CHAPTER 8

Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Mario Tama/Getty Images

Race and Ethnicity

Race and ethnicity are ascribed characteristics that define categories of people. Each has been used in various times and places as bases of stratification; that is, cultures have thought it right and proper that some people receive more scarce resources than others simply because they belong to one category rather than another. In the following section, we provide a basic framework for looking at racial and ethnic inequality before focusing on the situation in the United States.

Understanding Racial and Ethnic Inequality

How is it possible for groups to interact on a daily basis within the same society and yet remain separate and unequal? In this section, we begin by introducing some basic concepts needed to understand racial and ethnic inequality: the social construction of race and ethnicity, how disadvantages multiply, the concepts of majority and minority groups, and the basic patterns of interaction among majority and minority groups.

The Social Construction of Race and Ethnicity

A **race** is a category of people treated as distinct because of *physical* characteristics to which *social* importance has been assigned. An **ethnic group** is a category whose members are thought to share a common origin and important elements of a common culture—for example, a common language or religion (Marger 2003). Both race and ethnicity are inherited from one's parents.

Although many assume that race and ethnicity are genetic traits, all humans, regardless of their race or ethnicity, share virtually the same pool of genes. Both race and ethnicity are based loosely if at all on physical characteristics, such as skin color. For this reason, sociologists talk of the **social construction of race and ethnicity**: the process through which a culture defines what constitutes a race or an ethnic group. As this suggests, this process is based more on social ideas than biological facts; indeed, biologists are almost unanimous in believing that race has no biological reality.

How are racial and ethnic identities socially constructed? Consider the changes in racial definitions that emerged during the 1930s. Before this, the modern concept of a "white race" really didn't exist. Instead, people talked of multiple races, including an Anglo-Saxon race, a Mediterranean race (Italians and Greeks), a Hebrew race (Jews), and Slavic races (Jacobson 1998). Around 1930, doctors, politicians, lawyers, anti-immigrant activists, journalists, and others dropped these distinctions and instead began describing whites as a single racial group. Sociologists would say that these professionals and activists, whether or not they realized it, were engaging in the social construction of whiteness as a racial category. At the same time, the U.S. Bureau of the Census declared that Mexican Americans would be classified in the census as nonwhite. The Mexican government complained, and the Bureau reversed itself. Currently the Census Bureau defines Hispanic Americans as an ethnic group whose members can belong to any race. Similarly, the shift from using the term *black* to using the term *African American* reflected changing social ideas about race

A **race** is a category of people treated as distinct on account of *physical* characteristics to which *social* importance has been assigned.

An **ethnic group** is a category whose members are thought to share a common origin and important elements of a common culture.

The **social construction of race and ethnicity** is the process through which a culture (based more on social ideas than on biological facts) defines what constitutes a race or an ethnic group.

Austrophoto/F1online digitale Bildagentur GmbH/Alamy

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, people in Lithuania and other former Soviet republics can now celebrate and highlight their ethnicity.

and ethnicity, not any new information about the biological origins of that group. Each of these examples illustrates the social construction of race and ethnicity: a political process in which groups compete over how racial and ethnic categories should be defined.

Elsewhere in the world, new ethnic identities arise as national borders shift. Only during the twentieth century did Sicilians, Napolitanos, Milanese, and others begin developing a common Italian language, culture, and ethnic identity. Conversely, since the break-up of the former Soviet Union, Lithuanians, Latvians, Kazakhs, Abkhazians, and others have worked to rebuild ethnic, linguistic, and cultural traditions and identities that had been suppressed or even abandoned during the Soviet years. As these examples illustrate, racial and ethnic statuses can fluctuate. Over time, individuals may change their racial and ethnic identification, and society, too, may change the statuses it recognizes and uses.

Majority and Minority Groups

In addition to talking specifically about whites and African Americans or Jews and Arabs, sociologists interested in race and ethnicity also talk more broadly about majority and minority groups. A **majority group** is one that is culturally, economically, and politically dominant. A **minority group** is a group that, because of physical differences, is regarded as inferior and is kept culturally, economically, and politically subordinate.

A **majority group** is a group that is culturally, economically, and politically dominant.

A **minority group** is a group that is culturally, economically, and politically subordinate.

Although minority groups are often smaller than majority groups, that is not always the case. For example, by the late twentieth century, whites comprised only 15 percent of the population in South Africa. However, whites controlled all major political and social institutions until apartheid (legal segregation) was abolished in 1994. Sociologically, then, whites were the majority group under apartheid. Similarly, some scholars regard women as a minority group because, based on physical sex

TABLE 8.1 Income and Wealth of Families by Ethnicity

The United States is stratified by both race and class. Within each racial or ethnic group, the richest 20 percent receive about half of all income for that group, indicating real social class differences. At the same time, whites as a group have considerably more income and wealth than do African Americans or Hispanics, indicating real racial and ethnic differences.

	Percent of Total Income Received, within Ethnic Group		
Income Quintile	African American	Hispanic	White Non-Hispanic
Poorest fifth	3	4	4
Second fifth	9	9	9
Third fifth	15	15	15
Fourth fifth	24	23	23
Richest fifth	49	49	50
Medians			
Median Income	$34,192	$35,054	$53,256
Median Wealth	$6,166	$6,766	$67,000

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census 2005, 2008b, 2008c.

differences, they have been economically, politically, and culturally subordinate to men.

Multiplying Disadvantages

Most contemporary scholars use some form of conflict theory to explain how racial and ethnic inequalities—or more generally, inequalities between majority and minority groups—are developed and maintained. This theory suggests that in the conflict over scarce resources, historical circumstances such as access to technology and the existence of slavery gave some groups advantages while holding other groups back. To maintain their power, those who have advantages work to keep others from getting access to them (Tilly 1998). These inherited advantages have left us with two stratification systems, one based on class and one based on race and ethnicity.

These two stratification systems work together to multiply disadvantages and inequality. We can see how this works in Table 8.1. As the table shows, the different racial and ethnic groups display very similar patterns of *internal* inequality: *Within* each of these three groups, the wealthiest 20 percent of families receive half of all income. On the other hand, comparing *across* the three groups, we see that the median income of white non-Hispanic families is about 1.5 times that of Hispanic and African American families.

The differences become even more extreme when we look not at income but at *wealth*. As Table 8.1 shows, the median net worth of white non-Hispanic families was $67,000. This is about *ten times* higher than the median for African American and Hispanic families. These racial differences in wealth, not racial differences in income, form the roots of the continuing U.S. racial divide (Shapiro 2004).

Case Study: Environmental Racism

One example of how poverty and racism combine to multiply inequality is *environmental racism.* The term **environmental racism** refers to the disproportionately

Environmental racism refers to the disproportionately large number of health and environmental risks that minorities face daily in their neighborhoods and workplaces.

large number of health and environmental risks that minorities, especially if they are poor, face daily in their neighborhoods and workplaces (Bullard, Warren, & Johnson 2001; Camacho 1998). For example, landfills for hazardous waste are disproportionately located in African American and Hispanic communities. Farmworkers and their children, most of whom are Hispanic and very poor, are exposed to poisons whenever the crops they pick are sprayed with pesticides. On poor Native American reservations where uranium mining is often the only well-paid job, mining has poisoned thousands of workers, as well as their spouses and children, when mine waste seeps into the water or is blown into the air. This unequal environmental burden exists because manufacturers, mining companies, and the like find it easiest to locate polluting industries in poor minority communities that lack the political power to enforce environmental restrictions and that are desperate for jobs, no matter the environmental cost.

The best predictor of exposure to environmental pollution is race; the second best predictor of exposure is poverty (Brulle & Pellow, 2006). These environmental hazards reinforce as well as reflect ethnic and class inequality: Children exposed to toxic chemicals or air pollution, for example, risk mental retardation, developmental delays, and physical illnesses such as asthma that can lead them to miss school days. As a result, these children are less likely to succeed in school and more likely to continue to live in poverty as adults.

Patterns of Interaction

Relations between racial and ethnic groups can take one of three general forms: *pluralism*, *assimilation*, or *conflict*.

Pluralism

When two or more groups coexist as separate and equal cultures in the same society, we speak of **pluralism**. In a truly pluralist society, each of the different cultures is valued, each has its own equally valued institutions, membership in one or another culture does not affect individuals' social position, and all value their shared membership in the same society.

In reality, separate rarely means equal, whether we are talking about white and African Americans, English- and French-speaking Canadians, or Shiite and Sunni Muslims in Iraq. Nevertheless, nations that consider themselves pluralistic give at least outward support to the idea of equality.

Although the United States has not achieved true pluralism, it has done much better than most other societies (Alba & Nee 2003). White and nonwhite Americans increasingly go to the same schools, live in the same neighborhoods, belong to the same social groups, and are willing to marry one another.

Assimilation

As we saw in Chapter 2, assimilation is the process through which members of a minority culture lose their defining cultural features and adopt those of the majority culture. For example, most immigrants to the United States quickly stop wearing the distinctive clothing of their native lands, and most children of immigrants speak only English. Many Jewish Americans now celebrate Christmas (or at least have Christmas trees and lights), and most Irish Americans eat corned beef and cabbage only on St. Patrick's Day, if at all.

Pluralism is the peaceful coexistence of separate and equal cultures in the same society.

When assimilation is complete, the traces of a minority group may all but disappear. For example, many white Americans suspect they have a Native American ancestor but have no knowledge of that ancestor's culture.

Although the United States is not fully pluralistic, in many settings children from different races and ethnic groups interact easily.

Conflict

Relations between minority and majority groups often take the form of conflict. For much of the twentieth century, racial and ethnic conflict in the United States was reflected in laws and customs that forbade social, political, or economic participation by minorities. In other times and places, racial and ethnic conflict has taken the form of slavery, driving minority groups into concentration camps, or expelling minorities from a country altogether. At the extreme, conflict can result in **genocide**: mass killing aimed at destroying a population (Jones 2006). Genocides have occurred throughout history; recent genocidal attacks have occurred in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Darfur, and elsewhere. The killings in Darfur are discussed further in Focus on a Global Perspective: Genocide in Darfur on the next page.

THE STAGES OF GENOCIDE No society goes straight from tolerance to genocide. Instead, societies typically follow a predictable set of stages (Stanton 2009). First, they classify individuals into different groups (Christians and Muslims, Hutus and Tutsis). Then they use symbols such as clothing or tattoos to mark the different classifications. The next step is dehumanization: convincing the general public to believe that the minority group is less than human. For example, during the nineteenth century American politicians and military officers often described Native Americans as less-than-human savages.

Once a minority group has been dehumanized, the risk of genocide is high (Hagan & Rymond-Richmond 2008; Stanton 2009). Either the government, the military, or groups of civilians may begin spreading hate propaganda, forcing segregation, and organizing plans for mass killings. After this happens, it is relatively easy to deport the intended victims to death camps or famine-starved regions and to find people willing to do the killing.

The good news is that at each of these stages, appropriate interventions can keep genocide from happening (Genocide Watch 2009). For example, during World War II,

Genocide refers to mass killings aimed at destroying a population.

focus on  A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Genocide in Darfur

Racial inequality is not solely an American problem. Discrimination and prejudice in other countries also deny minority groups their rights and opportunities. The genocide in Darfur offers a recent example (Hagan & Rymond-Richmond 2008). Although the political process that underlies Darfur's ethnic strife may be unique to that society, the economic processes appear to be typical of those accompanying ethnic conflict in societies throughout history: Racial and ethnic hostilities are most pronounced when economic resources are scarce and the majority group's economic advantage is threatened.

Darfur is a region in western Sudan, the largest country in Africa. Like most African countries, Sudan was cobbled together by a colonial power—in this case, Britain—during the nineteenth century. The country is overwhelmingly composed of Sunni Muslims who use Arabic as their lingua franca, but northern Sudan is primarily Arab, while the rest of the country is now considered black African. Ironically, the physical differences between these two groups are slight enough that westerners typically cannot distinguish Sudanese Arabs from Sudanese Africans. Indeed, prior to this conflict, ethnic identity was fluid and relatively unimportant, intermarriage was common, and the distinction between "Arab" and "African" was rarely used. African farmers coexisted easily with Arab herders, since each benefited from trading with the other. Moreover, Arab herders sometimes became farmers, and African farmers sometimes became herders, depending on their shifting economic circumstances.

Since Sudan achieved independence in 1956, Arabs from northern Sudan have dominated the country's economy and government. Yet their home territories hold few of Sudan's agricultural lands, oil deposits, or other natural resources. Moreover, global warming, growing human and livestock populations, and damaging agricultural practices are all contributing to the "desertification" of northern Sudan. To maintain their dominance over the country and its natural wealth, the Sudanese Arabs who run the country's government have used military repression, political repression, and economic strangulation against their perceived enemies. In response, since the 1980s armed resistance by Sudanese Africans, in both southern and western Sudan, has increased, as has repression by the central government.

Beginning in 2003, however, the Sudanese government moved from repression to what most observers describe as genocide against the people of Darfur (and, increasingly, against Africans in neighboring Chad). To facilitate this policy, the government embarked on a campaign to dehumanize Sudanese Africans in the minds of Sudanese Arabs (Hagan & Rymond-Richmond 2008). They then formed and armed local Arab militias, known as "Janjaweed." Janjaweed members were recruited from nomadic and semi-nomadic Arab tribes who hoped to gain not only war loot, but also access to increasingly scarce water sources,

Nazi German forces occupied Denmark. However, unlike in the rest of occupied Europe, the Danish government refused to order Denmark's Jews to wear yellow stars on their clothing, the Danish police helped Jews to hide, and a flotilla of Danish fishermen helped to ferry Jews to Sweden, which was outside Nazi control. As a result, only 17 percent of Danish Jews were killed (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 2009; Bergen 2003). In contrast, in Poland, where much of the government, police, and the public supported killing—or at least removing—Jews, more than 90 percent of Jews died.

Map 8.1 on page 192 shows the countries in which genocidal killings are now being planned or are occurring.

Maintaining Racial and Ethnic Inequality

This section looks at how segregation, prejudice, and discrimination work together to maintain social distance and thus racial and ethnic inequality.

pasture for livestock, and arable lands (Human Rights Watch 2006). Although officially the war is now over, the deaths and destruction continue.

By 2009, the Sudanese army and the Janjaweed had killed more than 100,000 civilians and driven almost 6 million refugees away from their homes (U.S. Department of State 2009). In addition, the Janjaweed have engaged in aerial carpet bombing, systematic torture, mass amputations with machetes, and mass rape—all aimed overwhelmingly at civilians rather than at resistance fighters. To justify these actions, the government and Janjaweed have encouraged racial stereotyping of African Sudanese as inferior. As a result, Sudanese civilians increasingly identify themselves as Arab or as African, rather than as Sudanese or as members of a specific tribe. Meanwhile, both intraethnic and interethnic violence is exploding.

In March 2009, the International Criminal Court charged Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir with war crimes and crimes against humanity.

AP Images

Since 2003, and in a bid to control valuable lands and water supplies, the Sudanese government has encouraged racial stereotyping of African Sudanese as inferior and has promoted the slaughter of Sudanese Africans by Sudanese Arabs like these "Janjaweed" militia members. Yet, before this conflict, ethnic identity in Sudan was fluid and relatively unimportant, intermarriage was common, and people rarely distinguished between "Arab" and "African" Sudanese.

Segregation

One easy way to maintain social distance and inequality is through **segregation**—the physical separation of minority- and majority-group members. Thus, most societies with strong divisions between racial or ethnic groups have ghettos, barrios, and Chinatowns where, by law or custom, members of the minority group live apart.

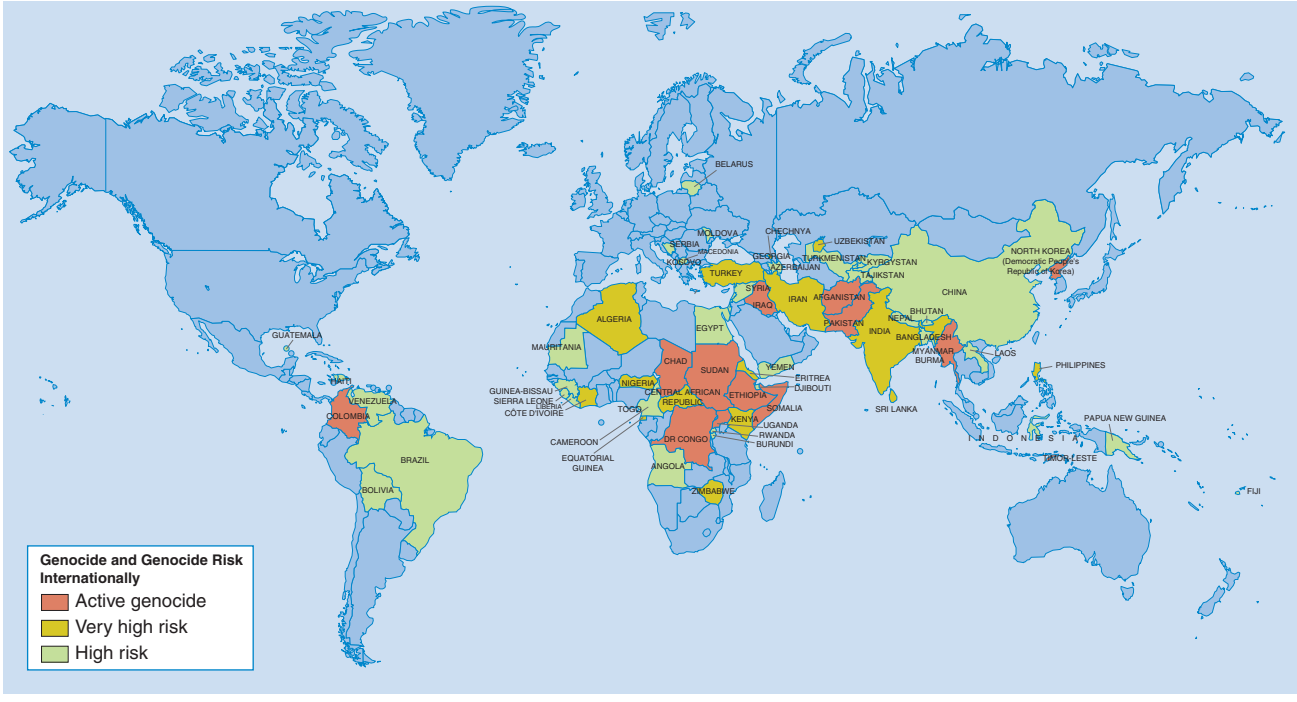
Historical studies suggest that high levels of residential segregation of Hispanic, Asian, and African Americans in the United States have existed since at least 1940. Such segregation is no longer established in law, but it is no historical accident. Segregation continues for two reasons: economic differences across racial/ethnic groups and continuing prejudice and discrimination (Iceland & Wilkes 2006).

Economic differences certainly matter. Lower-income Hispanics, African Americans, and Asians are all more likely to live in ethnically segregated neighborhoods than are wealthier members of the same groups. This suggests that if minorities' social class increases, segregation will decline.

But economic differences alone can't explain segregation. Whereas Hispanics and Asians are significantly less likely to live in segregated neighborhoods if they are at least middle class, this is not true for African Americans. Similarly, even when African

Segregation refers to the physical separation of minority- and majority-group members.

MAP 8.1: Genocide and Genocide Risk Internationally
Many countries around the world are now engaging in genocide or are at high or very high risk of doing so. Those at *high risk* have begun organizing mass killings and spreading hate propaganda. Those at *very high risk* have begun drawing up death lists or sending minority-group members to death camps located in famine-starved areas.
SOURCE: Genocide Watch (2009)



Americans are educated, affluent, and move to the suburbs, they remain substantially less likely than whites to escape "distressed" neighborhoods (Crowder, South, & Chavez 2006; Iceland & Wilkes 2006; Alba, Logan, & Stults 2000). This suggests that prejudice and discrimination continue to foster segregation of African Americans. Studies find that, compared with others with similar incomes, African Americans are less likely to be shown homes in "nicer" areas by real estate agents and are more likely to be turned down for mortgages or to face hostility from potential neighbors (Iceland & Wilkes 2006; Ross & Turner 2005).

Current data suggest that we should be guardedly optimistic. Real estate agents and mortgage brokers are less likely to discriminate against African Americans than in the recent past, and African American segregation has declined somewhat since the 1970s. Segregation of other groups shows little decline, but this is mostly explained by recent immigration from Asia and Latin America (Iceland & Wilkes 2006).

Prejudice

Segregation is typically justified based on prejudices and stereotypes. A **prejudice** is a negative view of a group of people not based on evidence. Prejudice exists despite the facts rather than because of them. A person who believes that all Italian Americans have ties to the Mafia will ignore any instances of the law-abiding behavior of Italian

Prejudice is an irrational, negative attitude toward a category of people.

Racial segregation remains a fact of life in the United States. Even among the middle class, African Americans are more likely than European Americans to live in a poor neighborhood.

Americans. If confronted with an exceptionally honest man of Italian descent, the bigot will rationalize him as the exception that proves the rule. **Racism** is a form of prejudice. It is the belief that inherited physical characteristics associated with racial groups determine individuals' abilities and are a legitimate basis for unequal treatment.

These days, explicit racism has become less common than in the past. Instead, we more often see color-blind racism. **Color-blind racism** refers to the belief that all races are created equal, that racial equality has been achieved, and that therefore any minorities who do not succeed have only themselves to blame. This belief leads many white Americans to oppose policies designed to combat racism or to improve opportunities for minorities and to oppose politicians who support such policies (Bobo & Kluegel 1993; Quillian 1996; Herring 2003; Bonilla-Silva 2006). An important criticism of the concept of color-blind racism is that it can be hard to tell whether people oppose these policies because they are *racist* or because they are *conservatives* who would oppose any government interventions (Quillian 2006).

The basic building blocks of prejudice are stereotypes. A **stereotype** is a preconceived, simplistic idea about the members of a group. For example, you may know someone who believes that all athletes and cheerleaders are dumb or that all Latinos are good dancers. Stereotyping does have its uses. It's probably a good idea to assume you should stay away from someone who is waving a gun in the air and mumbling to himself, and it's probably a safe bet that a very fashionably dressed woman can give you directions to a high-end shopping mall. Life would be very difficult if we had to start absolutely from scratch in every social interaction, with no idea of how this individual might be similar to or different from others we've met (or heard about) in the past.

On the other hand, stereotypes also *hinder* social interactions when they lead us to make false assumptions about others. The man waving the gun around might be an actor, and the fashionably dressed woman might be wearing clothes her sister chose for her. Some Asians are good at math, and some aren't. Some men are good at sports, and some are utterly uninterested. Some computer jocks are also punk rockers, and some punk rockers also enjoy knitting.

Racism is the belief that inherited physical characteristics associated with racial groups determine individuals' abilities and characteristics and provide a legitimate basis for unequal treatment.

Color-blind racism refers to the belief that all races are created equal and that racial equality has already been achieved.

A **stereotype** is a preconceived, simplistic idea about the members of a group.

sociology and you

Prejudice and stereotypes are not limited to ethnic group relationships. If you have ever assumed that older people are more interested in playing cards than in having sex, you have engaged in *stereotyping*. If stereotypes like this one lead you to conclude that older people are less capable and worthy than are younger people, you would be exhibiting *prejudice*. If those prejudices led you to decide against hiring an older person, you would be engaging in *discrimination*.

Explaining Prejudice

What causes prejudice? Scholars most often answer this question by pointing to the effects of one personality factor—the *authoritarian personality*—and three social factors: *socialization*, *scapegoating*, and *competition for scarce resources*.

THE AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY A long research tradition has documented that people who have an authoritarian personality are more likely to be prejudiced. Someone with an **authoritarian personality** tends to be submissive to those in authority and antagonistic to those lower in status (Stenner 2005). Americans with authoritarian personalities tend to be strongly prejudiced against African Americans, Jews, gay people, and women.

SOCIALIZATION We learn to hate and fear in the same way we learn to love and admire. Prejudice is a shared meaning that we develop through our interactions with others. Most prejudiced people learn prejudice when they are very young, along with other social norms. This prejudice may then grow or diminish, depending on whether groups and institutions encountered during adulthood reinforce these early teachings (Wilson 1986).

Prejudice is also learned when we look at the society around us. If we live in a very unequal society and observe that no one pays highly for a group's labor or no one "like us" wants to be around people "like them," we are likely to conclude that the members of that group are not worth much. Through this learning process, members of the minority as well as the majority group learn to devalue the minority group (Wilson 1992).

SCAPEGOATING Although everyone is socialized into some prejudicial views, certain conditions can reinforce those views. One is the experience of frustration. When individuals find it difficult to achieve their own goals, they are more likely to look for others to blame for their problems. This practice, called **scapegoating**, has appeared time and again. For example, anti-Semitism exploded in Nazi Germany during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when the German economy collapsed and many Germans were left jobless and impoverished.

COMPETITION FOR SCARCE RESOURCES Competition over scarce resources (such as good jobs, nice homes, and admission to prestigious universities) also increases prejudice. For all racial and ethnic groups, prejudicial attitudes are closely associated with the belief that gains for other racial and ethnic groups will spell losses for one's own group (Bobo & Hutchings 1996).

Maintaining Prejudice: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

In Chapter 7, we introduced the concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy—where acting on the belief that a situation exists causes the situation to become real. The self-fulfilling prophecy is one very important mechanism for maintaining prejudice. A classic example is the situation of American women until the last few decades. Because women were considered inferior and capable of only a narrow range of social roles, they were given limited education and barred from participation in the institutions of the larger society. That they subsequently knew little of science, government, or economics was then taken as proof that they were indeed inferior and suited only for a role at home. In fact, many women were unsuited for any other role: Being treated as inferiors had made them ignorant and unworldly. The same process reinforces boundaries between racial and ethnic groups. For example, if we believe that Jews think they are better than others, then we don't invite them to our homes.

An **authoritarian personality** is submissive to those in authority and antagonistic toward those lower in status.

Scapegoating occurs when people or groups who are blocked in their own goal attainment blame others for their failures.

decoding the data

Race and Job Interviews

SOURCE: Bertrand & Sendhil (2004).

	Percent Receiving Call-Backs for Job Interviews	
	"White" names	"African American" names
Among group as a whole	10.1%	6.7%
Among more-qualified applicants	11.3%	7.0%

When identical, fictitious resumes are sent to employers, with some "applicants" assigned names like Emily and Brad and others assigned names like Lakisha and Kareem, those with white-sounding names receive 50 percent more call-backs for interviews. When the resumes are tweaked to give the applicants better qualifications (such as more education), whites get more call-backs but African Americans do not.

Explaining the Data: Based on what you have read in this chapter, how would you explain why those with white names are called back for interviews more often than those with African American names? How would you explain why adding qualifications improves the chances of white applicants but not of African American applicants?

Critiquing the Data: Might employers have incorrectly identified the African American names as coming from a different ethnic or racial group? If so, how might this have affected the results?

Most African Americans do not have distinctively African American names. Would employers be more or less likely to discriminate against someone with a distinctively African American name? Why? Given this, would these data likely *under*estimate or *over*estimate discrimination against African Americans?

Some employers may not look at names on resumes or may not realize that a name suggests an individual's race. Given this fact, would these data likely underestimate or overestimate discrimination against African Americans?

When we subsequently observe that they associate only with one another, we take this as confirmation of our belief.

Discrimination

Treating people unequally because of the categories they belong to is **discrimination**. Prejudice is an attitude; discrimination is behavior. Most of the time the two go together: If your boss thinks that African Americans are less intelligent than whites (prejudice), he will likely pay his African American workers less (discrimination). Some people, however, are inconsistent, usually because their own values differ from others around them. They may be prejudiced, but they nonetheless avoid discriminating because they don't want to be sued for unfair treatment. Or they might *not* be prejudiced but nonetheless discriminate because it is expected of them—perhaps by a boss who opposes hiring minorities, or by a parent who opposes interracial romance. Decoding the Data: Race and Job Interviews looks at the effect of race on job applicants.

Most anti-racist public policies seek to reduce discrimination and segregation rather than to reduce prejudice. As Martin Luther King, Jr., remarked, "The law may not make a man love me, but it can restrain him from lynching me, and I think that's pretty important" (as quoted in Rose 1981, 90).

Discrimination is the unequal treatment of individuals on the basis of their membership in categories.

© Sandy Felsenthal/Corbis

Although being Irish has little impact on most Irish Americans' lives these days, many still enjoy celebrating their cultural heritage, like these boys at a St. Patrick's Day parade.

Institutionalized Racism

Finally, racial and ethnic inequality is also maintained by institutionalized racism. **Institutionalized racism** refers to situations in which everyday practices and social arrangements are assumed to be fair, but in fact systematically reproduce racial or ethnic inequality. For example, almost all Gypsy children in the Czech Republic are placed in special schools for the mentally handicapped, and almost all children in these schools are Gypsy (New York Times 2006). Czech school authorities argue that Gypsy children are placed in these schools based on standardized evaluations, but this policy effectively makes it impossible for Gypsy children to succeed in Czech society. Less extreme versions of school segregation and tracking reinforce racial inequality in the United States.

Racial and Ethnic Inequality in the United States

Racial and ethnic inequality is not new. In this section, we discuss the past, present, and future social positions of selected racial and ethnic groups in the United States.

Institutionalized racism occurs when the normal operation of apparently neutral processes systematically produces unequal results for majority and minority groups.

White Americans

The earliest voluntary immigrants to North America were English, Dutch, French, and Spanish. By 1700, however, English culture dominated the entire Eastern seaboard. The English became the majority group, and everybody else became a minority group. In the 1840s, employers posted signs saying "No Irish need apply." In the 1860s, discrimination focused on Chinese and Japanese, and in the 1890s on Jews and Italians.

This pattern of prejudice and discrimination continues to the present day (if more rarely) against groups as diverse as French Canadians and Arab Americans.

White Ethnicity

Despite and in part because of this history of prejudice and discrimination, many white Americans continue to have a strong sense of connection to their ethnic roots. They are proud to be Italians, Greeks, Norwegians, or Poles, and enjoy eating the foods, celebrating the holidays, and singing the songs of their ethnic group. By the third or fourth generation after immigration, however, ethnic identity is largely symbolic and a matter of choice (McDermott & Samson 2005). This choice carries few risks because white ethnicity rarely presents a barrier to social integration or personal advancement.

Other white Americans no longer can claim an ethnic identity. Some come from families that emigrated to this country generations ago, and others come from families of such mixed heritage that they can no longer identify with a single ethnic group, or even a couple of ethnic groups. These individuals' only ethnic identity is as white Americans.

This shift from Italian-American, Polish-American, and other ethnic identities to "unhyphenated American" identities led some past observers to suggest that America had become a "melting pot," in which (white) ethnic groups had blended together into a new American identity. The reality is more complex. Certainly, our language contains many words borrowed from other languages (*frankfurter, ombudsman, hors d'oeuvre, chutzpah*), and some of us are such mixtures of nationalities that we would be hard-pressed to identify our national heritage. Instead of a blending of all cultures, however, what has occurred is assimilation to the dominant language and culture of the United States. To gain admission into U.S. society and to be eligible for social mobility, one has to learn "correct" English with the "correct" accent, speak without using your hands too much, work on Saturday and worship on Sunday, and, in general, adopt the culture of the northern and western Europeans who dominated the United States for generations.

White Racial Identity

As white Americans' connections to their different ethnic identities have declined, sociologists have begun to focus on whiteness as a *racial* identity (McDermott & Samson 2005). Ironically, one of the most important things to understand about white racial identity is that it typically is invisible. Except in unusual circumstances, such as when they live surrounded by nonwhites, white Americans rarely think of themselves as even having a race. When white people choose to watch football rather than soccer, to listen to rock rather than to salsa music, or to eat apple pie rather than sweet potato pie, they rarely think of these choices as reflections of their white color.

White Privilege

Because white people rarely think of themselves as a racial category, they rarely recognize that the life they enjoy—living in relatively safe neighborhoods, having relatively good jobs, going to relatively good schools—partly resulted from structured racial inequalities built into the system long before they were born. For example, any time an African American is denied a job because of his or her race, the odds of a white person getting hired increase. The term **white privilege** refers to the benefits and opportunities that whites receive simply because they are white (Rothenberg 2002). White privilege benefits all white Americans, whether or not they recognize or want those privileges.

sociology and you

When you go to the shopping mall, do you dress nicely so no one will think you are a shoplifter? If you answered no, you probably are white. The fact that many people assume whites to be law-abiding citizens until proven otherwise is an example of white privilege. White privilege also is typically invisible: Few whites know that law-abiding African Americans are often stopped by security guards, so few whites recognize that their racial identity protects them.

White privilege refers to the benefits whites receive simply because they are white.

African Americans

African Americans now comprise 12.3 percent of the U.S. population. Until very recently, they were the largest minority group in the country, but they were recently passed by Hispanics. Still, their importance goes beyond their numbers: They have made innumerable contributions to U.S. history and culture, and their circumstances have long challenged the United States's view of itself as a moral and principled nation.

The social position of African Americans has its roots in one central fact: Most African Americans are descended from slaves. After slavery ended, both legal barriers (such as patently unfair "literacy tests" that barred African Americans from voting) and illegal barriers (such as the occasional lynching of African Americans who challenged white authority) prevented most African Americans from rising in the American social and economic structure. Real change did not take place until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the civil rights activism of the late 1960s.

These days, more African Americans are middle class than ever before. At the same time, however, a troubling fissure has emerged within the African American population: Whereas some African Americans belong to the middle or even upper class and are increasingly integrated into U.S. society, others remain poor and live in segregated neighborhoods with few employment opportunities. In fact, for this second group, the situation has deteriorated (Wilson 1996).

Current Concerns

Since World War II, white attitudes toward African Americans have improved dramatically; most whites now support integration in principle, are comfortable living in neighborhoods where African Americans form a small minority, and no longer disapprove of interracial marriage (Krysan 2000). Similarly, important improvements have been made in many areas of African American life. Nevertheless, neighborhood segregation remains high (Massey 2007), African American infants are more than twice as likely as white infants to die before their first birthday (National Center for Health Statistics 2009), and African American men's life expectancy is still six years less than white men's.

Similarly, although African Americans are rapidly catching up with whites in their educational attainment, they still lag behind (Kao & Thompson 2003; U.S. Bureau of the Census 2009a). Moreover, even when whites and African Americans have the same levels of education, whites have higher incomes. Almost one-quarter of African American families live below the poverty line, and the median income for African American families is only 64 percent that of white families (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2009a). Even more discouragingly, the majority of African American 40-year-olds raised in middle-income families now have *lower* family incomes than did their parents (Isaacs, Sawhill, & Haskins 2008).

These striking economic disadvantages are due to two factors: African American workers earn less than white workers, and African American families are less likely to have two earners.

LOW EARNINGS Even when we look only at people employed full time and year-round, median income for African Americans remains 20 percent lower than for whites (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2009a). In part, this occurs because African Americans more often than whites live in the South, where wages are low for everyone. In addition, African Americans typically have less education than do whites and so disproportionately work in low-paying fields. For example, African Americans make

up 11 percent of all employed U.S. civilians but 19 percent of janitors, 26 percent of mail clerks, and 33 percent of nursing aides (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2009a).

Yet these differences account for only part of the earnings gap between African Americans and white people in the United States (Cancio, Evans, & Maume 1996; Pager & Shepherd 2008). The other part is the result of a pervasive pattern of discrimination that produces a very different occupational distribution, pattern of mobility, and earnings picture for African Americans and whites in the United States. Although there are far more African American professionals than in the past, they often are kept outside the true corporate power structure (Collins 1993, 1997): Compared to whites in comparable positions, they receive lower salaries and wield less authority at work (Smith 1997; Wilson 1997).

FEMALE-HEADED FAMILIES About half of the gap between African American and white family incomes is due to the fact that African American families are less likely to include an adult male. Because women earn less than men and because a one-earner family is obviously disadvantaged relative to a two-earner family, these female-headed households have incomes far below those of husband–wife families.

The fact that so many more African American than white families are headed by females—46 percent compared with 14 percent—has led some commentators to conclude that poverty is the result of bad decisions by African American men and women. This type of argument is an example of "blaming the victim," and empirical evidence suggests that it simply isn't true. Rather than *causing* poverty, research indicates that female headship *results* from poverty: African American women are less likely to marry because relatively few men in their community can support a family (Lichter, LeClere, & McLaughlin 1991; Luker 1996; Newman 1999b).

Hispanic Americans

Hispanics (sometimes known as *Latinos*) are an ethnic group rather than a racial category. Hispanics include immigrants and their descendants from Puerto Rico, Mexico, Cuba, and other Central or South American countries. Hispanics constitute 12.5 percent of the U.S. population, making them the largest minority group in the country. About two-thirds of Hispanics in the United States are of Mexican origin, with the rest originating in Central and South America and the Caribbean. Hispanics may also identify as white, black, mixed race, or members of any other racial group.

It is almost impossible to speak of Hispanics as if they were a single group. The experiences of different Hispanic groups in the United States have been and continue to be very different. For example, Cubans who emigrated in the 1960s shortly after the Cuban Revolution typically came from wealthier backgrounds, were lighter-skinned, and were seen as refugees from a hated Communist regime. As a result, they found greater acceptance in the United States than either later waves of Cuban immigrants or immigrants from Mexico or Guatemala.

Figure 8.1 on the next page compares the various Hispanic groups to one another and to the non-Hispanic white, Asian, and African American populations on three measures: education, poverty, and family structure. On two of these measures, a Hispanic group comes out at the very bottom: Mexican Americans are the most poorly educated racial or ethnic group, and Puerto Ricans (many of whom are considered black by other Americans) are the most likely to live in poverty. In addition, Puerto Ricans are second most likely, after African Americans, to live in female-headed households.

Despite the difficulties many Hispanics now face, they remain optimistic about their future prospects in the United States. In a national poll conducted in 2007 by the

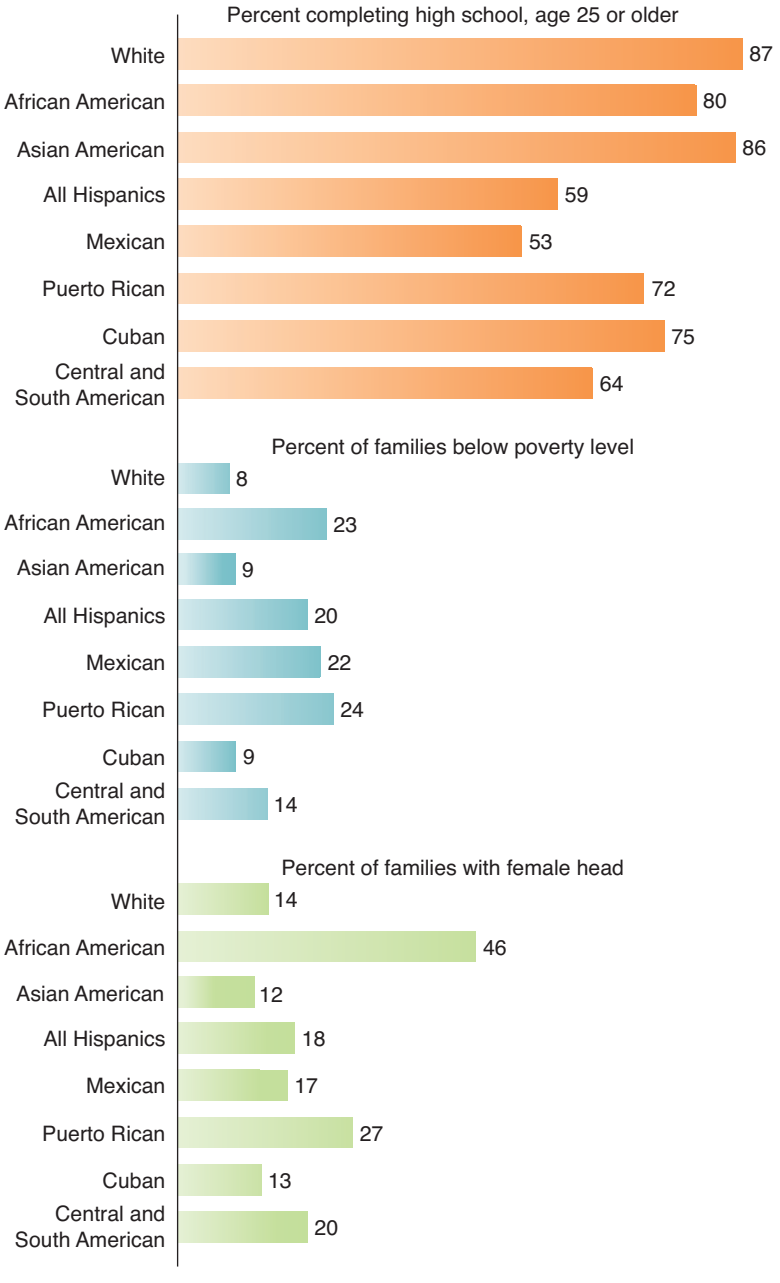


FIGURE 8.1 Education, Poverty, and Family Structure, by Race and Hispanic Origin
Compared with other groups, Hispanics—especially Mexicans—are the most likely to lack a high school education, partly because many are recent immigrants. Hispanics and African Americans are more likely than whites and Asians to live below the poverty level, and African Americans are the most likely to live in female-headed households, followed by Puerto Ricans (many of whom are also of African descent).
SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census (2009a).

New York Times, 74 percent of Hispanics strongly agreed with the statement "If you work hard, you will succeed in the U.S." (Preston 2007).

Current Concerns

The Hispanic population in the United States is growing more rapidly than any other segment, although immigration has slowed considerably due to the economic downturn (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2009a). This rapid growth has raised two concerns

among many Americans. First, because most of the new immigrants are young, poorly educated, and (especially if they are undocumented immigrants) willing to accept very low wages, some U.S. citizens fear these immigrants may lower wages for everyone. Second, some fear that Hispanic culture and the Spanish language will "take over" the country. These fears are heightened by the (slightly) increasing residential segregation of Hispanics in the United States (Iceland & Wilkes 2006), which has led some to question whether these new immigrants will ever become socially integrated into U.S. society.

Are new Hispanic immigrants in fact driving down wages? The answer remains unclear. Some researchers have concluded that immigrants stimulate the economy overall and thus benefit all Americans (Card 2005). Other researchers argue that immigration improves the quality of life among affluent Americans (by making cheap labor available), but depresses the wages of Americans who lack high school degrees by as much as 5 percent (Porter 2006; Borjas & Katz 2007).

Will Hispanics become socially integrated into the United States? On the one hand, because of continued immigration from Latin America, U.S.-born Hispanics now can easily enjoy salsa dancing, Mexican fiestas, Guatemalan restaurants, and perhaps romance and marriage with a recent immigrant. As a result, Hispanic ethnic identity is being reinforced even among those whose families emigrated here much earlier (Waters & Jimenez 2005). On the other hand, these earlier generations of Hispanic immigrants nevertheless are relatively socially integrated into the United States (Alba & Nee 2003). Almost all who were born in this country are fluent in English, and those whose parents were also born here often speak little if any Spanish. There is good reason to think the same will be true of new immigrants.

In addition, the caste-like barrier separating races operates much less dramatically for Hispanics. White prejudice against Hispanics is far less strong than against African Americans, and although Hispanic segregation has increased, it remains modest. As a result, the main barrier Hispanics face is class rather than ethnicity—at least if they are white. As a result, by the second and third generation, most Hispanics can translate educational attainment into well-paying jobs and leave the segregated barrios (Iceland & Wilkes 2006).

In sum, there is good reason to be optimistic about the effect of Hispanic immigration on the United States. Nevertheless, concern about rising immigration has fueled recent demands for stricter border controls. In turn, these demands have led to a surge of political activism among Hispanic immigrants and their supporters, calling for more humane treatment of immigrants and perhaps guest worker programs or "amnesty" programs for undocumented immigrants. The results of these efforts remain to be seen.

Although life is often difficult for recent Hispanic immigrants, many Hispanic Americans now hold middle- and even upper-class jobs.

Asian Americans

The Asian population of the United States (Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, Laotians, and Vietnamese, among others) more than doubled between 1980 and the present but still constitutes only 3.6 percent of the total population. The Asian population can be broken roughly into three segments: descendants of nineteenth-century immigrants (Chinese and Japanese), post-World War II immigrants (Filipinos, Asian Indians, and Koreans), and recent refugees from Southeast Asia (Cambodians, Laotians, and Vietnamese).

A century ago, Asian immigrants encountered sharp and occasionally violent racism. Today, incidents of racial violence directed at Asians are rare but still occasionally make headlines. Despite these handicaps, Asian Americans have experienced high levels of social mobility. A higher percentage of Asian Americans than white Americans have college, doctoral, medical, and law degrees (Le 2006). Educational levels are especially high among Japanese and Chinese Americans, many of whom come from families that have lived in the United States for generations. Education levels are also high among Asian Indians and Filipinos, many of whom came to the United States to get a graduate education or with graduate degrees in hand. Current evidence suggests that the more recent streams of immigrants from Southeast Asia will follow the same path. For example, although many of the Southeast Asian refugees who came to the United States between 1975 and 1984 began their lives here on welfare, almost twice as many Vietnamese youths aged 20 to 24 are enrolled in school as are white youths of the same age.

Current Concerns

The high level of education earned by Asian Americans is a major step in opening doors to high-status occupations, and median income for Asian Americans is very similar to that of whites (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2009a). Yet discrimination is not all in the past. Unofficial policies make it more difficult for Asian American applicants than for white Americans with the same credentials to gain admittance to elite colleges and universities. And highly educated Asian Americans still earn significantly less than whites with the same professional credentials, primarily because they are less likely to move out of professional and technical positions into managerial and executive positions (Le 2006). Asian Americans are often passed over for promotions because white employers assume Asian Americans won't have the personality, social skills, or simply the "look" an executive is assumed to need. In addition, Asian Americans less often even learn about available executive positions because they are less often accepted into the "old boy networks" in which most professional mentoring takes place, and in which individuals gain the contacts that can lead to higher-level jobs. Finally, Asian Americans—even those whose great-great-grandparents emigrated to this country—still are held back by others who assume they aren't "really" Americans. As one third-generation Japanese American said,

> I get real angry when people come up to me and tell me how good my English is. They say: "Oh, you have no accent. Where did you learn English?" Where did I learn English? Right here in America. I was born here like they were. [But] people see me now and they automatically treat me as an immigrant." (quoted in Zhou & Gatewood 2000, 18)

Native Americans

Native Americans (American Indians) are one of the smallest minority groups in the United States (less than 1 percent of the entire population), and nearly half of their members live in just four states: Oklahoma, Arizona, California, and New Mexico. Native Americans are arguably our most disadvantaged minority group. They have the lowest rates of educational achievement and the highest rates of alcoholism and premature death of any U.S. racial or ethnic group (Kao & Thompson 2003). This situation exists despite hopeful new signs of economic vitality on some Indian reservations over the past 20 years, including the development of mineral reserves on the Navajo reservation and the advent of gambling casinos elsewhere.

TABLE 8.2 Life on the Navajo Reservation

Percent 65 years and over	9.80%
Percent high school graduate (25 years or older)	63.50%
Percent college graduate (25 years or older)	17.50%
Percent families with female heads	27.80%
Percent families below poverty level	36.20%
Percent using wood to heat home	63.10%
Percent lacking telephones	46.70%
Percent with no vehicle	14.70%
Percent lacking indoor water or toilets	21.20%
Median family income, 2007	$29,846

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census (2009b).

Table 8.2 summarizes the situation on the Navajo reservation, the largest geographically in the country. More than 250,000 Americans belong to the Navajo (or, in their language, the Diné). Keep in mind, though, that the status of Native Americans is highly diverse. Native Americans represent more than 200 tribal groupings, with different cultures and languages. Some have been successful: fish farmers in the Northwest, ranchers in Wyoming, and bridge builders in Maine. In urban areas, and east of the Mississippi, where the impact of white society has been felt the longest, many Native Americans have blended into the majority culture and entered the economic mainstream. On the other hand, on isolated reservations such as the Navajo reservation, with few economic resources (and little opportunity to draw crowds to casinos), socioeconomic conditions often are quite poor. In addition, in white-dominated towns near large Native American reservations, prejudice and discrimination by whites remain major barriers.

Arab Americans

Although Arab Americans comprise considerably less than 1 percent of the U.S. population, recent world events have given their status in this country special importance.

All Arab Americans are immigrants or children of immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East (including Morocco, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq); Iran is not an Arabic country. The largest single group of Arab Americans is from Lebanon ("Arab American Demographics" 2006). Each of these countries has its own traditions, but they share common linguistic, cultural, and historical traditions. Some Arab Americans descend from families that emigrated to the United States in the late 1800s, some emigrated themselves only in the last few years. Two-thirds of Arab Americans are Christians.

Arab Americans are a highly educated population ("Arab American Demographics" 2006). They are as likely as other white Americans to have graduated high school and are slightly more likely to have graduated college. As a result, the majority hold professional jobs, and their median incomes are somewhat above the U.S. average.

© Ed Kashi/Corbis

Arab Americans, like these Michigan schoolchildren, are an increasingly important minority group in the United States.

Current Concerns

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and other evidence of anti-American sentiment in the Arab world have raised concerns about the status of Arab Americans in the United States. On the positive side, many Americans who had no opinion of Arabs before 9/11 have become more educated since then and have taken pains not to discriminate against all Arabs or Muslims because of the actions of a few. Similarly, a poll conducted in 2007 by the nonprofit Pew Research Center (2007) found that 53 percent reported favorable attitudes toward Muslim Americans—considerably lower than the 76 percent who held favorable views of Catholics and Jews but identical to the percentage with favorable attitudes toward Mormons and much higher than the 35 percent with favorable views of atheists.

On the other hand, Gallup Poll researchers report that about 40 percent of Americans openly admit that they are prejudiced against Muslims in the United States. The same percent would prefer that Muslim Americans be subject to special security requirements, such as carrying special I.D. cards (Saad 2006). American attitudes have grown slightly more negative over the last few years, especially among evangelical Christians and those who rely on the media (rather than personal contact) for their ideas about Arabs and Muslims (Saad 2006; Pew Research Center 2007). Unfortunately, the media often reinforce prejudices in television shows, films, and articles that either ignore Arabs or depict them as anti-American or as terrorists (Semmerling 2006; Byng 2008).

Multiracial Americans

Individuals who identify as more than one race now constitute 1.6 percent of the U.S. population. Although this may seem like a small number, it is a significant change, in two ways. First, the absolute number of multiracial Americans has increased more than ten times in the last half century. Second, for the first time in American history, significant numbers of Americans born to parents of different races now identify as *multiracial* rather than identifying with only one parent's race.

Why have increasing numbers of Americans begun to define themselves as multiracial? In the past, many multiracial children were conceived through rape, leaving them with little desire to identify with their father's race. Similarly, in past decades many who married outside their group were rejected by their families, and so their children only grew up with one set of relatives and one racial identity. Today, most multiracial children are born to loving parents and welcomed by all their relatives. As a result, identifying with only one race can feel like abandoning half of one's family. Yet Americans now must fill out more and more forms that ask them to identify themselves by race. All these pressures led to the rise in individuals who openly identify as multiracial (DaCosta 2007).

Despite the rise of a visible multiracial community, however, many Americans continue to feel uncomfortable when they cannot wedge an individual into a predetermined racial slot. Golf superstar Eldrick "Tiger" Woods has had to fight constantly against journalists and others who want to describe him simply as African American, even though two of his eight great-grandparents were Native American, four were Asian, and one was European American.

The Future of Racial and Ethnic Inequality in the United States

The last few decades have witnessed considerable improvement in the social status of minority groups—as well as the momentous election of the first African American president of the United States (a topic discussed in Focus on American Diversity: The Election of Barack Hussein Obama on the next page). Yet inequality remains. This final section reviews the debate about whether inequality can best be reduced by focusing on race or on class before describing some of the strategies now being used to reduce inequality.

Combating Inequality: Race versus Class

In this chapter and Chapter 7, we have shown how both social class, on the one hand, and race or ethnicity, on the other hand, affect one's life chances. When a person has a lower status on both of these dimensions, we speak of **double jeopardy**. This means that disadvantages snowball. For example, poor African American, Hispanic, and Native American teenagers are more likely than poor white teenagers to be unemployed or to end up in prison.

Sociologists have hotly debated whether race or class is more important for understanding the structure of inequality in the United States today. The question most often asked is, "Is the status of lower-class African Americans due to the color-blind forces of class stratification, or is it due to class-blind racism?" In a series of books and articles, African American sociologist W. J. Wilson (1978, 1987, 1996, 2009) has argued that the problems faced by African Americans stem less from current racism than from the inheritance of poverty and the changing nature of the U.S. economy. As well-paying factory jobs disappeared and as other forms of employment shifted from the inner cities to the suburbs, the position of the poorest third of the African American population has disintegrated. Joblessness is up, the number of female-headed households is up, rates of drug use are up, and so on. For this reason, Wilson argues that African Americans can best be helped through strategies designed to create full employment and better jobs for *all* Americans, such as the movements for fair wages and for increasing educational opportunities described in Chapter 7.

Double jeopardy means having low status on two different dimensions of stratification.

focus on  AMERICAN DIVERSITY

The Election of Barack Hussein Obama

On November 4, 2008, Barack Obama was elected President of the United States. Obama, who identifies as African American, is the son of a white American mother and a black Kenyan father.

Given continuing prejudice against African Americans, how was Obama able to get elected? In part, luck was on his side: The outgoing Republican president, George W. Bush, was the most unpopular president in history; the Republican vice presidential candidate, Sarah Palin, alienated many voters with her highly conservative views and lack of political experience; and both an unpopular war and economic troubles turned voters against the ruling Republican party (Todd & Gawiser 2009).

Obama also won election because he and his campaigners did so many things right. First, they recognized the important growth in urban, suburban, African American, and Hispanic voters and focused on wooing those groups (Todd & Gawiser 2009; Sheldon 2009). Second, they recognized the tremendous potential of new media and took full advantage of email, BlackBerries, blogs, cell phones, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and the like (Smith 2009).

Of course, Obama's personal characteristics also contributed to his election. In addition to being highly intelligent and well educated, voters found him articulate, relaxed on stage, funny when appropriate, and amazingly calm—a trait that seemed particularly appealing in such difficult times.

Finally, Obama's election reflects a shift in U.S. attitudes toward race. No African American candidate, no matter how qualified he or she was or how inept the opposition was, could have been elected president 20 years ago. That said, his odds were certainly improved by the fact that he did not seem "too black" to white voters since he was both light-skinned and obviously upper-middle class.

So far, at least, Obama's election has improved both race relations and *perceptions* of race relations. Just over half of white Americans and almost all African Americans believe his presidency will bring different groups of Americans together. In addition, the percentage who believe that race relations in the United States are generally good increased in less than a year from 55 to 65 percent among whites and from 29 to 59 percent among blacks (*New York Times* 2009).

Most sociologists disagree. They doubt that policies based on social class alone will be enough to resolve the problem of racial inequality in the United States. True, there are middle- and even upper-class minority-group members, and it would be a serious mistake to assume that racism keeps all racial minorities poor and powerless. Nevertheless, race and ethnicity continue to be fundamental dividing lines in U.S. society. Membership in a minority group remains a handicap in social-class attainment and in social relationships. For example, the finding that middle-class African Americans are much more likely than are middle-class whites to live in poor neighborhoods suggests that the issue goes beyond class (Alba, Logan, & Stults. 2000). Any successful strategy for combating inequality in the United States will have to address issues of race and ethnicity as well as social class.

Strategies for Ending Inequality

The major strategies used in the United States to fight against racial and ethnic inequality are antidiscrimination and affirmative action laws. Since 1964, the United States has officially outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. These laws have had considerable effect. States can no longer declare interracial marriage illegal or refuse to allow African Americans to vote or to attend state schools, and newspapers can no longer advertise that a job is open only to whites.

Whereas antidiscrimination laws make it illegal to discriminate, affirmative action rules require employers, schools, and others to actively work to increase the representation of groups that have historically experienced discrimination.

This means, for example, that a college with very few minority faculty may be required to advertise new jobs through minority faculty organizations, as well as in regular employment bulletins. Affirmative action has proven much more contentious than antidiscrimination laws.

Where This Leaves Us

Racism and interethnic conflicts are problems worldwide, erupting in schoolyards, on street corners, and in courts of law. This does not mean, though, that these conflicts cannot be lessened or even eliminated. Irish people no longer are refused employment, as was common in the nineteenth century, and Jews no longer are prohibited from living in certain neighborhoods or belonging to certain clubs, as was common until the 1960s. Ideas about race and ethnicity are social constructions that change as societies change. To combat prejudice and discrimination, we will need to combat subtle and institutionalized racism, and we will need to address the social class inequalities that support racial and ethnic inequalities. Doing so will be both especially difficult and especially crucial if economic hard times continue in the United States.

Summary

1. A race is a category of people treated as distinct due to physical characteristics that have been given social importance. An ethnic group is a category whose members share a common origin and culture. Both race and ethnicity are socially constructed categories.
2. In the United States, the population is stratified by both race and class. These two factors work together to create greater advantages or disadvantages for different groups.
3. The concepts of majority and minority groups provide a general framework for examining structured inequalities based on ascribed statuses. Interaction between majority- and minority-group members may take the form of pluralism, assimilation, or conflict.
4. Prejudice, discrimination, segregation, and institutionalized racism all help to maintain racial and ethnic inequality. Color-blind racism allows inequality to continue even when majority-group members believe that they are not prejudiced.
5. In the United States, white ethnicity is now largely a symbolic characteristic. Its main consequence is that it has become the "standard" American ethnicity against which other groups are judged. White racial identity is typically invisible and carries considerable if unacknowledged privileges.
6. On many fronts, African Americans have improved their position in U.S. society. Nevertheless, African American families continue to have a median income that is far lower than that of white families. Major areas of continued concern are high rates of female-headed households, unemployment, and housing segregation.
7. Hispanics are the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the United States. They generally have fewer years of education and lower earnings than do other Americans, but they are increasingly assimilating into American culture and life. Hispanic immigration helps the economy overall but may reduce income for the least-educated U.S. citizens.
8. Native Americans are the least-prosperous minority group in the United States. Living conditions and economic prospects are most difficult on geographically isolated reservations.
9. Asian Americans have used education as the road to social mobility. Even the newest immigrant groups outstrip white Americans in their pursuit of higher education. Despite some discrimination, Asian Americans have higher median family incomes than do white Americans and experience low levels of residential segregation.
10. Arab Americans are primarily middle class: well educated, with good jobs. A majority of Americans hold

favorable views toward Arab Americans, but prejudice against them is nonetheless strong.

11. Efforts to reduce racial and ethnic inequality will need to focus not only on reducing prejudice and discrimination but also on tackling broader issues of economic inequality.

Thinking Critically

1. Within the next 50 years or so, non-Hispanic whites will be a *numerical* minority within the United States. In sociological terms, do you think they will be a minority group? What social, economic, or political changes do you expect as a result of changes in the relative size of the different U.S. racial and ethnic groups?
2. In thinking about the relationship between prejudice and discrimination, we generally assume that prejudice leads to discrimination. Can you think of a time or situation when discrimination might have led to prejudice?
3. Consider how people you know talk about Arab Americans and how you have seen them portrayed in the media. Then, using the concepts in this chapter, discuss whether Arab Americans are considered white. (Note: Do not discuss whether they *should* be considered white, just whether they are.)
4. List five things you typically do during the course of the week, such as going shopping or meeting with friends. How would that experience be different if you woke up tomorrow and found that your race had changed to African American or to white?
5. Some scholars contend that the major cause of racial/ethnic inequality in the United States today is institutionalized, not individual, racism. If this is so, what recommendations would you offer to policy makers who wanted to reduce racial or ethnic differences in quality of life?
6. What similarities and what differences do you see between the situation in Darfur and that of African Americans in the United States?

Book Companion Website

www.cengage.com/sociology/brinkerhoff

Prepare for quizzes and exams with online resources—including tutorial quizzes, a glossary, interactive flash cards, crossword puzzles, essay questions, virtual explorations, and more.