2006).

The racialization of Muslims operates on several flawed assumptions. First, people make stereotyped assumptions based on physical traits (turban = Osama bin Laden), even if in their own personal experience they know better (not everyone wearing a turban is in cahoots with bin Laden). Second, making snap judgments about Muslims requires a gross caricaturization of Islam’s followers. For instance, most Arabs in the United States are not Muslim but Christian, and about 20 percent of U.S. Muslims are African American (Kuruvil, 2006).

As it turns out, American Muslims are both a highly diverse population and a very mainstream one. About 35 percent of Muslims were born in America, and some Muslims have been in North America since the seventeenth century, when they were transported from Africa as slaves (Pew, 2007). As a group, they are assimilated with the mainstream, having income and education levels similar to the rest of the population. By and large, they hold fast to the ideas that education is important and that hard work pays off in a successful career. Doesn’t sound too radical, does it? That’s because the overwhelming majority of Muslims in America and throughout the world strongly disagree with Islamic extremism (Pew, 2007). Of course, no racial boundaries are drawn along accurate lines or real differences, but again, once racialized, a group faces real social consequences.

**Race versus Ethnicity**

What’s the difference between race and ethnicity anyway? Some books use the terms interchangeably; most subsume race under the umbrella label of ethnicity. Today’s understanding of race is that it is

- **Externally imposed:** Someone else defines you as black, white, or other.
- **Involuntary:** It’s not up to you to decide to which category you belong; someone else puts you there.
- **Usually based on physical differences:** Those unreliable bumps on your head.
- **Hierarchical:** Not white? Take a number down the ranks.
- **Exclusive:** You don’t get to check more than one box.
- **Unequal:** It’s about power conflicts and struggles.
This last point is important for making sense of the Burakumin and Muslim Americans. Racial groupings are about domination and struggles for power. They are organizing principles for social inequality and a means of legitimating exclusion and harassment.

**Ethnicity**, one’s ethnic affiliation, is by contrast

**Voluntary**: I choose to identify with my one-eighth Irish background (it makes me feel special, so why not?).

**Self-defined**: It is embraced by group members from within.

**Nonhierarchical**: Hey, I’m Irish, you’re German. Great!

**Fluid and multiple**: I’m Irish and German. Even better!

**Cultural**: Based on differences in practices such as language, food, music, and so on.

**Planar**: Much less about unequal power than race is.

Ethnicity can be thought of as a nationality, not in the sense of carrying the rights and duties of citizenship but identifying with a past or future nationality. For Americans, Herbert Gans (1979b) called this identification **symbolic ethnicity**. Symbolic ethnicity today is a matter of choice for white middle-class Americans. It has no risk of stigma and confers the pleasures of feeling like an individual. For example, the fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States today in terms of percentages is Native Americans. According to the U.S. Census, the American Indian and Alaska Native population grew by 123,000, about 4.6 percent, from 2000 to 2003, whereas the entire U.S. population grew during that same time by 3.3 percent. These numbers are not the outcome of a baby boom on the reservations, but instead reflect a growing interest in claiming one’s heritage, so long as it’s not too stigmatizing and brings just the right amount of uniqueness.

These differences between race and ethnicity underscore the privileged position of whites in America, who have the freedom to pick and choose their identities, to wave a flag in a parade, or to whip up grandma’s traditional recipe and freely show their ethnic backgrounds. The surge of ethnic pride among white Americans today implies a false belief that all ethnic groups are the same, but in the very ways that symbolic ethnicity is pleasurable and voluntary for white ethnic, it is not so for nonwhite ethnic Americans such as Latinos and Asians. As soon as someone classifies you as different on the basis of your phenotypical (racial) features, you lose the ability to choose your ethnic identity. It becomes racialized—subsumed under a forced identifier, label, racial marker of “otherness” that you cannot escape. Thus, although it is common to use the term ethnicity across the board to refer to Latino, black, Asian, or Irish backgrounds, being Irish in America is something that a person can turn on or off at will. You can never not be Asian or Latino. Your body gives away your otherness, no matter how much you want to blend in.

To be black in America is to be just that—black. Some scholars argue that this is the fundamental issue about race in America. Blacks were considered, until recently, a monolithic group. They were unique among racial groups in that their ethnic (tribal, language group, and national) distinctions were deliberately wiped out during the slave trade in order to prevent social organization and revolt (Eyreman, 2001). Alex Haley’s landmark novel Roots (1976) raised an awareness among African Americans about tracing their ethnic rather than racial identity. This is changing now as more and more African Americans trace back their roots to specific places in Africa through genealogical research or DNA testing. Likewise, immigration from Africa and the Caribbean has created distinctly recognizable national groups of origin among the U.S. black population. Finally, the presidential campaign of Barack Obama has led, perhaps, to a symbolic expansion of who counts as black: even the son of a white, Kansan mother and Kenyan father who has half-Asian and fully African half-siblings. At first, many black Americans questioned his claims to “blackness” but as his polls numbers rose overall, he became increasingly identified with (and embraced by) the African American community.

**ETHNIC GROUPS IN THE UNITED STATES**

The United States is home to countless ethnicities today. It has such a heterogeneous population, in fact, that it is on its way to having no single numerically dominant group. Until the mid-nineteenth century, ethnic diversity was minimal because immigration rates were relatively low until about 1820. Early in the country’s formation, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants dominated over Native Americans as well as black slaves. From that point forward, Anglos secured their place at the top of the cultural, political, and economic hierarchy, prevailing over other immigrant populations. As exemplified in the following snapshot of ethnic groups in America today, these historical
hierarchies have remained relatively stable and intact despite drastically changing demographics.

Native Americans

According to archaeological findings, the original settlers of the North American continent arrived anywhere between 12,000 and 50,000 years ago from Northeast Asia, traveling by foot on glaciers. Before European explorers arrived in significant numbers for extended periods in the fifteenth century (there is evidence that the Vikings had reached North America before then), the indigenous population was anywhere between 10 and 100 million. Native Americans were a geographically, culturally, and physically diverse group, but they were categorically viewed as a single uncivilized group by arriving Spanish, French, and British explorers. Confronted with foreign diseases and unfamiliar military technology, the Indians were quickly dominated by white invaders. In Central and South America, the Spanish brutally enslaved them as labor for the mining industry. In the northern parts of North America, French colonialists nurtured their relationships with the Indians in order to cultivate a profitable fur trade. The British, chiefly concerned with acquiring land, settled colonies with the long-term goals of expanding the British state, dispossessioning and “civilizing” Natives in the process (Cornell, 1988).

Native Americans' way of life was completely obliterated by the European settlements, from their obviously vital land, which was taken from them, to their communal infrastructure. Most devastating were diseases such as smallpox and cholera, against which the Indians were virtually defenseless, having no native immunity. By the end of the 1900s, the Native American population had dwindled to approximately 250,000. The Indian Bureau (later called the Bureau of Indian Affairs) was established as part of the War Department in 1824 to deal with the remaining “Indian problem,” and its chief means was “forced assimilation.” This involved placing Native American children in government-run boarding schools that taught the superiority of Anglo culture over “primitive” Native culture. Children who refused to adopt Western dress, language, and religion met with harsh punishment (Cornell, 1988).

(A similar project was undertaken in British-ruled Australia with the native Aboriginal tribes.)

Today Native Americans number about 2.5 million, less than 1 percent of the total population. The population is roughly split between those living off and those living on one of the 278 federal reservations. The largest reservation, Navajo, covers approximately 16 million acres of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah and has a population of about 143,000. Reservations are generally impoverished and ripe with health problems and high crime. In fact, Native Americans as a whole are plagued by the lowest average socioeconomic status. They rank worst in terms of high school dropout rates and unemployment, which go hand in hand with poor health outcomes such as alcoholism, suicide, and premature death. Around 33 percent of Native Americans die before age 45, compared with 11 percent of the U.S. population as a whole (Garrett, 1994). As an ethnic group, Native Americans have grown by 38 percent since the 1980s, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. This increase has resulted from both the high birthrate among Native Americans and the increased tendency among whites to embrace their Native roots. Declaring your newfound Indian roots is at once a case of symbolic ethnicity and a pragmatic act: Native Americans are eligible for numerous types of federal assistance, ranging from health-care services to preferential admission rates at colleges.

African Americans

The first black people in North America arrived not as slaves but as indentured servants contracted by white colonialists for set periods. They were in the same boat as poor, nonfree whites such as those from Ireland or Scotland (Franklin, 1980). The system of slavery, however, evolved to meet colonial labor needs, and the slave trade was a fixed institution by the end of the seventeenth century. African Americans have been, all in all, on the bottom of the racial hierarchy ever since.

Just before the American Revolution, slaves made up more than 20 percent of the colonial population (Dinnerstein et al., 1996). Today about 12.3 percent of the American population is black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Like the Japanese Burakumin, this minority group has high rates of poverty, health problems, unemployment, and crime. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median income of African Americans as a group is roughly 65 percent that of whites. In 2005, more than 7 million people in the United States were on probation or parole, in jail or prison—that's 3.2 percent of all U.S. adult residents, or 1 in every 32 adults. But among black men ages 20–29, 1 in every 3 is in jail or on probation (BJS, 2005). At the end of 2005, there were 3,145 black inmates per every 100,000 black males
in the United States, compared with 1,244 Hispanic male inmates per every 100,000 Hispanic males and just 471 white male inmates per every 100,000 white males (BJS, 2005).

Sociologists and demographers today are beginning to study how new black immigrants are fracturing the holistic conception of "African American." For the first time, more Africans are entering the country than during the slave trade. In New York City alone, which is the most common destination for African immigrants, one in three blacks are foreign-born (Greer, 2006). Afro-Caribbeans such as Cubans, Haitians, and Jamaicans resent being unilaterally categorized as African American, because each of these immigrant groups enjoys a unique history, culture, and language that does not correspond to the American stereotypes of black skin. For this reason, new black immigrant groups would rather not assimilate but instead retain their distinctive immigrant status, setting themselves apart from the lowest status group in America, blacks (Greer, 2006).

Latinos

Latino, like the term Hispanic (the two are often used interchangeably), refers to a diverse group of people of Latin or Hispanic origin. According to the 2000 Census count, a majority of Latinos in the United States come from Mexico (almost 60 percent), Puerto Rico (about 10 percent), Cuba (5.5 percent), and the Dominican Republic (2.2 percent). They are a huge and rapidly expanding segment of the American population; in 2004 they made up approximately 13 percent of the population, surpassing African Americans. Latinos also live in heterogeneous places, although they have clustered on the West Coast, and in the South and Midwest (Hernandez et al., 2007).

Hispanics are often called an “in between” ethnic group because of their intermediate status, sandwiched between Caucasians and African Americans. Unlike African Americans, the majority of Latinos in America today have come by way of voluntary immigration, particularly during the last four decades of heavy, second-wave immigration. (Figure 13.1 provides a breakdown of the U.S. Hispanic population by region of origin.) Puerto Ricans are the exception, because they have been able to travel freely to the United States since 1917, when Puerto Rico became an American territory and its inhabitants U.S. citizens. The chief motivation for Latino immigration is economic, because of America’s high demand for cheap labor, such as in the service and construction industries.

Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans all have diverse phenotypical traits that make racial distinctions of a unified Latino type nearly impossible. Mexicans are generally classified as “mestizos,” a physical type that combines Native American and European traits, and most Latinos are racial hybrids, without any pure physical markers of difference. For instance, Puerto Ricans are often a mixture of African, European, and Indian backgrounds. So ambiguous is the Latino label that at various times the U.S. Census has classified them as part of the white race and as a separate race.

Most Cubans, meanwhile, “pass” as white, although their immigration status has changed drastically in recent years. Following the Communist revolution led by Fidel Castro, the first large wave of Cuban immigrants arrived in southern Florida in the 1960s. These immigrants were upper-middleclass, and educated, and perceived as the victims of a Communist regime that came to power during the Cold War. As such, they were welcomed enthusiastically to this country, and their assimilation started smoothly (Portes, 1969). By 1995, however, that warm welcome had faded. The U.S. federal government terminated its 35-year “open door” policy toward Cuban refugees, and the heavy media coverage of Cubans arriving since then in small boats has led to stereotypes of a desperate “wetback” invasion. Arrivals since the 1970s—who generally are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in Cuban society—have met more resistance from their host society, consequently experiencing higher rates of unemployment, low-wage work, and dependence on welfare and charity than whites and previous Cuban émigrés (Portes et al., 1985).

Asian Americans

Like Latino, the term Asian American is very broad, encompassing diverse and sometimes clashing peoples from China, Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia. The first wave of Asians to arrive in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century were predominantly unskilled laborers of Chinese, then Japanese, then Korean and Filipino origin. A second large wave of immigration is currently under way, mostly made up of well-educated and highly skilled people from all over Asia.
Early Asian immigrants were perceived as a labor threat and therefore met with extreme hostility. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which led to a ban against the Chinese in 1907, marked the first time in American history in which a group was singled out and barred entry. Urban "Chinatowns" developed out of ghettos in which marginalized Chinese workers, mostly men, were forced to live. Japanese immigrants faced similar hostilities and were formally barred entry by the Oriental Exclusion Act of 1924. Today 13.5 million U.S. residents claim some kind of Asian or mixed Asian ethnicity, representing about 4.7 percent of American households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Asian Americans are also a rapidly growing population; the 1990 Census counted just 6.9 million Asians. They are most heavily concentrated in California, Hawaii, New York, Illinois, and Washington. They are a unique among ethnic minorities because of their high average socioeconomic status, surpassing that of most other ethnic minorities and most Caucasian groups as well in terms of educational attainment and employment. For example, the median family income for the U.S. population as a whole in 1999 was $41,994, whereas for Asian Americans it was $51,908 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). Despite the average success of Asian Americans, Cambodians and Hmong (from southern China) experience very high poverty rates.

In recent years, Asians have been applauded for their smooth assimilation as the "model minority," the idea being that if only other ethnic groups could assimilate as well, America would have fewer social problems. Such a view, however, effaces the rather unsound history Asian immigrants have faced in this country, as well as the continuing poverty and discrimination faced by some Asian ethnicities. Furthermore, "positive" stereotypes of high achievement are not always beneficial and can place enormous pressure on Asian youths to measure up to an impossibly high ideal.

Middle Eastern Americans

Middle Easterners come from places as diverse as the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, Iran, Iraq, and the Palestinian territories. They established communities in the United States as far back as the late 1800s, but their numbers have swelled since the 1970s as part of the rise of non-European immigration. Middle Easterners in this second wave of immigration often arrive from politically tumultuous areas seeking refuge in the United States.

Today about 3 million Americans report some Arab origins, and there are even more with a Middle Eastern heritage, because not all Middle Easterners are Arab (Tebhimi, 2002) despite the fact that most Americans regard anyone from the Middle East as uniformly Arab and Muslim. In fact, the largest Middle Eastern population in the United States today is from Iran, and they are Persians, not ethnic Arabs, and do not generally speak Arabic. Similarly, although the majority of new Middle Eastern Americans are Muslim, many of them are Christian, and a small number Jewish (Bozorgmehr et al., 1996).

Widespread misunderstandings about Middle Easterners derive, in part, from their negative stereotyping in the mainstream media. In one study of television portrayals of Arabs, researchers found four basic myths that continue to surround this ethnic group. First, they are often depicted as fabulously wealthy—as sultans and oil tycoons. Second, they are shown as uncivilized and barbaric. Third, they are portrayed as sex-crazed, especially for underage white sex slaves. Fourth, they are said to revel in acts of terrorism, desiring to destroy all things American (Shahbazi, 1984). Little has changed since this study came out 20 years ago, although after 9/11, the emphasis shifted away from stereotypes of Arabs as extremely rich and toward one of Middle Easterners as terrorists.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING WHITE

We've seen some of the trajectories of various ethnic and racial groups in America, but what about the largest racial population, whites? Scholars have begun to pay more attention to what it means to be a white person. Every year on the first day of my introduction to sociology class, I ask my 200 or so students to write down the five social categories that best describe who they are. Black students almost always put their race at or near the top of the list. Latino and Asian American students usually list their ethnicity as well. Until recently, I could be fairly confident that whites would not list their race. Some might identify Polish, German, or another ethnic or national origin, but not one white student would write down Caucasian, white, or even Euro-American. And that was the point of my experiment.

We have already seen how the category of whiteness is socially constructed—first inclusively defined as all "free white persons" in 1790, then restrictively defined as only Northern and Western European whites in the early twentieth century, and reformulated back to an umbrella category by the mid-twentieth century. We know now that this category, which seems so natural and innate, is actually a flexible label that has expanded over time to include many formerly nonwhite groups such as Jews, Irish, and Italians.
Today most white people have little awareness of the meaning of whiteness as a category. As Nell Irvin Painter, the author of *The History of White People*, says, “The foundation of white identity is that there isn’t any. You’re just an individual” (Schuckner, 2002).

Whiteness, argues Peggy McIntosh (1988), is an “invisible knapsack of privileges” that puts white people at an advantage, just as racism places nonwhites at a disadvantage. In her now classic essay, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” McIntosh catalogs more than 50 “Daily Effects of White Privilege,” ranging from the mundane to the major. Here are just a few McIntosh notices:

- I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser’s shop and find someone who can cut my hair.
- I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
- I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.
- I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
- I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing, or body odor will be taken as a reflection on my race.
- I can choose blemish cover or bandages in “flesh” color and have them more or less match my skin. (pp. 3–3)

Whiteness then is about not feeling the weight of representing an entire population with one’s successes or failures. It’s about not having to think about race much at all.

In recent years, however, awareness of whiteness has been on the rise, as evidenced by the profusion of scholarship on whiteness, the goal of which is to call attention to the social construction and ensuing privilege of the category. Calling attention to whiteness helps whites understand how skewed the playing field really is. It also helps rectify something wrong with the way we study race in America: By traditionally focusing on minority groups, the implicit message that scholarship projects is that nonwhites are “deviant,” to borrow from Comte de Buffon, and that’s why we study them.

But white consciousness may have another, more troubling side. In 1980, before white studies got under way in universities, the white supremacist David Duke left his position as the grand wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and founded the National Association for the Advancement of White People (NAAWP), attempting to sugarcoat his racist movement with a seemingly more politically correct approach. In this new framework, Duke presented whites as a besieged minority, writes sociologist Mitch Berbrier (2000), defining the NAAWP’s mission as a pro-white heritage movement as opposed to an antiblack one. Sociologist Abby Ferber has analyzed the clever appropriation of civil rights language in Duke’s white supremacist discourse. For example, in an article by Duke in the *White Patriot*, Ferber finds the rhetoric of reverse discrimination, victimhood, and the right to cultural difference:

[O]ur race and all others should have the right to determine their own destiny through self-determination and rule....[E]very people on this planet must have the right to life: the continued existence of its unique racial fabric and resulting culture. (*White Patriot*, no. 56, p. 6, quoted in Ferber, 1999)

Sounds reasonable, right? That’s because the new language of white supremacy allows racists to move away from explicitly racist language (of biological inferiority, for example). Duke’s NAAWP also co-opts civil rights discourse, as in the organization’s mission statement: “The NAAWP is a not for profit, nonviolent, civil rights educational organization, demanding equal rights for whites and special privileges for none.”

Such examples demonstrate one possible outcome of the emergence of white studies: to politically empower extremists by giving them a legitimate language for their racist ends. Note, however, that this rhetoric does not acknowledge the advantages whites typically enjoy. The power of whiteness studies is that it exposes the social construction of a seemingly natural (and neutral) category, giving a sense of the unequal footing beneath the labels “white” and “black.” (That is, whites can embrace ethnic identity, but blacks are stuck in a racial category.) But like any new “technology” such discourse can be used for many ends.

**MINORITY-MAJORITY GROUP RELATIONS**

What are the social consequences of race? Scholars have defined four broad forms that minority-majority group relations can take: assimilation, pluralism, segregation, and conflict.
In the 1920s, sociologist Robert Park began to wonder what, on the one hand, held together the diverse populations in major American cities and, on the other hand, sustained their cultural differences. He came up with a race relations cycle of four stages: contact, competition, accommodation, and assimilation. His model, called straight-line assimilation, was at first accepted as the universally progressive pattern in which immigrants arrive, settle in, and achieve full assimilation in a newly homogeneous country.

Milton Gordon (1964) tweaked Park’s model by suggesting multiple kinds of assimilation outcomes. For Gordon, an immigrant population can pass through (or stall in) seven stages of assimilation: cultural, structural, marital, identificational, attitude-receptiveness, behavior-receptiveness, and civic assimilation (Table 13.2).

With Park and Gordon in mind, let’s do a thought experiment. Imagine yourself as a Polish immigrant, arriving at Ellis Island in 1900. You don’t have much money, and you’ve come to America in search of opportunity; this is the land of plenty, so you’ve been told. You settle into a Polish enclave of Manhattan, where you connect with friends and maybe some family. You do your best to learn English. You buy a pair of riveted denim pants, popular among American workmen. You secure work in a factory thanks to your connections in the Polish community. After an initial period of tension and conflict stemming from job competition and housing constraints, you eventually are accepted by your Anglo-American neighbors, first by being allowed to join the workers’ union and then—and probably only happens to your children—by being allowed to marry into an Anglo family. By this time, you think of yourself as an American. Congratulations, you have reached Milton Gordon’s final stage of civic assimilation.

Harold Issacs (1975) noticed something that these theories of assimilation could not explain: People did not so easily shed their ethnic ties. Ethnic identification, among white ethnics and everyone else, persisted even after a group attained certain levels of structural assimilation. Clifford Geertz (1973) explained this persistence as a matter of primordialism—that is, the strength of ethnic ties resides in deeply felt or primordial ties to one’s culture. Ethnicity is, in a word, fixed. If not biologically rooted, it’s rooted in some other intractable source that Geertz reasoned must be culture.

The flip side of this argument came from Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan in Beyond the Melting Pot (1963). Far from being a deeply rooted structure that kept people bonded to their culture, ethnic identification, they reasoned, persisted because it was in individuals’ best interests to maintain it. They saw ethnic groups as miniature interest groups—individuals uniting for instrumental purposes, to fend off job competition, for instance. Glazer and Moynihan believed that ethnicity was fluid and circumstantial. More recently, scholars have posited that ethnic identification is both a deeply felt attachment and an instrumental position that can change according to circumstance (Cornell & Hartman, 1998).

### Table 13.2 | Gordon’s Stages of Assimilation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural assimilation</td>
<td>Change of cultural patterns to those of host society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural assimilation</td>
<td>Large-scale entrance into cliques</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marital assimilation</td>
<td>Large-scale intermarriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification assimilation</td>
<td>Development of sense of collective identity based exclusively on host society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude reception assimilation</td>
<td>Absence of prejudice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior reception assimilation</td>
<td>Absence of discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic assimilation</td>
<td>Absence of value and power conflict</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Pluralism

For most people, however, assimilation into American society is not very easy, and acceptance varies systematically. At times a pressure cooker has been invoked as a more appropriate metaphor than a melting pot. Park’s model was useful in shifting attention away from essentialist explanations of the so-called innate differences among immigrants, but it suffers from several shortcomings. Most obviously, it does not apply to nonwhite immigrants, many of whom are not fully accepted into all areas of American society. Park’s model also does not apply to involuntary immigrants, notably African Americans. Barth and Noel (1972) noted that assimilation is not necessarily the end result for immigrants. On the contrary, other outcomes such as exclusion, pluralism, and stratification are possibilities. And as others point out (Lieberson, 1961; Massey, 1995; Portes & Zhou, 1993), some immigrants assimilate more easily than others, depending on a variety of structural factors, like migration patterns, differences in contact with the majority groups, demographies such as fertility and mortality rates and age structure, and, ultimately, power differentials between groups. This is the case for the “new immigration,” which, in comparison to the earlier era of European immigration (1901–30), is a large-scale influx of non-European immigrations that began in the late 1960s and continues to the present (Figure 13.2 on pp. 518–19).

The new immigrants, largely from Hispanic and Asian countries, are racialized as nonwhites—even though Asians are widely considered a “model minority.” They therefore are subject to a different set of conditions for assimilating and face greater obstacles to their upward mobility (Massey, 1995).
For example, Portes and Xian (1993) report that the children of Haitian immigrants living in Miami's Little Haiti are at high risk for downward mobility because they face social ostracism from their own ethnic community if they choose to adopt the outlook and cultural ways of native-born Americans. Among Haitian youth, a common message is the devaluation of mainstream norms, and anyone who excels at school or abides by mainstream rules runs the risk of being shunned for “acting white.” This picture of assimilation is much more complex than Park’s initial formulation.

A society with several distinct ethnic or racial groups is said to be a pluralism, meaning that a low degree of assimilation exists. A culturally pluralistic society has one large sociocultural framework with a diversity of cultures functioning within it. This is the premise of multiculturalism in America. Statistically speaking, in a pluralist country, no single group commands majority status. Switzerland, with its three linguistic groups—German, French, and Italian—is a striking example of ethnic autonomy and balance. Some people predict that if current demographic trends continue,
Segregation and Discrimination

A third paradigm for minority-majority relations is segregation, the legal or social practice of separating people on the basis of their race or ethnicity. An extreme case of segregation was the Southern United States before the civil rights movement. Under the Jim Crow system of segregation, reinforced by the Supreme Court’s 1896 ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, a “separate but equal” doctrine ruled the South. Strictly enforced separation existed between blacks and whites in most areas of public life—from residence to health facilities to bus seats, classroom seats, and even toilet seats.

Although the *Plessy* decision ruled that separate facilities for black and whites were constitutional as long as they were equal, in real life the doctrine legalized unequal facilities for blacks. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) has long recognized that segregation and discrimination are inextricably linked. Nowhere is this more clear than in the case of education. Social science data consistently show that an integrated educational experience for minority children produces advantages over a nonintegrated school experience. School segregation almost always entails fewer educational resources and lower quality for minority students.

As Anthony Marx (1998) has noted, concern over segregation grew during World War II as America was caught in the embarrassing contradiction of, on the one hand, espousing antiracist rhetoric against its Nazi foes while, on the other hand, upholding an egregiously racist doctrine at home. America emerged from the war as a global force with heightened stakes for its world reputation; this new status, along with growing public dissent, perhaps helped to motivate the Supreme Court’s landmark 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The Court’s majority opinion that legally segregated schools were “inherently unequal” is considered the ruling that struck down the “separate but equal” doctrine. It was also the spark that ignited the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

However, school desegregation has been under fire since several Supreme Court decisions in the 1990s (Dowell, 1991; Pitts, 1992; and Jenkins, 1995). Two 2007 cases in Louisville, Kentucky, and Seattle, Washington, came the closest to overturning the spirit (if not the letter) of *Brown*. Meanwhile, former presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan both openly attacked desegregation initiatives, especially busing. In 1981, President Reagan’s attorney general, William Bradford Reynolds, flatly proclaimed that the “compulsory busing of students in order to achieve racial balance in the public schools is not an acceptable remedy” (Orfield, 1996). Today most U.S. schools are marginally less segregated than they were in the mid-1960s. Average white students in America attend a school where 78 percent of their classmates are also white. But in all this bickering over the effectiveness of busing, the larger point is missed: School segregation is invariably linked to poverty, which is perpetuated by residential segregation, and perhaps that is the issue we should be addressing if we are concerned about mitigating racial disparities.

In 1968, under President Lyndon B. Johnson’s initiative, the Kerner Commission reported that despite the civil rights movement sweeping the nation, America was split into two societies: “one black, one white—separate and unequal.” The main reason for the fissure was residential segregation, what sociologist Lawrence Bobo has termed the “structural linchpin of American racial inequality” (Bobo, 1989). Residential segregation, scholars argue, maintains an urban underclass in perpetual poverty by limiting its ties to upwardly mobile social networks, which connect people to jobs and other opportunities. When you live in the ghetto, your chances of landing a good job through your social network are indeed slim (Wilson, 1978).
It has also been suggested that residential segregation inflicts poverty through a "culture of segregation" (Massey & Denton, 1993). According to this argument, you live in a ghetto that's extremely isolated from the outside world—no family restaurants like the Olive Garden, no mainstream bank branches, not even a chain grocery store that sells fresh vegetables. You're surrounded daily by the ills that accompany poverty: poor health, joblessness, out-of-school children, welfare, educational failure, a drug economy, crime and violence, and, in general, social and physical deterioration. In the ghetto, the most extreme form of residential segregation, you come to believe that this is all there is to life; the social ills become normative. It's no big deal to sell drugs, drop out of school, depend on welfare, or run with a gang. You slide into the very behaviors that, in turn, reproduce the spiral of decline of your neighborhood.

Whether you buy this line of thought or not (and this viewpoint has been accused of being overly deterministic), consider how a segregated neighborhood got that way in the first place. It didn't just pop up out of nowhere, nor was it always there. As Douglass Massey and Nancy Denton (1993) have argued, the ghetto was deliberately and systematically constructed by whites to keep blacks locked into their (unequal) place. Before 1900, blacks faced job discrimination but relatively little residential segregation. Blacks and whites lived side by side in urban centers, as the index of dissimilarity numbers in Figure 13.3 shows. The index of dissimilarity, the standard measure of segregation, captures the degree to which blacks and whites are evenly spread among neighborhoods in a given city. The index tells you the percent of nonwhites that would have to move in order to achieve residential integration.

Various structural changes—industrialization, urbanization, the influx of Southern blacks to the North who competed with huge waves of European immigrants—led to increased hostility and violence toward blacks, who found themselves shut out of both blue collar and white neighborhoods. The color line, previously more flexible and fuzzy, hardened into a rigid boundary between black and white.

The black ghetto was manufactured by whites through a set of deliberate, conscious practices. Boundaries separating black neighborhoods were policed by whites, first with the threat of violence and periphery bombings in the 1920s and then with "neighborhood associations" that institutionalized housing discrimination. Property owners signed secret agreements promising to not allow blacks into their domain. When a black family did move to a neighboring block, whites often adopted the strategy of flight instead of fight, and this process of racial turnover yielded the same result: black isolation. Even today, when a black family moves into a white neighborhood, the property value declines slightly, in subtle anticipation of the process of white flight, which leaves behind a run-down undesirable black neighborhood—a veritable vicious circle.

Also helping to create the black ghetto have been specific government policies, such as the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), which in the early 1930s granted loans to home owners who were in financial trouble. The HOLC also instituted the practice of "redlining," which declared inner-city black neighborhoods too much of a liability and ineligible for aid. Following the HOLC's lead, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Veterans Administration (VA)—both of which were designed to make home ownership a reality for struggling Americans—funneled funds away from black areas and predominantly into white suburbs. Finally, in the 1950s, urban slums were razed in the name of "urban renewal," which essentially became a program of removal, as African Americans were relocated to concentrated public housing projects (Massey & Denton, 1993). These deliberately discriminatory policies are perpetuated today by de facto segregation in the form of continued suburban white flight and the splintering of school districts along racial lines.
Hurricane Katrina: It Takes a Natural Disaster to See a Social One

On Monday, August 29, 2005, a category 4 hurricane struck the Louisiana coast. Two levees, built to withstand a category 3 storm, were breached, and floodwaters rose to 20 feet throughout the streets of the city, forcing some trapped residents to their rooftops for the long wait for help. About 30,000 evacuees, those who could not or would not flee the city, had gathered at the Superdome, which authorities declared a "shelter of last resort." Mass looting was also reported on Tuesday in the French Quarter. By Wednesday, the situation in the Superdome had deteriorated, with reports of unsanitary conditions, rapes, gang shootings, and suicides. By Thursday, New Orleans had descended into anarchy: "Storm victims were raped and beaten, fights and fires broke out, corpses lay out in the open, and rescue helicopters and law enforcement officers were shot," (Nusskern, 2005). The National Guard arrived on Wednesday, two days late and in smaller numbers than requested. Officials at the Federal Emergency Management agency (FEMA) faltered as well, and it took them nearly a week to provide food, water, and help to the thousands left stranded.

The rescue blunders quickly illuminated issues of race and class. During an NBC live concert fundraiser for the hurricane victims, popular rapper Kanye West departed from his teleprompter cues and instead said, "George Bush doesn't care about black people." NBC News quickly released a statement asserting that West's views did not reflect those of the network, but West's remarks made headlines immediately. Did the slow and bungled response reflect racism? The issues of race and class reared again when remarks by former First Lady Barbara Bush also hit the headlines. Speaking outside the Superdome, she said to NPR reporters, "And so many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this—this [nervous laughter] is working very well for them." Her comments were widely criticized as exemplifying the government's larger "Let them eat cake" attitude toward poor hurricane victims. Would the government have responded differently had those in need been white, middle-class, or Republican?

The natural wreckage caused by Katrina—which included 964 deaths in Louisiana and an estimated $25 billion in property damage (“In Louisiana,” 2005)—revealed the ongoing social disaster of poverty in New Orleans and throughout the United States. An estimated 12.7 percent of Americans live below the poverty line ($14,680 for a family of three; see Chapter 15). That's more than 37 million Americans, and those numbers are increasing. Poverty declined steadily in the 1990s but is on the rise again, increasing by about a million people a year.

Who are the poor? While eight percent of whites are poor, approximately 24 percent of blacks live in poverty. The Ninth Ward in New Orleans is a poor neighborhood where about 50 percent of residents live below twice the poverty level (and are thus still eligible for various types of aid), and nearly all of them are black. Compare that with the festive French Quarter just blocks away where tourists visit and hardly anyone lives in poverty: it's less than 20 percent black. In one city there appear to be two separate worlds—one poor, one prosperous—and those two worlds are separated by color. As New Orleans rebuilds, it is unlikely that the two will be reconciled. The enduring problems of race, class, and poverty, so neatly swept under the rug of the public imagination since America's formal embrace of equal rights in the 1960s, were made public by Katrina.
Some scholars argue that a new form of segregation has emerged in America: the criminal justice system. During the 1960s, blacks were slightly overrepresented in the nation’s prisons, but in absolute numbers, there were many more white felons because many more whites were in the prison population. Today the racial distribution in jails and prisons is the reverse. Blacks and Latinos now make up the majority of incarcerated people. One in four black men in their twenties is in prison or jail, on probation or parole at any given moment (Pettit & Western, 2004). Is imprisonment just another means of confining the black population away from white? Several scholars make this case, based on changes in drug laws that seem to affect minorities disproportionately (see Chapter 6 for more details, especially on the Rockefeller Drug Laws in New York State).

Racial Conflict

The final paradigm of race relations is conflict relations, when antagonistic groups within a society live integrated in the same neighborhoods, hold the same jobs, and go to the same schools. This was the volatile scenario in Rwanda in 1994, when roughly 800,000 Tutsi were murdered by Hutu, mostly by machete, in the span of 100 days. That’s about 333.3 killings per hour, or five and a half lives every second (Gourévitch, 1998). The killings, as well as the maiming and systematic rape of Tutsi women, were the culmination of more than a century of racial hostility that began with the Belgian colonization of Rwanda.

Belgian explorers, immersed in discourses of scientific racism, confronted two Rwandan tribes, the Hutu and the Tutsi, who for ages had been living and working together, and intermarrying. Because of all their shared social, cultural, and genetic heritages, scientists today cannot distinguish Hutu and Tutsi into separate biological populations. But in the late nineteenth century, the Belgians gave preferential treatment to the Tutsi, whom they believed to be superior to the Hutu. What followed was a brutal system of oppression in which the Tutsi dominated over the Hutu.

When Rwanda was granted independence in 1962, after a century of hatred brewing between the two groups, the Hutu took power under a dictatorship masked as a democracy, and their long-standing animosity simmered into an explosion in April 1994 after three years of failed crops. The result was genocide, the mass killing of a particular population. The genocide, backed by the government and media, turned neighbors into murderers overnight: Friends killed friends, teachers killed students, and professionals killed coworkers. Rwanda was a stark reminder that when we speak of the myth or fiction of race, we cannot deny its reality in social life.

GROUP RESPONSES TO DOMINATION

There are several forms of response to oppression, four of which are briefly outlined below: withdrawal, passing, acceptance, and resistance. Although we tend to think of minority groups as being oppressed by majority groups, keep in mind that sometimes the majority are the oppressed group, as in South African apartheid, where 4.5 million British dominated over 19 million natives.

Withdrawal

An oppressed group may withdraw, as the Jewish population did after Nazi persecution in Poland. Before World War II, the Jewish population in Poland numbered 3.3 million, the second largest in the world. Eighty-five percent of Polish Jews died in the Holocaust, leaving roughly 500,000. After World War II, violence against Jews continued, and many moved. These conditions, plus the bitter taste of Polish complicity in the Holocaust itself, caused many Jews to leave for good. By 1947, Poland was home to just 100,000 Jews.

Another case of withdrawal was the Great Migration of the mid-twentieth century in the United States. Blacks streamed from the Jim Crow rural South in search of jobs and equality in the industrialized urban North and West; an estimated 1.5 million African Americans left per decade between 1940 and 1970. The North opened opportunities to blacks that previously had been violently denied to them in the South, including economic and educational gains as well as cultural freedom such as those manifested in the Harlem Renaissance. But leaving the South did not always lead to immediate improvements. In their search for a better life, many African Americans found cramped shantytowns on the edge of urban centers, exploitation by factory owners looking for cheap black labor, and increasing waves of hostility.
from white workers. Racialized competition for housing and employment sometimes led to violent clashes, such as the East St. Louis riot in the summer of 1917. The riots, principally involving white violence against blacks, raged for nearly a week, leaving nine whites and hundreds of African Americans dead. An estimated 6,000 black citizens, fearing for their lives, fled the city, another stark example of withdrawal.

Passing

Another response to racial oppression is passing, or blending in with the dominant group. During his early adulthood, Malcolm X, for example, attempted to look more white and through the painful process of chemically straightening or “conking” his Afro. A more recent example is the pop star Michael Jackson. Passing is not necessary about physical changes, though. One of the most common ways people have tried to pass has been to change their surnames. The single largest ethnic group in the United States today is German Americans. Not English, but German. Where, do you ask, are all the Schmidts and Muellers? They now go by Smith and Miller, after a huge wave of name changing among German Americans during the world wars—if not during the first one, then often by the second.

Acceptance versus Resistance

Another response is acceptance, whereby the oppressed group feigns compliance and hides its true feelings of resentment. In Erving Goffman’s terms, members of this group construct a front stage of acceptance, often using stereotypes to their own advantage to “play the part” in the presence of the dominant group (see Chapter 4). Backstage, however, privately among their subalterns or oppressed group, they present a very different self. Sociologist Elijah Anderson refers to this as “code-switching,” a strategy used by African Americans in the presence of dominant white society. In Anderson’s ethnography of a black neighborhood in Philadelphia, blacks learn two languages, one of the street and one of mainstream society, and daily survival becomes a matter of knowing which one to speak at the right time. For an inner-city youth, an act of code-switching could be as simple as putting on a leather jacket and concealing his textbook beneath it for the walk home from school (Anderson, 1999).

A more overt form of resistance, the fourth paradigm of group responses to domination, would be collective resistance through a movement such as revolution or genocide, or through nonviolent protest as in the U.S. civil rights movement (see Chapter 18 for a discussion of social movements).
race gaining ground. According to Howard Winant (2001), the new racial hegemony comes with “race neutral” rhetoric and relies more on culture and nationality to explain differences between nonwhites and whites than immutable physical traits. The new line of thinking, called “kaiser-faire racism,” replaces biology with culture and assumes that there is something fixed, innate, and inferior about nonwhite cultural values. In America, this kinder, gentler antiblack ideology is characterized by the persistence of negative stereotyping, the tendency to blame nonwhites for their own problems, and resistance to affirmative action policy (Bobo et al., 1997). The irony is that since the civil rights triumphs of the 1960s, the official status of formal equality has brought about subtler forms of prejudice and discrimination, making it harder to tackle racism and inequality. When a state proclaims racial equality, white dominance gets off the hook and goes unnoticed.

Likewise, in the new color-blind Europe, argues Neil MacMaster (2001), a “differentiable” or “cultural” racism has taken hold. Characteristic of cultural racism is the call to protect national (white) identity from “criminal” and polluting cultural outsiders, constructing an image of “fortress Europe.” Antirefugee commentary is one example of the new racist ideology. For example, in a televised speech in 1978, Margaret Thatcher made the following appeal to cultural purity in regard to 4 million immigrants from recently decolonized countries: “Now that is an awful lot, and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people with a different culture” (MacMaster, 2001).

HOW RACE MATTERS: THE CASE OF WEALTH

In An American Dilemma (1944), Gunnar Myrdal pointed out that blacks and whites think about equality in different but complementary ways. In his study, whites cared most about intimate relations—they were most adamant about maintaining personal distance from blacks, especially when it came to marriage, but they did not mind so much if blacks had equal chances of earning a living. Blacks valued equal employment and legal rights first; the freedom to marry whites was at the bottom of their list of concerns. These “rank orders of discrimination” gave Myrdal some hope; if economic discrimination was of least concern for whites and greatest for blacks, then maybe African Americans could catch up. But it has not worked out that way.

Nonwhites, especially African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans, lag behind whites on a number of social outcomes, from income and educational attainment to crime rates and infant mortality rates. For example, blacks are half as likely as whites to graduate college or hold a professional or managerial job, and are twice as likely to be unemployed and to die before their first year of life. As striking as the figures are, there is one statistic that captures the persistence of racial inequality in the United States: it is net worth. If you want to determine your net worth, all you have to do is add up everything you own and subtract from this figure the total amount of your outstanding debt. When you do this for nonwhites and white families, the differences are striking. If you lined up all the African American families in terms of wealth (excluding automobiles) from highest to lowest and looked at the family in the middle, that median family in 2001 had a net worth of $10,700. Line up all white families, however, and the median family had a net worth of $106,400 (Lui, 2004), almost 10 times greater. When you compare averages or means, the typical white family enjoys a net worth that is almost ten times that of its black counterpart (Conley, 1999).

Latinos are a varied group but largely reflect African Americans on wealth measures. The median Latino family in 2001 had just $3,000 in assets. When it comes to home ownership, Latinos and black families also fare similarly; less than half of them own their own homes, whereas three of four of white families do (Lui, 2004). We know considerably less about Native Americans because reliable data are lacking, but given that they have a poverty rate of 26 percent (compared with just 8 percent for whites), their wealth is not likely to be high. Asian Americans, however, have low rates of poverty (13 percent) and high rates of home ownership, at about 60 percent.

This “equity inequality” has grown in the decades since the civil rights triumphs of the 1960s. What’s more, the wealth gap cannot be explained by income differences alone. That is, the asset gap remains large even when we compare black and white families at the same income levels. Even among the often heralded new black middle class, the accumulated assets of a family earning $40,000 a year amount to less than $20,000; a similar white family has a nest egg of around $80,000. For many among the growing black and Latino middle classes, this lack of assets may mean living from paycheck to paycheck, being trapped in a job or neighborhood that is less beneficial in the long run, and not being able to send one’s kids to top colleges. Parents’ wealth is also a strong predictor of children’s teenage and young adult outcomes—everything from teenage premarital childbirth to educational attainment to welfare dependency (Conley, 1999).
Equity inequality captures the historical disadvantage of minority groups and the way those disadvantages accrue over time. The institutional restraints on black property accumulation discussed above were one mechanism for hindering blacks' asset growth. Similar processes and policies have decimated the wealth of Native Americans, who went from living off the land (the entire U.S. territory) to being disproportionately impoverished and dispossessed over the course of a century by exploitative U.S. policies. One of the most telling examples of this sort of institutionalized dispossession happened to Japanese Americans. As skilled farmers, Japanese immigrants accrued enough wealth in the early twentieth century to attract resentment, culminating in the 1924 Alien Land Act, which prohibited noncitizens from owning land. Japanese immigrants then found success in business, running nurseries and selling cut flowers, and amassed considerable wealth by 1941, about $140 million cumulatively (Lyu, 2004). When World War II broke out and panic spread over the possibility of a treacherous Japanese population in America, the Roosevelt administration mandated a program of Japanese internment, a policy of relocating all Japanese—citizen and foreign-born alike—to camps in the western part of the United States. Japanese Americans were given a week to dispose of all assets, selling their homes and businesses to whites at scandalously low prices (Lyu, 2004). The result was a huge forced transfer of wealth from Japanese to whites under discriminatory government policy.

Another cause of equity inequality among African Americans is the simple fact that property in black neighborhoods doesn't accrue value at the same rate as that in mostly white areas. Property has the particular attribute of quantifying the social value of ideas or objects. A diamond, misprinted stamp, or painting by Van Gogh has no inherent productive value. Its price reflects only the value accorded to it in the marketplace. In this vein, when a neighborhood's housing values precipitously decline as the proportion of black residents rises, the price changes provide a record of the social value of "blackness." Property value does not follow the same clear-cut pattern for other ethnic minorities, although minority enclaves generally have lower real estate value than exclusively white neighborhoods.

The issue of race barely surfaced in all the discussion over George W. Bush's 2001 tax cuts. Amid his package of tax reductions was the proposed repeal of the federal estate tax, which had been in place since 1916 and affects only the richest 1.4 percent of the deceased. As the law stood at the time of the debate, the first $675,000 per individual ($1.35 million for couples) of net estate value was exempt from tax. Because of a 1997 change in the law, this exemption amount would rise steadily until it reached $1 million for individuals in 2006. The Bush estate tax repeal phased out the entire tax by 2010, although it will return right back to where it started in 2010. Because the number of African Americans who would benefit is extremely small, Bush's ultimate goal of eliminating the tax forever would exacerbate the already growing wealth gap between blacks and whites.

In summary, policies intending to address disparities between nonwhites and whites must take into account the extreme wealth gap and its historical trajectory. Affirmative action aimed at improving wages and increasing job openings for blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans can address only a piece of a larger cycle of equity inequality. Income from work provides for the day-to-day, week-to-week expenses; wealth is the stuff long-term upward mobility is made of.

THE FUTURE OF RACE

This brief overview of the history of race and its present-day ramifications allows us to make some guesses about the future of race. For starters, racial and ethnic diversity in America will tend to increase. Currently, 1 in 40 persons identifies him or herself as multiracial, and this figure could soar to 1 in 5 by the year 2050 (Lee & Bean, 2004). In the year 2050, the number of foreign-born people in the United States surpassed 34.2 million, a 2.3 percent increase since the year before, according to the U.S. Census. Second-generation Americans (natives with at least one parent born in a foreign country) numbered 30.4 million—that's 11 percent of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). And according to the National Research Council projections, by the year 2050, largely thanks to the most recent wave of immigration (along with differential fertility rates), America's Latino and Asian population will triple, making up about 25 percent and 8 percent of the United States, respectively (Smith & Edmonston, 1997). No longer black and white, America is now a society composed of multiple ethnic and racial groups with an ever-shifting color line marking fuzzy boundaries.

In 1996, there was a Multiracial March on Washington in which multiracial activists demanded a separate Census category in order to bolster their political claims and recognition. Although the movement did not result in a multiracial identity category, for the first time ever, the 2000 Census allowed respondents to check off more than one box for racial identity. The resulting multiracial population is currently estimated to be about 6.8 million,
and those are just the self-identified people who checked more than one race box in 2000 (see Figure 13.5). The latest Census also asks separate questions about race and ethnicity, which means that Census data can now be used to examine some of the racial diversity within the Hispanic population, as well as some ethnic diversity among African American and white populations.

This so-called browning of America brings us to a new crossroads. The white-black divide may become the white-nonwhite divide (see Figure 13.6). Back to the future, so to speak, because this distinction sounds a lot like the divide that characterized America throughout much of the nineteenth century. These demographic trends have made headlines and raised concerns about an impending white minority. In 1992, Phil Donahue devoted a show, titled "The Next Minority; White Americans?", to the topic. At least four states (California, Texas, Hawaii, and New Mexico) and the District of Columbia are deemed "majority minority" states, where whites are not the majority of the population. But let's not forget that racial categories are social constructions, not static entities. To claim a multiracial identity presupposes the existence of a monoracial identity, when we know scientifically pure

or distinct race of people exists. Similarly, the notion of a white minority presumes that whiteness is a fixed racial category, whereas whiteness has expanded to include groups previously considered nonwhite in the past. Indeed, as Warren and Twine (1997) point out, as long as blacks are present, a back door is open for nonblacks to slip under the white umbrella. For example, the Asian success story as the "model minority" is made possible by their ability to blend in with whites, because they are unequivocally not black. We are at a point in America when whiteness may be expanding again, as always with blacks serving as the counterweight.

**POLICY: Desegregation**

After the Supreme Court ruled against the "separate but equal" law that had kept black and white schools separated, school boards were mandated to desegregate so that blacks could attend white schools that would provide them with more equal educational opportunities. As you can imagine, white schools didn't exactly roll out the red carpet in welcome. For years after the court ruling, school districts did everything in their power to prevent desegregation. For example, in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957, the governor ordered the Arkansas National Guard to block the admission of nine black students to its Central High School. After a nine-month confrontation, President Dwight Eisenhower had to send in U.S. troops to protect the black students. Other districts retaliated in different ways. For instance, in 1959, the board of supervisors in Prince Edward County, Virginia, decided that the best way to fight court-mandated desegregation was simply to close its public schools. In their place, private schools sprang up to serve white students exclusively. This meant that from 1959 until 1964, when the Supreme Court ruled the shutdown unconstitutional, black students had no access to public education in this Virginia county.

As a result of this resistance, 10 years after official desegregation, only 2.3 percent of black students in the Deep South attended integrated schools (Civilrights.org, 2008). But with the rise of the Civil rights movement and the enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, school districts were ordered to end segregation and undo the harm of past segregation by making sure their schools were racially balanced. And this time, the ruling wasn't just an empty promise. The government was prepared to step in and enforce the court order (by threatening to cut off funding, for instance). The stage for desegregation was set.

With the newfound government backing, the number of black students in the South who attended schools with whites increased from 1.2 percent in 1964 to 32 percent in 1968. During this time, the South became the most integrated region (in 1976, 45.1 percent of black students in the South attended majority
white schools compared with about 28 percent in the Northeast and Midwest). Ironically, part of the success of Southern desegregation can be attributed to their previous blatant school segregation laws. The government used these against Southern school districts to prove that a district had contributed to segregation and was thus responsible for reversing the offense.

The 1966 Coleman Report, which found that the composition of a school was particularly important for black students, only further bolstered the ideology of desegregation and paved the way for another landmark decision on busing. In 1971, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a law that would allow school districts to bus students to different schools in order to achieve integration. Again, this plan was most successful in the South, where metropolitan areas were all part of one school district (including both whites and blacks) as opposed to more divided districts in the North and Midwest.

Desegregation wasn't perfect. Many white families moved (white flight) to avoid sending their children to school with black children. Some entire districts were so segregated already that there weren't enough whites to allow for integration. But despite such shortcomings, desegregation was effective. Take, for example, the results of a desegregation experiment examining the outcomes of 661 black students from the same low-income black community in Hartford, Connecticut, who were in the first and second grades in 1966. Half of the students were randomly selected to go to mostly white schools in the suburbs, while the other half remained in the mostly black city schools. In a follow-up study by Project Concern in 1981, the researchers found that those who went to the suburban white schools:

- Were more likely to graduate from high school.
- Were more likely to attend mostly white colleges and complete more years of college.
- Perceived less discrimination in college and other areas of their lives.
- Had fewer incidents with police and fewer fights as adults.
- Had closer and more frequent contact with whites as adults, were more likely to live in desegregated neighborhoods, and had more white friends in college.

- Were more likely to have jobs in sectors with smaller percentages of blacks (such as sales jobs).
- Were less likely to have a child before the age of 18 if they were female. ("Study Finds Desegregation," 1985)

Research also suggests that these benefits account for some of the decreases in educational gaps between black and white students in the past decades. For example, one study found that desegregation contributed to a 2 to 3 percent decline in the black drop-out rate, which accounts for about half of the overall decline in the black drop-out rate during the 1970s and 1980s. Furthermore, these effects were more dramatic in school districts that experienced the greatest declines in racial segregation (Guryan, 2004).

Unfortunately, the story doesn't end here. If it did, school districts would still be working toward achieving racial balance, and educational inequalities between advantaged and disadvantaged students would continue to decrease. However, desegregation was never widely popular and met with extreme resistance, even though research has continually found that integration does not negatively affect white students (Coleman et al., 1966; Guryan, 2004). Although the government actively fought this resistance, those who opposed desegregation never went away. As long as the government was liberal, as it was during the time of the landmark rulings, dissenters had little backing. But, as soon as conservatives under Richard Nixon came into power in 1968, the war against desegregation began.

The dismantling of desegregation didn't start all at once. At the beginning of the switch to conservative rule, there were still some liberal judges sitting in the federal courts. But, little by little, the conservatives got their way. The first major setback was a ruling in 1974 by the Supreme Court finding that suburban districts were under no obligation to mix with inner-city districts to achieve integration, unless it could be proved that the suburban districts had somehow contributed to the segregation. This ruling effectively eliminated the opportunity for integration in many northern cities, where suburbs were mostly white and inner cities were mostly black. During the 1980s, the attack continued, when President Ronald Reagan cut government funding that went to desegregation programs. Things really started moving along as the conservative judges appointed by Reagan carried out his antidesegregation legacy. Specifically, a series of Supreme Court decisions in the 1990s essentially ended any government backing for desegregation by telling school districts that if they could prove some effort on their part to desegregate at some point in their history, they had paid their debt in righting the wrongs of black segregation and did not have to continue desegregation programs. And proving this, as you could guess, was not particularly difficult. Just like that, school districts were off the hook (for a review of this issue, see Orfield, 1996).
Thus began the new era of resegregation. When goals of racial integration no longer dictated who attended certain schools, school districts reverted to the old method of determining school attendance by neighborhoods. But because housing in America has always been (and still is) highly segregated, neighborhood schools, by default, will be highly segregated. And this is exactly the trend we see today. During the 2002-03 school year, average white students attended schools that were 78 percent white. Similarly, 73 percent of blacks and 77 percent of Hispanics, but only 12 percent of whites, attended schools that were at least half minority (Orfield & Lee, 2005).

You might wonder why we should be concerned about such high levels of segregation. The main issue is that highly segregated schools tend to be poor schools, and high concentrations of poverty are strongly associated with worse educational outcomes. Poor schools enjoy fewer resources, a less stable and qualified teaching staff, and less rigorous curriculums (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Segregation also magnifies all the disadvantages that come with being from a lower class or being a racial or ethnic minority by putting students in a situation where most of their peers share the same disadvantages. This concentration of disadvantage exaggerates all these students’ individual disadvantages.

With the 2007 Supreme Court ruling, desegregation has thus come full circle. School systems are no longer required to ensure racial integration in the classroom, and they’ve returned to previous levels of segregation. Perhaps the best way to illustrate how far we’ve slipped back is by examining the recent vote of the Nebraska state legislature to divide the Omaha school system into three districts: one mostly black, one mostly white, and one mostly Hispanic. Supporters note that because the school system no longer busses students, neighborhood schools are already split along these lines. Therefore, the supporters continue, dividing the school districts along lines that already exist will give minorities more control over their own school boards to ensure that their students receive fair treatment. That sounds a lot like the arguments in favor of the “separate but equal” divisions upheld in 1896 that separated blacks and whites into different schools.

Conclusion

When you look at race using the sociological imagination, you'll recognize that it's hardly a cut-and-dried issue. You'll see the historical social construction of ideas and identities. You'll see the present-day realities—sometimes monstrosities—of an aspect of our lives so often called a myth or fiction. And you'll be equipped to look at the changing nature of race and race relations that will affect your future.