



CHAPTER NINE

# Race and Ethnicity

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**Chapter Objectives**  
At the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- Describe race and ethnicity as social constructions, and how they are interconnected.
- Describe how each paradigm explains race differently.
- Explain the foundations of race as a socially divisive force.
- Describe how life chances are manifestations of race.
- Explain the relationship between racial privilege and social inequality.
- Identify how race exists alongside, and in connection with, other social structures.
- Identify the persistence of race in modern society.

**H**ave you ever considered a reality in which you had the ability to create an image of your liking? What body shape and height would you select? Hair color and texture? Eye color? Skin tone? In the 2009 science-fiction film *the Surrogates*, people do just that. They live their lives through surrogate robots of their choosing. If sociologists were to study this phenomenon, they would first observe the selections people made. Second, they would try to understand why people selected the features they did. How did they determine what their ideal characteristics should be? The explanations would be numerous, but one of them would probably include the significance of race. Race is a funny thing. We see racial diversity in mass media, yet as one observer pessimistically quipped, *the more things change, the more they stay the same.*

The limited reality of surrogate robots does not limit our mind's eye. Think about who you are. Imagine yourself as a member of another racial group. What do you think you would experience? Who would you interact with? How would they interact with you? Who would you not socialize with? How would you

think differently? What would you think life is like? Such an existence is challenging to comprehend because the interactions you would have, the experiences you would know, and the daily thoughts that concerned you the most would be shaped by a reality you had little control over. It is daunting to realize that nearly everything you do, everyone you know and every issue and idea that matters to you is filtered by a reality beyond your choosing. Race and ethnicity remain defining features of our society, especially as determinants of social inequality and advantage. Race and ethnicity matter on a global scale as well. As one of the most diverse societies of the world's leading economies, the United States is an example for other nations in how they treat their minority groups. As you proceed in this chapter, keep in mind that race and ethnicity, like other social structures, shape our lives in significant ways that we don't often realize.

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## Social Construction of Race

The primary goal of this chapter is to challenge you to consider that many of the ideas and beliefs that you consider *normal* in life are tainted by race and ethnicity. It is about discovering that what exists on the surface or what we assume to be true may have more complexity than what we understand. For example, the power of race in society explains not only persistent inequality but also how many people rationalize such inequality as the result of personal weaknesses or cultural defects. By applying your sociological imagination, you see that what may appear to be normal is, in fact, socially constructed. To say that something is a **social construction** is to realize that society and the social structures that influence and govern it are human creations. There are consequences to these human inventions in terms of benefits and disadvantages. Society and its many aspects are not to be taken for granted or accepted as given. Social constructs change as people and institutions do. History teaches us a lot about the formation of race as a concept and the stratified institutions that laid the foundation for it. In the next section, you will briefly examine how this transpired.

## Slavery and the Construction of Race in History

In ancient Greece, people were primarily categorized by citizenship, language or religious beliefs. People became enslaved as a consequence of conquest, war or debt. In 17<sup>th</sup> century African societies, slaves were the equivalent of European serfs. They had rights, could marry or own property and could even be adopted into a master's family (Zinn, 1995).

When the British first settled on the North American Atlantic coast, race was not a social construct. Primary differentiation at that time was based on ethnicity, religion or economic status.

Captured Africans were initially brought to Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. They were traded as commodities for money and other goods. As plantation-style capitalism developed in the 13 British colonies, colonists relied on a combination of indentured European servants and mostly African slaves to work in the tobacco and agricultural fields, or to provide support services for plantation owners. The extensive use of cheap and enslaved labor for profitable tobacco expanded the plantation economy. This motivated growers to seek Africans for further enslavement (Zinn, 1995).

On a social level, the indentured servants and slaves fraternized. The tendency to identify their common status and a common enemy in their master contributed to instances of interracial solidarity. They conspired many times to escape their conditions. They usually ran away but in some cases engaged in violence against their masters. A 1661 law in Virginia that established penalties for interracial solidarity of this sort was the first of many to institutionalize racial domination. By 1691, Virginia had made it illegal for any free white person to interact, much less socialize, with any person of African or indigenous origin that wasn't their property (Zinn, 1995). What ensued was the racialization of enslaved Africans and the prejudices associated with blackness. In 1705, the General Assembly in Virginia reinforced this, declaring:

All servants imported and brought into the Country...who were not Christians in their native

Country...shall be accounted and be slaves. All Negro, mulatto and Indian slaves within this dominion...shall be held to be real estate. If any slave resist his master...correcting such slave, and shall happen to be killed in such correction...the master shall be free of all punishment...as if such accident never happened (PBS, 1998).

The brutal enforcement of these and other laws underscored the fear by the white elite that "discontented whites would join black slaves to overthrow the existing order" (Zinn, 1995: 37).

The development of concepts that refined race continued in unexpected ways. In his book, *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*, published in 1776, German anthropologist Johann Blumenbach inadvertently created a classification system consisting of five racial groups. Blumenbach may have believed in the equality of people, but he nevertheless considered whites the ethnocentric standard to which all the other racial groups should be compared (Gould, 1981).

Blumenbach positioned whiteness at the head of the list in a spectrum from lighter to darker shades of color. He described a skull found in the Caucasus Mountains as the "most beautiful form of the skull, from which...the others diverge." This description of the skull, coupled with the placement of white skin color at the head of the list, reflected a stratified ranking system that affirmed the white "Caucasian" racial category as its ideal.

The statements by British rebels in the Declaration of Independence in 1776 about equality and "natural" human rights created a quandary for the leaders of the new country. How could signatories that declared individual liberty as preeminent nevertheless consign a group of people to be bought and sold as property? These venerated declarations didn't prevent these men from proclaiming African slaves as three-fifths of a person for taxation and political representation in the U.S. Constitution. Current-day calls to abide by the Constitution as it was originally conceived ignore these facts. Should we reinstitute slavery? Count some people as three-fifths of a whole human? Or should some aspects of the Constitution be preserved and others left in the dustbin of history? Race prefigured in the governing of the

country then as it does now.

Ironically, Thomas Jefferson, the primary author of the Declaration of Independence, who penned "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," also supported scientific evidence for biological definitions of difference and inferiority. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson contemplated Blumenbach's hierarchy and suggested the innate inferiority of the black person: "I advance it therefore, as a suspicion only, that blacks ... are inferior to the whites in the endowments of body and mind" (1787/1984: 270). The invoking of the prestige of science to legitimate racial inequalities then, as now, had enormous consequences not the least of which was the condemnation of entire groups.

Race is not the biological distinction it has been believed to be. We share a biological heritage with minuscule genetic differentiation (Gould, 1981). While it is likely that people of similar appearance will reproduce and create other people who share similar characteristics, the idea that this is a natural desire or outcome is not accurate. Rather, geography has had more to do with human reproduction than anything else. Mates were nearly always nearby. In addition, researchers who study the physical characteristics of humans find that people are far more alike physically than they are different. In fact, Joseph Chang (1999), a professor of statistics at Yale University, demonstrated that if you go back about 30 generations, or roughly 750 years, anyone whose children had children is likely to be one of your ancestors with similar genetic characteristics.

What exists as we look back at the historical record is a conflict between the idea that biological differences of race exist with the scientific reality that they don't. W.I. Thomas in his book, *The Child in America*, described the significance of subjective perspectives on reality. He stated, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (1928: 571-572). We call this statement the Thomas Theorem. What this means regarding the concept of race, and its manifestation in the form of racism, is the *idea* that people believe races are real, biological distinctions. The owning, buying, selling and even killing of members of a so-

called race, are legitimized by the legacy of racial categories that have become institutionalized. The consequences of this phenomenon were real for many in the past, and the present has not escaped them either.

## Understanding Race

How do you know who is and isn't a member of a racial group? What do you base it on? How does your membership in a particular racial category determine whether you have health insurance? These are perplexing questions that many of us have. One way in which we get an idea of what this picture looks like is through demographic data. The Census Bureau, a federal government agency, collects data about race, ethnicity and gender from the nation's population through more than 50 surveys. The most complete collection of data is the U.S. Census, last conducted in 2010. In the questionnaire sent to all households, two related questions asked everyone to self-select race and ethnicity. **Race** refers to biological distinctions, phenotypes and/or cultural characteristics that are *believed* to be the basis for the creation of racial groups. What this suggests is a reality created out of a belief system, and reinforced institutionally (more on this later), that humanity is the result of racial groups.

But believing racial groups exist, or tabulating data from surveys, are not reasons why the concept of race is problematic. Rather, it's the subjection of race to a stratification system that gives resource advantages and social preferences to groups at or near the top, and deprivation and depreciation for all others below, that gives race its objectionable character. It is logical to think that members of the dominant group benefitting from such a social arrangement would not object to their privilege, would deny this reality and/or rely on narratives that obfuscate this reality. For example, Robert Jensen (2005) challenges us to think about the implications of racial stratification in our society when he asks, "Can we accept that many white people have worked hard to accomplish things, and that those people's accomplishments were made possible in

part because they were white in a white-supremacist society?" (24).

The federal government keeps track of the nation's racial composition for a number of reasons: to enforce civil rights laws (which also protect women, the disabled and veterans); to develop social service programs; to implement equity decrees handed down by courts; and report racial disparities. The ongoing legacy of racial disparity necessitates these actions. It enables us to consider policies to address racial inequities. You'll see data below that gives us a sense of the impact that race holds in society.

Race is obviously more than just a category on a questionnaire. Often, it shapes our attitudes and beliefs about other people, how we see ourselves, how we behave, and with whom we interact. We learn at a young age how to value people based on observable characteristics such as skin color, eye features, and even the size and shape of noses (Kang & Inzlicht, 2012). Unfortunately, these notions are attached to narrow expectations about how a group member should act or think. This is called **stereotyping**—unfounded behavioral expectations for a category of people. For example, are African Americans predisposed to be entertainers or professional athletes? Expectations are overgeneralized regardless of whether there is anecdotal evidence, instances or personal experience that corroborate these expectations. Is it surprising to see an African American in a position of intellectual authority rather than cutting a joke? Let's look at this example another way. Are you more likely to imagine Asian Americans as scientists rather than as farm workers? Stereotyping presumes that a certain characteristic or expectation is predominant for all members of an identifiable group.

Stereotypes stem from **prejudice**, an adverse opinion that is formed without knowledge or relevant facts about a person or a group. Prejudices may be favorable or negative but are not based on social reality. Rather, people often impute their feelings and attitudes from limited personal experiences. This can lead to the unfair treatment of people based on prejudices, also

known as **discrimination**. Prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory practices may coalesce into **racism**, a belief system that maintains the unequal treatment of a racial group and its members for their alleged inferiority. Discrimination is present at every level of society.

The most commonly understood form of racism is **individual discrimination**, when one person treats another unfairly, and that treatment is attributed to the victim's membership in a **minority group**. Minority group members often have less social power and, consequently, less access to important resources in society than members of the majority group. Acts of discrimination can range from name calling to the denial of a job interview to racially motivated violence. For example, in 1998, two white men in Texas dragged James Byrd to death behind a pickup truck because he was a black man (King, 2002).

A less understood aspect of racism is **institutional discrimination**. This refers to acceptable practices that create opportunities and privilege for some and disadvantage and inequality for the remainder. With institutional discrimination, the way in which society is organized is accepted as normal, and even necessary, while it confers disproportionate benefits to members of the **majority group**—the social group that holds and exercises the most power. Institutional racism is reflected in the successes whites experience and the benefits they possess through such things as wealth accumulation, education opportunities, job security, health care outcomes, court sentencing and media portrayal. Unprejudiced whites may defend traditional institutional arrangements that protect these advantages because that's the way things have been done. Why would we question the success of a portion of the population that followed the rules? Institutional discrimination may be more pervasive and damaging than instances of individual discrimination, yet racism—conscious or unconscious—may prevent institutional practices from being altered on a societal level.

Mechanisms that maintain the status quo become apparent when crises erupt. When Hurricane Katrina was moving toward Louisiana in August 2005,



If you saw a "white customers only" sign on a vending machine, how would you react?

Source: image editor

buses were sent to upscale neighborhoods to help the residents leave the area. Transportation was not sent to lower-income districts, where many people did not have the means to leave. A majority of residents in these districts were African American, and many died as a result of the lack of resources directed toward them (Dyson, 2006). The ones who survived experienced irreparable damage to their property and neighborhoods, while the population considered most important was supported with effective safety measures.

The **Jim Crow laws** that existed in our country before the civil rights movement are examples of institutionalized, **legal discrimination**. Upheld by the courts and enforced by police, these laws, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, permitted restaurants, businesses and government agencies to limit or deny services, housing and employment or comparable wages to racial minorities. Additional requirements were written into many states' voting procedures that made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for minority groups to take part in the democratic process. There were even areas in the country where minority group members were not legally permitted to be in public after nightfall, referred to as *sunset laws*. Some

aspects of institutionalized racial **segregation**—the physical separation of individuals or groups from each other—were eliminated in civil rights legislation or court decisions such as the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision in 1954. With the enactment of civil rights laws, gradually all of the states repealed their bans on interracial marriage, although as late as 1999, Alabama still had this law on its books. Nevertheless, policies regulating interracial interaction have persisted. In March 2000, Bob Jones University in South Carolina finally eliminated its ban on interracial dating. Racial intermingling among students was problematic at Wilcox County High School in Georgia until it held its first racially integrated prom in April 2013 (Klein, 2013). These changes speak of slow social progress that recognizes the ever-present destructiveness of race.

## What is Ethnicity?

Another way in which social groups are similarly distinguished is through **ethnicity**—a shared heritage defined by common characteristics such as language, religion, cultural practices and nationality that differentiate one group from other groups. Have you ever wondered why foods with similar ingredients taste different? The comparison between a pasta and an empanada illustrates cultural practices that distinguish ethnic groups. Sometimes we have an assumption about an ethnic group that is not true for all members. For example, Arabs are an ethnic group but differ on religion. They adhere to Christianity, Islam or atheism, for example. Popular media and politicians tend to equate Arabs with Muslims.

The United States is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. The history of ethnicity in the country is telling. Many people considered racially white today were considered ethnic immigrants in the past. Books such as *How the Jews Became White Folk* (Brodin, 1998) or *How the Irish Became White* (Ignatiev, 1996) document this phenomenon. Ethnicity is generally the basis for which groups are later distinguished by race. This is discussed later. **Emigrants**, people

moving from their home country to establish lives in a new one, and Native Americans (despite the federal government’s legacy of trying to exterminate them) are examples of the ethnic diversity in the United States.

Even though the story of the nation as an immigrant country is widely accepted, immigrants’ roles and place in society are still debated. Some think that once a person resides in another country, that person needs to shed his or her cultural traits and adopt the cultural traits of the members of the dominant group. This is called **assimilation**. Another way to view immigrants’ place in the U.S. is to see the country as an **amalgamation**, a collection of various ethnic groups that make up society. In this manner, societal culture evolves in some ways while other aspects remain unchanged. What happens more often than not is immigrants **acculturate**; they incorporate facets of the dominant culture while retaining aspects of their ethnic origin. Over time, the host society displays this intercultural mingling. For example, *Cinco de Mayo* is a Mexican holiday celebrated by non-Mexicans in the United States. In fact, it is a bigger commercial holiday in the U.S. than it is in Mexico!

One current debate about the adaptation of immigrants focuses on language. Language is the means by which socialization occurs. It facilitates communication and affects how we think and perceive the world. English, a unique blend of languages from many cultures, is the primary language in the United States. However, it is not the official language of the country. One of the historical reasons for this comes from the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, signed by the United States and Mexico in 1848, in which Mexico lost half of its territory after a two-year war. The treaty indicated the Spanish language would be respected alongside English. Spanish was so dominant that the state constitution for California was written in Spanish. New Mexico, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona and California were some of the U.S. territories heavily populated by Mexicans, who spoke only Spanish. Even today, more than 50 percent of New Mexico’s population speaks Spanish as a first language. Many U.S. cities have Spanish names—such as Los



What are your views on current immigration laws?

Source: Laura Elizabeth Pohl, Bread for the World

Angeles or El Paso—but have you ever considered that state names such as Nevada is Spanish for snowy and Colorado is Spanish for red? These are legacies of the Mexican origins of the West.

According to the 2011 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, Spanish is spoken by 12.9 percent of all U.S. households, or by roughly 37.6 million people at least 5 years of age. Among those who speak Spanish at home, 44 percent indicate they speak English “very well” (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012b). While our country is improving its ability to speak more than one language, something the people of the world’s leading economies already do, many groups oppose the provision of services and education in another language, Spanish or otherwise. They argue that if a person wants to live in the United States, he or she should learn English. They fear that Euro-American culture in the United States, and by extension American society, will be corrupted if another language becomes too common (Chavez, 2013). This xenophobic fear was expressed over 100 years ago against German Americans when German was the most prevalent foreign language. Yet, this experience didn’t turn German Americans against the U.S. during WWI and WWII (Adams, 1990). It is perplexing to think that delimiting the use of

language to one is necessary when science tells us that knowing more than one language increases a person’s quality of life and their life expectancy, stave’s off dementia, and improves social relations and the well-being of a society (Bialystock et al., 2012; Diamond, 2010; Marcos, 1998; Merritt, 2013). In general, knowing another language increases communication, reduces misconception and informs people of each other.

Anxieties over language are connected to the issue of undocumented immigration. In April 2010, Arizona passed Senate Bill 1070, a law permitting police officers to stop anyone suspected of being an undocumented immigrant and request documentation to prove his or her legal status. If a person fails to do so, he or she will be arrested and possibly deported. There was a large outcry against this law as it allows legal discrimination against residents and citizens who may share similar physical characteristics as suspected undocumented immigrants, an act known as **racial profiling**. Yet the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2012 upheld the provision permitting Arizona police to check the immigration status of those they perceive as undocumented immigrants, regardless of whether the person in question is suspected of violating a traffic law (Savage, 2012). As this section points out, factors that identify ethnicity are inseparable from the concept of race.

## A Glimpse into Minority Groups

The experiences and characteristics of minorities differ along racial and ethnic lines. Their stories are comparable yet their experiences are distinct, as are the labels that identify them. For example, when immigrants from Italy settled in the United States, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were bewildered at being referred to as Italians or, much later, Italian Americans. In Italy, however, their identity was regionally specific: Sicilians, Romans, Venetians, etc. That’s how they identified themselves. Yet, like many immigrant groups before and after, they struggled as they coped with the unwelcome force of race thrust upon them. They were bombarded with racial epithets very similarly to the ways in

which African Americans are.

Every racial or ethnic group also has differences within it. The members of these groups even differ on what to refer to themselves and who should and shouldn't be included. The following snapshots present facts and figures about the levels of various groups' inequality as a result of their minority status. The indices reflect aspects of inequality that challenge us to consider just how hard it is to be a minority group member in U.S. society. As always, individual exceptions to the rule exist. As a budding sociologist, in what ways can you explain these group outcomes? What policies maintain inequalities? How are they experienced?

### Native Americans

The stereotype of indigenous Americans as head-dress-wearing, horseback-riding, buffalo-chasing hunters is so ingrained that it leaves little room to imagine their actual diversity (Strickland, 1997). Before Christopher Columbus called the people who greeted his landing party *Indians*, this population was, as it still is, vast and varied in culture. Each tribe has a distinct and rich heritage. American Indians are, in fact, the first group in America to be racially tagged and subjugated to extreme and harsh treatment based on that identity. Albert Memmi, an author and scholar whose work focused on the social effects of colonization, wrote that it is necessary for colonized people to be dehumanized by their oppressors and their history rewritten so that conquest may be complete (1965). In Columbus' diary (1492), he made the following observations:

It appears to me that the people [of the New World] are ingenious and would be good servants... These people are very unskilled in arms... With fifty men they could all be subjected to do all that one wishes.

The 2010 Census tells us that there are approximately 5.2 million people, or 1.7 percent of the population, who identify with an American Indian and/or Alaska Native tribe. There are more than 800 tribes, and nearly 70 percent are federally recognized. Seventy-eight percent of Native Americans live outside reservations or rancherias.

According to the Census, the cities with the largest populations of Native Americans, in order, are New York City, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Oklahoma City, Anchorage, Tulsa, Albuquerque, Chicago, Houston and San Antonio (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010).

There are 566 federally recognized reservations and lands held in trust in 33 states. This is only about 2 percent of the land in the country. European settlers, and then the federal government, confiscated nearly all the land originally inhabited by indigenous people through force, deception and legal trickery. Much of this land was turned over for homestead lots and private business development in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tribes were pushed onto reservations, often on lands they hadn't inhabited. Native American reservations are highly regulated by the federal government, and residents are controlled more than any other group of people in the country except the military. Tribal leaders are consulted regarding the affairs of reservations, but many decisions are still made at the federal government level, especially the decision that defines who is recognized as a legal *Indian* or not (Wilkins, 2004).

Native Americans have the highest levels of poverty of any racial-ethnic group in the country. Centuries-long discrimination has prevented wealth accumulation. Reservations are often highly undeveloped economically and lack adequate resources for education and employment. Unemployment on and near reservations averages 49 percent. Thus, many are dependent on public and private social welfare programs. Approximately 47 percent of all Native Americans live at or below the poverty level (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2005; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010).

The introduction of casino gambling on reservations has resulted in a higher standard of living for some Native American tribes. Some casinos have seen enormous success, such as the Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. Proceeds from casinos are shared with tribal members. For example, these returns have been used to build a support system for members of the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe, including a tribal police force and court system, a Montessori school

and tribal college, and a social services bureau. However, gaming chiefly benefits the management companies that run these operations and a small percentage of Native Americans who live where gambling profits are high. These gains do not elevate the Native Americans' overall standard of living to the American median (Barlett & Steele, 2002; Sahagun, 2004).

### African Americans

People of African descent have been present in the Americas since the earliest years of European colonization. However, African "emigration" was forced through kidnapping and bondage, and was not by choice. The struggle for social, educational and economic equality for African Americans has framed the history of our country since its beginning. It translated into the opportunity structures and maintenance of power for whites.

The Census Bureau estimates that there are over 42.5 million African Americans, or 13.7 percent, in the United States. They make up the second-largest minority population; Latinos the largest. The South continues to be the region with the highest proportion of African Americans (20 percent). The 10 states with the largest black populations in 2010—New York, Florida, Texas, Georgia, California, North Carolina, Illinois, Maryland, Virginia and Michigan—represented 58 percent of the country's total black population. Louisiana is no longer in the top 10 as a result of the Hurricane Katrina disaster in 2005. Of the 10 largest U.S. cities with a population of 100,000 or more, Detroit, Michigan, has the largest proportion of blacks (84 percent) followed by Jackson, Mississippi, with 80 percent (Office of Minority Health, 2010; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012b).

Education is a resource that affects quality of life, and blacks are less likely than whites to have an education. By 2011, 83 percent of African Americans, compared to 91 percent of whites, had attained at least a high school diploma. In terms of higher education, the disparity is greater: Approximately 51 percent of African Americans had some college education compared with 62 percent of whites. The lack of educational attainment

combined with discrimination contributes to high unemployment. A study found that black males *without* a criminal record are less likely to receive a callback from an employment application than are whites *with* a criminal record. As a result, African American unemployment is generally twice as high as the national rate in any given year (Pager, 2003; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012b).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median African American family income was \$40,140, or 57.6 percent, compared with \$69,715 for non-Latino white families. Approximately 28.1 percent of blacks were at or below the poverty level compared to 10.9 percent of non-Hispanic whites. The unemployment of black males and females is double that of their white counterparts (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012b).

Income is one resource that affects quality of life; wealth is another. Wealth is generally transferred across generations affecting the long-term quality of life for multiple generations. Wealth is the accumulated sum of assets minus the sum of debt. The median wealth of African American households is 20 times *less* than that of whites. Between 2005 and 2009, inflation-adjusted black wealth fell 53 percent in comparison to 16 percent for white households. Moreover, 35 percent of black households had zero or negative wealth (i.e., debt) compared with 15 percent for whites. Wealth, for example, can provide collateral for borrowing, give family members a way to move up or stay out of poverty, and can help avoid a vicious cycle of debt (Pew Research Center, 2011).

In 2011, 17.7 percent of African Americans, compared with 10.7 percent of non-Hispanic whites, did not have health insurance. Of those who were covered, 50.3 percent of African Americans depended on private health insurance, compared with 69.8 percent for non-Hispanic whites. When it came to publicly funded health insurance, 39.9 percent of African Americans, compared with 29.1 percent of non-Hispanic whites, relied on it (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012b).

Racism is a fundamental cause of health disparities. The physiological and mental reactions to racism, as for all stressors, are detrimental to

racial minorities. Stress responses to racism are demonstrated to be related to hypertension, heart disease, mental health and other negative states of health. A report from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies placed stress from racism as the underlying factor of causes related to high infant mortality and detrimental pregnancy outcomes of African Americans (Jackson, 2007).

A recent study on the state of national health found that the death rate from 11 of the leading causes of death is 21 percent higher for African Americans than the national average. Blacks have significantly higher rates of death from heart disease (24 percent), diabetes (52 percent), HIV (89 percent) and homicide (82.5 percent) compared with whites. African Americans are 11.4 percent more likely to experience hypertension without getting it treated, and 40.7 percent more likely to visit the emergency room compared with whites. Consequently, the life expectancy of African Americans is five years less than that of whites (National Center for Health Statistics, 2011).

## Latinos

Latinos in the United States are a heterogeneous population of minority and immigrant groups. According to the 2010 Census, they number 50.4 million people, or 16.3 percent of the U.S. population, making them the largest racial-ethnic minority. The vast majority are of Mexican extraction (63 percent), followed by Puerto Ricans (9.1 percent), Cubans (3.5 percent), Salvadorans (3.2 percent), Dominicans (2.8 percent) and other Central and South Americans. Not only do they not all speak Spanish, the dialects they speak are as different as the food in their diets. Furthermore, they prefer to identify themselves by their nationality than with pan-ethnic labels such as Latino or Hispanic (Taylor et al., 2012; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010).

Latinos are expected to number 132.7 million, or 30.2 percent, by 2050 when 53.7 percent of the national population will have racial-ethnic minority backgrounds. According to this projection, Latinos will continue to be the largest racial-ethnic group in the nation (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2009).

According to the 2010 Census, 61 percent of

Latinos age 25 and older had at least a high school diploma, and 12.6 percent possessed a bachelor's degree or higher; 1.1 million Latinos 25 years and older have advanced degrees (e.g., master's, professional, doctoral). In 2008, 12 percent of full-time college students were Latino. Despite these gains, Latinos had the highest high school dropout rate in 2010 at 17.6 percent. "Some 41 percent of Hispanics ages 20 and older in the United States do not have a regular high school diploma, versus 23 percent of comparably aged blacks and 14 percent of whites" (Fry, 2010: 1; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010b).

According to the Census Bureau, 26.7 percent of Latinos, compared with 16.5 percent of whites, work in service-level occupations, while 19.2 percent of Latinos work in managerial or professional occupations compared with 37.7 percent of whites. Consequently, wage incomes are significantly less. Among full-time year-round workers, the median income for Latino families was \$40,982, compared with \$69,715 for non-Latino whites. This means Latino households earn 59 cents for every dollar non-Latino white families earn. The Census Bureau reports that 25.8 percent of Latinos live at or below the poverty level compared to 11 percent of non-Latino whites (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012b).

The median wealth of Latino households is 18 times *less* than whites. Latino households have a median wealth of \$6,325 compared with \$113,149 for non-Latino whites. Between 2005 and 2009, inflation-adjusted Latino wealth fell 66 percent in comparison to just 16 percent for white households. Moreover, 31 percent of Latino households had zero or negative wealth (i.e., debt) compared with 15 percent for whites (Pew Research Center, 2011).

Latinos have the highest uninsured rates of any racial-ethnic group. In 2010, 30.7 percent did not have health insurance coverage. Health disparities are a complex phenomenon, but the combination of discrimination in employment, low-wage work and lower levels of education contributes to it. For example, 14.2 percent of Puerto Ricans—higher than whites and African Americans—have asthma compared with 7.8 percent of the general

population. Latinos have an HIV infection rate that is 205 percent higher than that of whites. Latinos have the second highest rate of diabetes at 10.7 percent, 26.2 percent higher than the national average (Center for Disease Control, 2011; Office of Minority Health, 2010).

While Latinos have high indices in some areas of health disparities, they nevertheless have a higher than average life expectancy of 77.7 years. They have a lower mortality rate from chronic diseases than whites. They are less likely to smoke and drink alcohol excessively than whites. These differences are owed in large part to the fact that 41 percent of Latinos are foreign-born immigrants who bring healthy lifestyles with them. However, as Latino immigrants acculturate to U.S. society, they adopt the unhealthy diet and behavioral patterns of the dominant culture. The longer they live in U.S. society, the higher their consumption of processed foods and alcohol and their use of cigarettes, with a decrease in fiber consumption (Fry, 2010; National Center for Health Statistics, 2011; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010).

## Arab Americans

Prior to the World Trade Center attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, the U.S. Arab population received little attention from the rest of the country. It is a heterogeneous population from about 22 countries in Africa and Asia. Worldwide, the majority adheres to Islam and—as with Christians—there are many sects that emphasize certain aspects of their teachings while deemphasizing others. However, in the U.S., most Arab Americans are Christian. Arab Muslims make up about one-fourth of all Muslims in the world. An unfortunate consequence of the 9/11 attacks was the conflation of Arab Americans and Muslims. Racism begets a rigid belief system that homogenizes a targeted group. In the case of Arab Americans, the racism net lumped them with Muslim extremists and non-Arabs and non-Muslims such as Sikhs (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2009; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2011).

Arab Americans live in all 50 states. At least 3.5 million Americans are of Arab descent, with 94 percent concentrated in the Los Angeles, Detroit, New York/New Jersey, Chicago and Washington,

D.C., metropolitan areas.<sup>1</sup> Some 89 percent of Arab Americans age 25 or older have at least a high school diploma. Forty-five percent have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 27 percent of all Americans. Furthermore, 18 percent have a post-graduate degree, which is nearly twice the U.S. average of 10 percent (Arab American Institute Foundation, 2013).

Of working Arab Americans, 73 percent are employed in professional, managerial, technical, sales or administrative fields. Fourteen percent are employed in service jobs compared to 17 percent nationally. Most Arab Americans work in the private sector (88 percent), though 12 percent are government employees (Arab American Institute Foundation, 2013).

The median income for Arab American households in 2008 was \$56,331 compared with \$51,369 for all households in the United States. Mean individual income is 27 percent higher than the national average; 13.7 percent of Arab Americans live below the poverty line, though the figure increases to more than 28 percent for single mothers (Arab American Institute Foundation, 2013).

Roughly two-thirds of Arab Americans are Christian. About 25 percent of Muslims worldwide are Arabs. Religious practices that direct personal behavior—including the five-times-daily prayers, month long fast at Ramadan, beards for men and the wearing of the *hijab* (head cover) for women—

<sup>1</sup> The Census Bureau asks only for ancestry on the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS is distributed to 250,000 households on a monthly basis. A household participates every six months for up to one year and a half. The ancestry question is open-ended, meaning the respondent self-identifies. The Arab American Institute and demographers estimate an undercount by a factor of three for several reasons, including: distinguishing the ancestry question apart from the race and ethnicity questions; "the effect of the sample methodology on small, unevenly distributed ethnic groups; high levels of out-marriage among the third and fourth generations; distrust/misunderstanding of government surveys among more recent immigrants, resulting in non-response by some; and the exclusion of certain subgroups from Arabic-speaking countries, such as the Somali and Sudanese, from the Arab category. It is estimated that the actual population, adjusting for underreporting, is around 5.1 million" (Arab American Institute, 2012).

make Muslims more visible than most religious minorities and thus more vulnerable to bigotry. As the narrator for the documentary *Reel Bad Arabs* (2006) says, “Arabs are the most maligned group in the history of Hollywood.... [W]e’ve unlearned many of our prejudices against blacks, Native Americans, Jews, other groups. Why can’t we unlearn our prejudices against Arabs and Muslims?” (Media Education Foundation, 2006; Samhan, 2001).

## Asian Americans

Asian Americans are a heterogeneous group that includes long-standing minority and immigrant groups from China, India, Japan, Burma, Vietnam, the Philippines and other nations in Asia. The ethnic groups are diverse in language and culture. A majority (59 percent) were born outside the United States. In many ways, it is incorrect to identify them as an ethnic group because they are as different as they come. The Census Bureau estimates 15 million Americans, or 4.8 percent, are of Asian heritage. Since 2000, Asian American population grew by 43.3 percent. California has the largest population (4.9 million), and Hawaii is the state where Asians make up the highest proportion (38.1 percent) of the population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012b).

A common stereotype about Asian Americans is that they are a model minority group that has “made it,” unlike other non-whites. This is a case of racialized deception. Students of Asian descent who do well in school, like any other group, correlate with the income and education level of their parents. For example, “most of the nation’s Hmong and Cambodian adults have never finished high school” (Lewin, 2008).

The increases of Asian Americans in higher education parallel those of African Americans and Latinos. Contrary to stereotype, most Asian American students receive bachelor’s degrees in business, management, social sciences or humanities, not in the science, technology, engineering or math fields. The Census Bureau reports that 50 percent of Asian Americans age 25 and over have a bachelor’s degree or higher. Yet, 14.8 percent of Asian American adults do not have a high school diploma or equivalent. More

than 2.5 million do not have health insurance, and 12.9 percent live at or below the poverty line. Nevertheless, the median income of Asian American households is 18.9 percent *higher* than it is for whites (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012b).

However, the image of a model minority group does not protect Asian Americans from either prejudice or violence. Hate crimes are not uncommon, and these increased following 9/11. A 2002 report by the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium documented these crimes. “A Pakistani American family in Heber City, Utah, had their motel business set on fire.... The family stated that they had been receiving telephone threats from an anonymous person for about a year, warning them that they did not belong and to get out” (National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, 2002).

Many people today equate Asian products with inferior quality. “Made in China” is perceived as an indicator of poor quality and cheap labor, even in the face of trade policies by Congress over decades that encouraged U.S.-based corporations to move their production overseas! Economic globalization does little to stem racialized ignorance of products or people.

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## Whither Race and Ethnicity?

In 1903, the great sociologist W.E.B. DuBois foretold, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.” Enlightened perspectives on racism emerged as the last century unfolded. One of the insights that came to light was how race and ethnicity intersect. To begin with, race is imposed whereas ethnicity is a phenomenon that can be imposed or chosen. While race tends to be associated with biological origins, ethnicity refers to the cultural practices that distinguish one group from another. Both constructs define how we see ourselves, yet ethnic identity can be manipulated, if not discarded altogether. Thus, race and ethnicity are potent forces that shape social boundaries. These membership boundaries, imposed or selected, transform over time.

How we understand race relations changes

as the racial and ethnic composition of social organizations, from small units like families to large units like a society, also changes. Consequently, society creates and transforms racial categories over time. Sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant call this phenomenon **racial formation** (1994). Groups previously defined by their ethnicity are racialized. For example, Native American Indians are a diverse group of ethnicities. Many of the tribes speak languages unrelated to each other, practice different traditions and engage in unique forms of religious worship. Yet they are racialized by society as though they were one group with the same cultural background and traditions (Strickland, 1997).

The basis for understanding the fluidity of racial categorization—who is racially superior, who is racially inferior—is premised on ethnic stratification. Similar to the example above, Caribbean immigrants of African descent have distinct dialects and cultural practices, yet they are racially tagged as African Americans in the United States. They endure much of the prejudicial stereotyping and discriminatory acts meted against African Americans. Thus, they constitute a **racial-ethnic group**, a socially subordinate group that is culturally distinct.

Race or ethnicity, like other social structures such as gender, sexual orientation, disability and social class, are ranked in terms of their social value, known as **social stratification**. Historically, whites and cultural traditions attributed to whites have been valued at the top while others are tolerated, marginalized, ignored or demeaned. Whites and *American culture* are the ideal to which other ethnic groups and subcultures are compared. The combination of racism and **ethnocentrism**, the belief that one’s culture is superior and other **ethnic groups** or nations are inferior, reinforces social stratification.

Race and ethnicity coexist alongside other social structures. We tend to discuss them in isolation as though they are not interrelated. In reality, they are interdependent with many others. To illustrate, racism coexists with gender and social class. We can perceive these dependencies as relational circles that

overlap. Each circle represents a social structure, and the overlapping areas are where combined forms of inequality are reinforced. The mutual dependencies expand and contract, but they are ever present. While members of a racial minority may experience general deprivation, the ethnic, gender and social class differences within the racial group often lead to distinct experiences of social inequality.

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## Sociology and the Study of Race and Ethnicity

Sociology—the systematic study of social behavior and organization—is an ideal platform from which to consider the problems connected with race and ethnicity. Indeed, the study of race and race relations has long been a focus of the discipline. The three major schools of thought, or paradigms, in sociology—structural functionalism, conflict and symbolic interactionism—are frameworks that explain how race-ethnicity and society intersect. As you read along, think about which of these makes sense to you. If one seems more relevant, does that invalidate the others? What theory or theories could you draw from each of these paradigms?

### Structural Functionalist Paradigm

The structural functionalist paradigm refers to how a social system of interdependent parts maintains order. All parts of society have a purpose, even those that may be perceived as undesirable, to maintain consistency and stability in its structure. How can we understand the persistence of race in a functionally positive way when we usually think about its negative consequences?

We first recognize that the resources that exist in our society do, in fact, benefit the dominant group—whites. The legacy of Euro-American history and Western industrialization has maintained the existence of racism. Racism functions in many ways, including:

1. Racist ideologies of superiority that justify maintaining a society that favors the idealized, majority group.

2. Discouraging, if not limiting, subordinate groups from collectively challenging the status of the majority group for fear of reprisal.
3. Racialized institutions that reinforce the sense of identity; that is, who is part of the “in-group” and who is the “out-group.”
4. A sense of entitlement and gains from privilege that deter members of the majority group from altering the status quo that maintains their advantage.

Dysfunctional conflicts also prefigure in this paradigm. They tend to focus on the experiences of subordinate groups. From this perspective, adjustments that address aspects of the dysfunctions may be made in order to restore social stability. However, dysfunctions are generally tolerated as long as sustained protest is absent. Ways in which racism is dysfunctional for society include:

1. The talents and skills of the members of the subordinate group are underutilized, causing a loss to society. Those that are utilized by society are exploited.
2. How discrimination compounds other social problems in society.
3. The role that racial prejudice has in intercultural communication.
4. The ways in which racial antagonism interferes with policies intended to benefit everyone, not just a favored population.

Structural functionalism does not attempt to define a moral ground or determine which attitudes are good or bad. The structural functionalist paradigm simply describes what exists in a society. It is up to members of the society to determine their ethical foundations.

### Conflict Paradigm

Much of Karl Marx’s writings, which later developed into what is known as conflict theory, was about social inequality. He recognized the abuse of workers during the expansion of capitalism known as industrialization. He argued capitalism would implode and cease to exist after workers realized the dynamics related to their exploitation and revolt. As multiple theories emerged from this

paradigm, concepts such as social class and racial inequality were examined in a combined form as a primary topic of research.

The central idea of the conflict paradigm is that social change comes about from the conflict generated in a capitalistic society that divides and conquers. The constant struggle for power and the ensuing conflict over resources make this theory a device for examining and understanding race relations. Conflict theorists explain that competition for control of resources in society results in social discord. Within a racialized lens, conflict theorists ask this question: Who benefits, who loses?

This perspective works quite well to explain the ongoing tension between whites and racial minority groups. Many whites in positions of power reinforce racial inequalities by favoring other whites while exploiting and discriminating against non-whites. Assimilation is not perceived as a desirable condition or readily available option for non-whites because of the persistence of racism. Non-whites are asked to sacrifice their heritage for the cultural practices of dominant society. In the 1980s and 90s, many states passed English-only laws to reinforce the cultural dominance of English. This movement was born from anxiety that American society was deteriorating culturally by the presence of foreign-speaking immigrants.

### Symbolic Interaction Paradigm

Symbolic interaction refers to a perspective in which people understand, interpret, and create social reality with symbols consisting of images, spoken language, expressions, body language and appearances. Norms, rules and expectations influence the interpretation of symbols used to communicate a shared understanding. This paradigm holds that racism is an expression of symbols that reflect a reality. The exchange of these symbols through social interaction reproduces racial prejudices. Thus, racial inequality is the outcome of dominant group members sharing their prejudices among one another and distributing them through the institutions they dominate. Anti-racists point out how these symbols distort our perceptions of racial minorities. People rely on these symbols to make determinations about how they feel, and

act, toward racial group members. For example, studies show that entertainment media’s emphasis on comedic performances by African Americans not only stereotypes these performers but also socializes dominant group members to prefer these types of representations over others. The media are a source for many of the studies that employ symbolic interactionism (Ford, 1997).

Symbolic interactionism also examines how people learn to become members of their culture, dominant or not. From this perspective, one can see that existing prejudices and stereotypes can be perpetuated simply by socializing the next generation into that belief structure. A study by the University of Toronto concluded that young children are more likely to trust their parents’ prejudices about groups than their own experiences with these racial groups (Kang & Inzlicht, 2012). Socialization is continuous throughout one’s lifetime. The reality that results significantly affects the lives of all. The ideas individuals hold to be true reflect how they interpret symbols, including those related to racial inequality. The effects of racialized socialization vary depending on one’s racial, gender and class identities. Structural functionalist and conflict paradigms focus on society, while symbolic interactionism examines it at the micro, individual level.

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### Life Chances for Minorities

In every aspect of life, such as education, income and health, disparities between the life circumstances of whites and non-whites are noticeable when we examine statistics. As shown earlier, the **life chances**—the ability to experience the opportunities and corresponding resources held by a society—experienced by racial minorities illustrate racial inequality.

One of the most significant resources for having a quality life is health care. The United States, unlike the other leading economies of the world, does not have a universal health care system. The recently passed Affordable Health Care Act (ACA) in 2010 will cover most, but not all, of the 47 million people uninsured at the time of its passage. People

must either work for an employer that provides coverage as a benefit, qualify for the government-funded Medicare or Medicaid programs, purchase a private plan through the ACA, or pay a fine to opt out of health insurance and hope to avoid serious health problems or injuries. Many people cannot afford individual health insurance, including many plans that have low monthly fees but have high deductibles (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2013).

Minority and immigrant populations are most affected by increases in medical care. Racial minorities comprise 55.2 percent of the uninsured, even though these groups are only 36.7 percent of the U.S. population. They are more likely to be locked in low-wage jobs that do not provide health insurance benefits. In some cases, health insurance is offered, but the high deductibles and/or employees’ low wages make it difficult for them to afford the monthly premiums. Often, non-whites work in part-time or temporary jobs and are three to four times as likely to be unemployed as Euro-Americans. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 10.7 percent of non-Latino whites, 17.7 percent of blacks, 30.7 percent of Latinos, 27.3 percent of Native Americans, 16.6 percent of Asians, and 18.5 percent of Pacific Islanders had no health insurance (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012b). The ACA has three levels of coverage determined by costs. The resource inequalities that disproportionately impact racial minorities such as employment status, professional advancement, job security/tenure, wealth accumulation, transportation mobility and housing may have adverse effects on the quality of health care minorities receive under the ACA.

A mistaken yet commonly held belief is that everyone has access to a good education and can secure a solid career if he or she chooses. But when we examine education rates, we see a startling picture. Some 8.9 percent of whites do not have a high school diploma, while 39 percent of Latinos, 17 percent of African Americans, 15 percent of Asian Americans and 18.8 percent of Native Americans do not. The disparities in educational attainment repeat themselves at the post-secondary level as well. In 2011, 64.6 percent of Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders age 25 years and





Why do you think there is such a wide disparity in high school graduation rates?

Latino. This does not match with the workforce rate of 10.8 percent African American and 14.3 percent Latino. In other words, blacks and Latinos are more likely to work in low-end, service-oriented jobs where career advancement and income gains are non-existent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012b).

Housing is also a major area in which systemic racial discrimination persists. For example, Patricia Williams, a law professor at Columbia University in New York City, decided to buy a house in

the mid-1990s. She researched available options and chose a home in her price range in a good neighborhood. She had an excellent credit history. This, combined with her prestigious position, allowed her to obtain a mortgage with a phone call.

When the mortgage forms arrived in the mail, she noticed that the bank had identified her race as white. She corrected this error, checked the African American box and returned the signed forms to the bank. Immediately the bank wanted more money and increased her lending rates. The professor threatened to sue and the bank backed down, telling the professor that it was concerned with falling property values in that neighborhood.

This puzzled her. She had done her research and found no issues in the neighborhood. Then she realized that her *blackness* was the reason values might fall (Williams, 1997). Reports about the impact of the recent housing bubble revealed that that African Americans and Latinos were targeted by mortgage lenders in a reverse form of red-lining. They were steered into housing loans that charged them higher fees and interest rates compared to those for white applicants with similar credit ratings. Latino applicants who qualified for a regular loan were 1.8 times more likely than their white counterparts to be maneuvered into a subprime loan.

higher had a bachelor's degree or higher, followed by 31.9 percent of whites, 18.4 percent of African Americans, 13.8 percent of Native Americans, and 13.2 percent Latinos (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012b).

The reasons for not finishing high school or attaining a postsecondary education are multifaceted. The interplay of structural, political, economic and cultural factors above and beyond individual capacity is involved. Also, minority students often face an adversarial environment in school. Their culture is devalued in the curriculum, and students with non-conventional names (unlike Mary, John, Bill, etc.) may be the object of ridicule on the playground. Racial minorities are more likely to get punished and receive harsher punishments than their white counterparts by school administrators (Hefling, 2014). The burden of model behavior is hoisted on the individual minority student. It overlooks the institutional impediments as well as social forces that limit, if not destroy, social mobility.

Educational attainment correlates with work and income. Careers and positions that require more education, and pay higher salaries, are generally occupied by whites. In 2010, only 7.7 percent of executive and managerial professionals were African American, and only 8.2 percent were

## Ten Things Everyone Should Know About Race

1. *Race is a modern invention.* Ancient societies, like the Greeks, divided people not according to physical differences but to religion, status, class or even language. The English word “race” turns up for the first time in a 1508 poem by William Dunbar referring to a line of kings.
2. *Race has no genetic basis.* Not one characteristic, trait or even gene distinguishes all the members of one so-called race from all the members of another so-called race.
3. *Human subspecies don't exist.* Unlike many animals, modern humans simply haven't been around long enough, nor have populations been isolated enough, to evolve into separate subspecies or races. On average, only one of every thousand of the nucleotides that make up our DNA differs from one human to another. Humans are one of the most genetically similar of all species.
4. *Skin color is only skin deep.* The genes for skin color have nothing to do with genes for hair form, eye shape, blood type, musical talent, athletic ability or forms of intelligence. Knowing someone's skin color doesn't necessarily tell you anything else about him or her.
5. *Most variation is within, not between, “races.”* Of the small amount of total human variation, 85 percent exists within any local population. About 94 percent can be found within any continent. That means, for example, that two random Koreans may be as genetically different as a Korean and an Italian.
6. *Slavery predates race.* Throughout much of human history, societies have enslaved others. But it was often as a result of conquest or debt, not because of physical characteristics or a belief in natural inferiority. Because of a unique set of historical circumstances, North America had the first slave system where all slaves shared a common appearance and ancestry.
7. *Race and freedom were born together.* The United States was founded on the principle that “All men are created equal,” but the country's early economy was based largely on slavery. The new idea of race helped explain why some people could be denied the rights and freedoms that others took for granted.
8. *Race justified social inequalities as natural.* The “common sense” belief in white superiority justified anti-democratic action and policies such as slavery, the extermination of American Indians, the exclusion of Asian immigrants, the taking of Mexican lands and the institutionalization of racial practices within American government, laws and society.
9. *Race isn't biological, but racism is still real.* Race is a powerful social idea that gives people different access to opportunities and resources. The government and social institutions of the United States have created advantages that disproportionately channel wealth, power and resources to white people. This affects everyone, whether we are aware of it or not.
10. *Colorblindness will not end racism.* Pretending race doesn't exist is not the same as creating equality.

Source: Independent Television Service [www.itvs.org](http://www.itvs.org)

Even during the recovery phase of the recent Great Recession, black and Latino mortgage applicants are being denied home loans at higher rates than whites (Reuters, 2013; Savage, 2012).

## The Persistence of Race

The impact of racism has existed in our society long enough for many to understand that it is unacceptable to publicly ridicule, utter racial epithets at or physically harm people on the basis of their race or ethnicity. These practices at the personal level are not as commonplace, but not necessarily because upstanding, moral people decided to change their belief systems. Rather, it took the sacrifices, and sometimes lives, of many people of color and their allies to challenge the social systems that maintained racial inequalities. Indeed, only about 5 percent of the population during the 50s and 60s took part in the civil rights movement, and it changed the course of history (Dyson, 2000). Much social change can be attributed to that 5 percent. After all, we can point to the proliferation of high-profile racial minorities in many areas of society including U.S. President Barack Obama, a bi-racial American.

Does the fact that lynching is no longer commonplace, that many non-whites are in professions that previously excluded them or that interracial relationships are expanding mean that racism is a thing of the past? Are we living a color-blind era in the United States? If we relied on public opinion polls to make sense of reality, we might conclude things are quite satisfactory. In a 2008 Gallup poll, 60 percent of whites believed racial minorities have equal job opportunities, 65 percent thought racial discrimination against African Americans is a minor problem or none at all, and 81 percent had great or a fair amount of confidence that the police treat blacks and whites equally. One study of white college students found that they believe the socioeconomic playing field is now level for all races, especially for African Americans (Gallagher, 2004). These are examples of the Thomas Theorem that stand in contrast to the group profiles and statistics illustrating racial inequality described

Source: White House



Do you know people who think racism is dead in the United States because we have a bi-racial president?

earlier. In what areas of life have you realized the Thomas Theorem in practice? Below we take a look at two media technologies and a new area in racial studies that decipher the ways in which race persists despite social progress since the civil rights era.

### We Have Moved On: The Quandary of the Color-Blind Era in Talk Radio

Every January, when the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. is recognized, excerpts from his famous 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech are played. The line “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character” is extolled by the media and in U.S. classrooms alike. What is the purpose of repeating this part of King’s speech? Why are other speeches that he gave five years after this not retold?

There is a general consensus that overt white supremacy is a thing of the past. Many of us feel we live in a new era. Civil rights laws made it

illegal to deny housing, employment and public accommodations on the basis of race. This feeling is so widespread that, as the Gallup poll mentioned above indicates, many disconnect the present and the past, when blatant racism was the norm. There is a strong feeling that people in the modern era are not connected with what took place in the past. After all, it wasn’t they who committed, much less witnessed, the brutality of slavery, lynchings or Jim Crow laws. When blatant racism does arise, such as in 2012 when a high school boys basketball team from a white Pittsburgh suburb racially taunted its rivals, who were mostly black, or when a black man in Jasper, Texas, was dragged to death in 1998, it is roundly condemned. The fame of many non-whites, including Oprah Winfrey, Jennifer Lopez or George Takei, underscores a belief that we live in a morally superior period of U.S. history.

Yet, banal expressions of racism persist, such as in radio broadcasting. For example:

- Liberal radio host and comedian Stephanie Miller resurrected racial stereotypes about African Americans’ dialects and sexuality when she said: “When we look back in history, not only will [President Barack Obama] be seen as a great president, we will have had like 20 more black presidents and they will all be progressively blacker until every tea party head in the country explodes and I was hoping for a President Fiddy is all I’m saying, right? Whoot! I hope future State of the Unions start with, S’up, America? Ladies and gentleman, the president of the United States, Ludacris. Yeah, here comes the first lady, she’s the first lady in the bed” (Ann’s Mega Dub, 2013).
- Longtime conservative radio personality Rush Limbaugh said of Native Americans: “Holocaust? Ninety million Indians? Only four million left? They all have casinos—what’s to complain about that?” (Media Matters, 2009). Regarding a speech by Chinese President Hu Jintao to U.S. and China business leaders in Washington D.C., Limbaugh mocked: “Hu Jintao was just going, ‘Ching cha. Ching chang cho chow. Cha Chow. Ching Cho. Chi ba ba

ba. Kwo kwa kwa kee. Cha ga ga. Ching chee chay. Ching zha bo ba. Chang cha. Chang cho chi che. Cha dee. Ooooh chee bada ba. Jee jee cho ba.’ Nobody was translating, but that’s the closest I can get” (Media Matters, 2011).

- In 2010, nationally syndicated radio host Dr. Laura Schlessinger hurled *nigger* at a caller more than 10 times. The caller, who self-identified as black, was asking for advice about how to deal with her neighbor, who utters racially insensitive remarks in her presence, and the caller’s husband who has friendly relations with the neighbor (Holden, 2010).
- In the summer of 2008, radio host Michael Savage reiterated a long-standing stereotype about the criminality of immigrants, who are primarily non-European today, saying: We need to get our troops out of Iraq and put them on the streets of America to protect us from the scourge of illegal immigrants who are running rampant across America, killing our police for sport, raping, murdering like a scythe across America while the liberal psychos are telling us they come here to work (Aronow, 2008).
- The Reagan administration’s secretary of Education turned talk-show host, Bill Bennett, said in 2005, “If you wanted to reduce crime, you could—if that were your sole purpose—you could abort every black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down.” Bennett quickly added that such an idea would be “an impossible, ridiculous and morally reprehensible thing to do.” But, he said, “Your crime rate would go down” (CNN, 2005). According to FBI crime records, the most common average street criminal is a young white male between the ages of 18 and 24 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012).
- Boston radio talk-show host Jay Severin said of Mexicans on his show in 2009: “It’s millions of leeches from a primitive country come here to leech off you and, with it, they are ruining the schools, the hospitals, and a lot of life in America.” Responding to a caller in 2004 about

developing relationships with Muslims, he said: “You think we should befriend them. I think we should kill them” (Abel, 2009).

- The media watchdog organization *Media Matters* (2009b) posted a list of racially charged comments by on-air personalities, including: Jesse Lee Paterson: “I think we all agree that Barack Obama was elected by, mostly by black racists and white guilty people.”
- Nationally syndicated talk-show host Jim Quinn referred to African Americans as “race-baiting... ingrates” who should “get on [their] knees” and “kiss the American dirt” because slavery brought them to the United States.
- Political analyst Pat Buchanan bluntly stated the superiority of whites, claiming “This has been a country built, basically, by white folks.”

These statements were made in an era that many believed was long gone. How are powerfully situated people motivated, and secure enough, to make such unambiguous, racially charged statements?

One way to make sense of this is by understanding the role of **scapegoating**. This concept refers to the singling out of a group or individual for unmerited blame. The legacy of scapegoating immigrants, or the poor, is longstanding in U.S. history (Acuña, 2010). When economic crises occur and large swaths of majority group members lose their financial footing, opportunists exploit this condition, thereby reinforcing the inequality that is at the heart of social problems. It is easier to blame a minority group for social problems than to recognize the structural inequalities that exacerbate these problems or to investigate the members of the power elite whose policies made these conditions possible. It seems easier to blame the victim than it is to challenge the way a society is organized that reproduces inequality.

Racism is one of those features in society that transforms itself. The absence of overt instances of racism is muted in subtle, yet pervasive, forms of

it. One of the more clever forms is racially coded imagery. Let’s look at some instances of this.

- In a 2005 CNN report during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, two contrasting images were displayed: One was of two white men in a boat, filled with supplies who, according to the reporter, were “scavenging for survival materials.” The other image was of some black men leaving a store with various supplies in their arms. The same reporter called these men “looters.”
- In 2011, Newt Gingrich, a candidate for the Republican Party’s presidential nomination said: “It would be great if inner city schools and poor neighborhood schools actually hired the children to do things. ... What if they cleaned out the bathrooms, and what if they mopped the floors?” (References to “inner city” or “urban” are widely agreed to be euphemisms for African Americans.)

The subtlety of institutionalized racism contains an assortment of practices that preserves advantages and power for whites. In nearly every quality-of-life index that is valued in our society—education, employment, income, health care, life expectancy, home ownership and wealth—whites come out ahead. In nearly every index that is feared—criminal conviction, sentencing, mortality, unemployment, debt, health ailments and afflictions—racial minorities suffer disproportionately. The resource inequalities reflected in these quality-of-life indices are meted out institutionally but experienced personally.

### The Internet: A Raceless, Anonymous Vacuum?

Sociologist Jesse Daniels argues that our view of the Internet is stuck in 1994 when this technology came to the surface of society. While concerns about the availability of pornography and depictions of violence have been raised regarding the Internet, the idea that the Internet is a place where racism is nonexistent still persists, especially when we consider that young people, who use the Internet

extensively, harbor less racial animosity than older generations. But the assumption of a raceless Internet utopia is misleading (Daniels, 2012).

The Internet is like any other social conduit. It transmits the reproduction of ideas and knowledge already present. What’s distinct about the Internet in contrast to print and broadcast media is the public’s access to it, and their ability to create content. As a consequence, extremist views have proliferated. The Simon Wiesenthal Center (2009) reports that 10,000 hate-filled websites now exist worldwide, many of which advocate the extermination of minority groups. Furthermore, the potential to create imaginative website names and URLs through the Internet’s layered technology enables white supremacist and hate groups to *cloak* their identities and political agendas. Some white supremacist groups feature Martin Luther King Jr. with duplicitous language supporting their goals such



Have you ever witnessed racial prejudice on the Internet?

that the casual web surfer may become confused about the site’s content (Daniels, 2008).

The expansiveness of the Internet today and its sophisticated visual element play a role in how it mediates racial identity formation. The creation of avatars and representations of idealized racial identities are commonplace (Nakamura, 2009). They reproduce what users racially understand to the extent that stereotypes are normalized. Online video games are environments where racial dynamics are explored by gamers often with racially inflected conversations (Daniels & Lalone, 2012). Are avatars that reflect a human identity a two-dimensional version of robots in the film *Surrogates* (2009)?

Paradoxically, the Internet’s vastness gives many users a sense of disinhibition to disclose ideas or things about themselves that they otherwise wouldn’t in person (Suler, 2004). Examples such as a college student posting a video of her mocking Asians and a federal judge emailing a joke likening President Obama to a dog illustrate how this technology transmits racial prejudices (Adams, 2012, CBS, 2011). Racially offensive communication by users is facilitated by not having to deal in real time or space with a potentially offended person or party. As a result, the Internet can give users a sense of anonymity and invisibility (Suler, 2004). While the Internet is often discussed as a revolutionary technology that solves present-day problems, or will do so in the future, it is yet another avenue that shapes how race is perceived and experienced.

### Racial Privilege: The Inheritance of Advantage and Dominance

When inequality is examined, we focus on its victims. But as Tim Wise points out, “for anyone who is down, someone is above them—and they are above them because they are down” (2008). The nation’s culture, and the running of the country, was structured at its inception by whites for whites. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Native Americans and Africans were not regarded as fully human and were treated accordingly. Over the centuries, various systems were organized to

ensure Euro-American racial advantages. This is called **white privilege**. In general, privilege refers to unearned power (Johnson, 2005). It is inherited and confers benefits not of an individual's choosing, but as a result of how society is organized. The consequences of the *right* birth include social advantages and psychological compensation.

Denial or defensiveness by beneficiaries of privilege is not uncommon. After all, there are social programs and affirmative action policies intended to remedy the inequities that minorities and women experience. It is a misconception that these laws create such favorable outcomes for minority groups and women that white males are now the underprivileged group. Popular radio talk-show host Michael Savage claimed: “[White males] are the new witches being hunted by the illiberal left using the guise of civil rights and fairness to women and whatnot” (Media Matters, 2007). Despite these assertions, nearly every social index indicates that white males are the top beneficiaries of resource benefits. How do we explain the difference between claims of white inequality and evidence proving otherwise?

One of the earliest explanations of white privilege was offered by Peggy McIntosh (1989). She describes it as an “invisible knapsack” that whites carry consisting of “special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks” encoded in laws, resources, images, language, traditions and assumptions of life. McIntosh (1992) listed 46 examples of white privilege including:

- To be taught that people of your race had created a civilized democracy.
- To see yourself widely (and for the most part positively) represented in the media.
- To not be followed when shopping.
- To not be viewed as representing or speaking for your racial group.
- To find greeting cards, dolls and toys depicting people who look like you.

- To not have to protect your children from racism.
- To not be considered a “credit to your race” when you excel.

One could add that there exists a cultural space where you can praise your success as the result of personal effort without facing the stigma that it was government policy that made it possible. Consequently, whites feel “more at home in the world” and “escape [the] penalties or dangers that others suffer” (1992: 72). As Tim Wise, in his book *White Like Me* (2005), states:

To be white not only means that one will typically inherit certain advantages from the past but also means that one will continue to reap the benefits of ongoing racial privilege... (xi)

The ubiquity of whiteness bestows another reality: dominance. What this means is that there is unearned social power in being white. The privilege to ignore or reject that fact that a person has unearned advantage is a form of dominance. This power extends to dismissing, for example, white supremacy as a relic of the past or not taking the grievances or fears of racial minority groups in a serious manner. Dominance confers protection from the severity of social sanctions or penalties that racial minorities are likely to endure. Racial dominance is reinforced with other social structures such as gender and class. The median earnings of white women are lower than those of white males but more than those of disabled white men or black females. Thus, there is individual variation among racially dominant group members. Analysis of any social structure, including race, requires awareness of how it is interrelated with other social structures.

Tim Wise proposes a hypothetical response to grievances of white underprivilege. Suppose a drug exists that renders a white person black; he or she would be black to police officers, to store owners, to loan officers, and to college admissions counselors. If it is true, he argues, that black people have most or all of the privilege and opportunity whites used to have, whites would not only take the pill but demand it. “If being black were such a

## Anti-Racism Strategies

The ubiquity of race, the way in which it's interpreted, its effects in the form of discriminatory racism and the variety of transformations it takes, defy its eradication. Efforts are made by social justice movements, advocates and sympathizers alike. Though these struggles are usually known only to participants, they make a difference. There exist myriad ways take on many centuries of practices that have perpetuated racism. History plays an important role in understanding racism as well what to do about it. Consider the words of 19<sup>th</sup> century abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass on doing what's right regardless of biography:

I have never placed my opposition to slavery on a basis so narrow as my own enslavement, but rather upon the indestructible and unchangeable laws of human nature, every one of which is perpetually and flagrantly violated by the slave system (1969, vi).

Essential Anti-Racism Responses:

- **Assume racism is ever-present:** The privileges as well as inequities of racism in the functioning of society are everywhere. Not having to think about racism, as we do with gravity, does not negate its reality. The cultural manner in which it is reproduced, the political aspect of it in terms of who generally rules and the social outcome from resource distribution all point to its ubiquity. The challenge is in noticing these consequences.
- **Observe how racism is denied, minimized and/or justified:** It is difficult to grasp the extent of racism when the population of our small worlds doesn't pay attention to it. A consequence of this is its obfuscation when it comes to the surface. The challenge is to notice when attention of it is redirected to it.
- **Learn the evolution of white supremacy:** The legacy of white supremacy manifests in a variety of ways. From a historical perspective, we see that it isn't necessarily revealed through hate-mongering behavior. The many forms of white supremacy are intertwined with power and are often subtle in the speech, actions and policies that reproduce white privilege.
- **Understand how race intersects with other social structures:** Race is often compartmentalized when it is discussed, as though it stands apart from other social problems. In reality, race exists from its interdependence with other social structures that shape our lives, including gender, sexuality and social class. This is in part why racism has impact. Oppression Olympics (who has it worst) undermine how racism intersects with other forms of inequality. The challenge is to understand how they overlap when one appears to dominate in a particular situation.
- **Distinguish phenotype and deeds:** Racism is sometimes characterized as an infection that solely affects whites. By extension, it's assumed non-whites are immune from it. Racism is a penetrating force such that people of color can also be misanthropes. Furthermore, many whites have a legacy of anti-racism. The proof is in social justice deeds—not in the shell of the person or rhetoric of an organization.
- **Organize, educate and agitate:** Collective organizing around an event or policy is a cornerstone of anti-racism. Education about the ramifications of race is a social justice pillar. Agitating whether in a micro-environment or public setting is a foundation for social change. Collectively, the three are transformatory<sup>1</sup>.

I often tell students in discussions about affirmative action that equality is like a pendulum. Though we may want it to rest in the center, the pendulum has been tightly held for centuries by the dominant establishment for whites, if not in the distribution of resources then with the intention of psychological comfort. But social justice movements have pulled on it to move in the opposite direction. It is only through that momentum when it cuts across racial divisions that we can reach a balanced medium.

<sup>1</sup>These strategies were developed by the author from a variety of sources including, but not limited to: Kivel 2008; Southern Poverty Law Center 2010 ; and the Los Angeles Direct Action Network (nd).

boon, whites would be *lining up* for a pill like this” (2005: 173). The demand of Sylvester McMonkey McBean’s star-making machine in Dr. Seuss’ *The Sneetches* illustrates this imaginary pill very well. The sneetches without green stars on their bellies are discriminated against until McBean comes along with the ability to implant them. Immediately, these sneetches form a long line in order to gain access to the status and resources of their star-bellied brethren (1961).

In reality, anti-vitiligo drugs that darken skin pigmentation exist. However, there is no demand for this pharmaceutical much less for it to be refined so it blackens skin as much as possible. Why? Because we know that non-whites, and African Americans in particular, are discriminated against; therefore, no one who is not black would want to become so. If anything, the cosmetic industry responds to the demand for beauty products and surgeries that manifest an idealized white aesthetic for lighter skin tone, blond hair, blue or green eye contacts, and a thin body (Media Education Foundation, 2010).

It’s understood, at least implicitly, that white privilege is an advantage. Does this mean that *every* white person enjoys all the social and financial advantages and psychological benefits available in society? Does the success of minority group members mean there is no such thing as white privilege? In the course of this chapter, I have presented a less obvious but more challenging window into the vestiges of race. In the next section, let’s consider the social setting that race is intertwined with.

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## Intersectionality of Race

As mentioned previously, racial issues are generally understood as things that take place in an isolated manner. The high unemployment rates of Native American teenagers or loan discrimination experienced by Latinos are unrelated to the suspicion and doubt institutionalized in the organizations that determine these outcomes. Furthermore, when racial issues are compared with other social structures, the competitive value system in society may lead people to rank these

issues in a form resembling **oppression Olympics**, for example, saying that sexism, not racism, is the most widespread expression of discrimination. Or, that it is worse to be gay than to be old. Oppression Olympics can divert us into a competition for attention, resources, and ideational supremacy. It reinforces social divisions rather than amends them. It allows economic privilege or political power to go unchecked. Yet race depends on other social structures, such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age and social class, for its persistence not in spite of them.

Race, gender and social class are the most well-known forms of oppression. Patricia Hill Collins (2012) describes these as a matrix of domination. Race is stratified in an interlocking structure of domination and subordination with the other forms of oppression. Thus, one’s advantage in a particular environment or historical era is contingent on the disadvantage that others experience. Consequently, the institutional, symbolic, and individual dimensions of oppression simultaneously render disadvantages and privileges. They affect an individual’s life chances and how they respond to the advantages as well as disadvantages presented to them.

The interaction of race with other social structures occurs simultaneously, though not to the same degree. Therefore, not every white person is successful and not every person of a racial minority dies prematurely. Class, for example, explains why there is white poverty. Exploitation in the labor market affects everyone. This explains why there are over 46 million Americans in poverty. But when race is considered along with class factors, we see how these interlocked social structures operate differently. For example, Native Americans are the highest percentage of people living in poverty. The combined effects of race and class hit Native American tribes harder than they do whites when we compare the two. While white poverty exists and includes the highest number of people in poverty and on welfare programs, as a percentage of all whites, this group has the lowest poverty rate when compared it to the percentage rates of other groups.

Let’s look at another example of how race, gender

and class intersect. We know males have social privileges above females that translate into higher rates of success. We know that advanced education can boost mobility whether someone comes from poverty or from a middle-class background. Yet race matters when we acknowledge its existence alongside gender and a class factor like education. Latina college graduates earn less on average than white males with a high school diploma. Shouldn’t advanced education overcome gender inequality? If not, then what could explain the outcome in this example? Is race the most significant factor determining this outcome? Is gender more important? It might be correct to conclude this, but the arguments for race or gender being the most salient factor obscures how race, gender and class operate systematically to interfere with equity and keep the members of society in conflict over resources that are distributed according to the power structure.

What is the point of these illustrations? They are to help you understand that even though social progress has been made since the civil rights era, there is still a great deal of work left to do to change the system. Race and ethnicity interact with other social structures in a patchwork of arrangements and practices that confer advantage and inequality. Responses to this patchwork from social movements have called attention to specific social problems yet can be understood as a collective reaction to the intersection of race, gender and class. Movements tend to draw from each other as well as create alliances for the future. But they all have a lasting effect on society, even if they are criticized or unknown by the citizens of a country.

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## Making a Difference

For many centuries, society has assigned everyone to a racial or ethnic group. Anyone, for example, who had any African ancestry was essentially black—a uniquely American principle of *blood quantum*. According to laws and social convention, a person’s dominant identity was derived from *any* black African ancestry. As recently as 1983, a Louisiana court ruled that a

white woman, Susan Guillory Phipps, had to list the race on her birth certificate as ‘colored,’ to her dismay. Phipps, who was the great-great-great-great-granddaughter of a slave (or 3/32 African), but whose other ancestors were white, was nonetheless an African American, according to the court. As she put it, “I am white. I am all white. I was raised as a white child. I went to white schools. I married white twice” (Ebony, 1983). The social construction of who is and isn’t black, or a member of any other minority group, has important implications for what policies to consider to resolve the institutionalized inequalities that result.

One of the solutions to the problem of institutionalized inequality is affirmative action. It refers to a general policy framework to redress injustices of a historical nature. **Affirmative action** is defined as a policy or program that seeks to rectify past discrimination by increasing opportunities for historically underrepresented groups. The federal government has passed various forms of affirmative action legislation, but the laws that were passed in response to the civil rights movement starting in 1963 are those that stimulate our current debate. Opponents have argued that such policies weaken the opportunity structures already in place.

Critics contend that affirmative action:

- Is reverse discrimination. The white males who lose opportunities have done nothing personally to deserve not being hired, promoted or admitted.
- Is demeaning to minorities and women. Saying that they need extra consideration is the same as saying that they are incapable to begin with. People who receive affirmative action benefits never escape a cloud of suspicion about their abilities.
- Can result in hiring less-qualified people.
- Helps middle-class people of color who are already qualified for hiring or admission; it does little or nothing to help the poor and uneducated.

Advocates of continuing affirmative action say:

- Reverse discrimination is not a social problem. Within the court system, less than 3 percent of the affirmative action cases involved allegations of reverse discrimination against white males, and only 6 percent of these claims were upheld (Bell, 2000: 7).
- Research clearly indicates that racial discrimination in areas such as housing, employment, and education is still widely practiced. The claim that affirmative action is no longer needed is mistaken in its platform.
- Much evidence shows that affirmative action works. It has resulted in the education and hiring of many women (the largest beneficiaries of this policy) and minorities. When the law schools at the University of California and the University of Texas were barred by courts from applying affirmative action guidelines, the percentage of minorities enrolling dropped sharply.

Race is not a permanent or unchangeable construct. The dynamics of race are fluid. Today in the United States, there is increasing support at the federal level to understand the shifting and shaping of race by appreciating multi-racial identity,

as evidenced by the Census 2000 and 2010 forms. Not only are there several race categories to select from, but a person may also check more than one category. In addition, there is space to self-identify a racial or ethnic category of one's choosing. Over 9 million people self-identified a multi-racial background in Census 2010, with black and white being the most prevalent combination. Professional golfer Tiger Woods and President Barack Obama are but two examples of this that have helped elevate awareness of the racial heterogeneity in our society (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010).

The civil rights movement helped the United States move closer to equality in many ways. As with most social change, cultural lag is in full effect. What this means is that significant portions of the population are skeptical, if not hostile, to the idea that social equality is a goal to strive for. It may stem from a disagreement over whether humanity is born with a defect that requires correction or whether it is born good but is socialized to be bad. Regardless, indices of inequality presented in this chapter point to the need for change to occur at every level. It is important to understand social change does not rest primarily in the hands of elected officials or movement leaders. Each of us can work to arrest discrimination that produces inequality.

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## Summary

This chapter asks you to consider different and challenging ways to think about race and ethnicity. What are they? How are they similar? How do they relate to each other? How does race intersect with other social structures? Does technology eviscerate racism or merely transmit what already exists? How does society reconcile the movement toward racial social justice while variations of racism are alive and well? The historical origins and current evidence of the debilitating effects of discrimination are presented here. So is the formidable force that accompanies the symbolic, social and psychological advantages of white privilege. Language that leads to a greater understanding of race can also be used to minimize its reality or make the various ways it operates obscure. The advantage of sociology is that it is circumscribed by concepts, theories and methods that deal exclusively with the social aspect of life.

If you need to rebuild a house to suit a new way of life, you first examine how it is designed, what you want to keep in it, what you want to discard and those things you want to change to improve it. So it is with culture, ideology or institutions. We have things to change if we want a new, and improved, way of life.

Tim Wise has spent his career working to help us understand that. He concludes in his book, *White Like Me* (2005):

I have no idea when, or if, racism will be eradicated. I have no idea whether anything I say, do, or write will make the least bit of difference in the world. But I say it, do it, and write it anyway, because as uncertain as the outcome of our resistance may be, the outcome of our silence and inaction is anything but. We know exactly what will happen if we don't do the work: *nothing*. And given that choice, between certainty and promise, in which territory one finds the measure of our resolve and humanity, I will opt for hope (154).

I intended this chapter to provoke your sociological imagination, which helps us understand the social processes that are bigger than our small-world experiences. It asks questions about the puzzles of life, and it draws out the contradictions that are discomfiting, even disturbing. "While a piece of the oppressor may be planted deep within each of us, we each have the choice of accepting that piece or challenging it as part of the 'true focus of revolutionary change'" (Collins, 2012). Powerful ideas such as race that organize society can be redrawn and rethought simply because they are human creations. The difference is whether we seek it. Frederick Douglass (1855/1969) recognized this when he stated: Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.

## Review/Discussion Questions

1. What are the effects of racial inequality?
2. What is racial privilege and how is it premised on racial inequality?
3. How does institutional discrimination occur?
4. In what ways do the life chances for members of minority groups differ from those of whites?
5. What forms of white privilege can you identify both historically and presently?
6. What examples of acculturation can you identify?
7. How is the history of slavery connected with present-day racial inequality?
8. What are your thoughts on affirmative action?
9. How are affirmative action and racial privilege similar and dissimilar?

## Key Terms

**Acculturate** is to incorporate aspects of the dominant culture while retaining aspects of a group's ethnic origin.

**Affirmative action** is a policy or program that seeks to redress past discrimination by increasing opportunities for underrepresented groups.

**Amalgamation** happens when various cultures combine to create a new culture.

**Assimilation** occurs when a person from a minority cultural group adopts the cultural characteristics of the dominant group while discarding his or her own ethnic traits.

**Discrimination** is differential treatment of people based on superficial characteristics such as skin color or accent.

**Emigrants** are people who leave their home countries and establish citizenship in new countries.

**Ethnic groups** are people with shared cultural heritages that others regard as distinct.

**Ethnicity** is a shared heritage defined by common characteristics such as language, religion, cultural practices and nationality that differentiate it from other groups.

**Ethnocentrism** is the belief that one's culture is superior and that other ethnic groups or nations are inferior. All other cultures and societies are judged according to the standards of the society or culture that one belongs to.

**Individual discrimination** occurs when one person treats another unfairly, and that treatment is based on the person's social status.

**Institutional discrimination** results from society operating in ways that allow certain groups to receive better treatment and opportunities than other groups.

**Jim Crow laws** allowed restaurants and business owners to legally deny services to members of minority groups.

**Legal discrimination** is unequal treatment that is upheld by laws.

**Life chances** are the ability to access the opportunities and resources held by a society.

**Majority group** is the social group that controls power and the resources that derive from this power. Population numbers do not equate to this power.

**Minority group** is a subordinate group whose members have significantly less power, access and use of important resources in society than members of a majority group.

**Oppression Olympics** refers to a "who's had it worse" competition for attention, resources, and ideational supremacy between aggrieved groups or people.

**Prejudice** is an attitude about a person or a group that is not based on social reality.

**Race** is understood as a group of people defined by physical characteristics such as skin color that differentiate members from other groups on that basis.

**Racial-ethnic group** refers to a socially subordinate group that is culturally distinct.

**Racial formation** is how society creates and transforms racial categories over time.

**Racial profiling** is a discriminatory law-enforcement tactic in which racial minorities are targeted.

**Racism** is a set of beliefs used to justify the unfair treatment of a racial group and its members.

**Scapegoating** is the singling out of a group or individual for unmerited blame.

**Segregation** is the physical separation of individuals or groups from each other.

**Social construction** refers to the belief that the ideas that influence and govern social organizations are human inventions.

**Social stratification** is the systematic ranking of categories of people on a scale of social worth, which affects how valued resources are distributed in a society.

**Stereotyping** refers to pre-defined, rigid mental images about how a person or group should act or think, held to be true regardless of whether there is evidence or data disproving these images. They may be positive or negative.

**White privilege** refers to cultural superiority ascribed to people who have "white" skin.

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