Chapter 8

Racial and Ethnic Inequality
The Social Construction of Race and Ethnicity

- The process through which a culture defines what constitutes a race or an ethnic group.

**Race** – a category of people treated as distinct on the basis of physical characteristics to which social importance has been assigned.

**Ethnic group** – a category of people thought to share a common origin and elements of a common culture.
Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Majority and Minority Groups

A majority group – is one that is culturally, economically and politically dominant.

A minority group – is one that is culturally, economically and politically subordinate.
Prejudice and Discrimination

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

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

Prejudice is an *attitude*; discrimination is *behavior*.
Factors Contributing to Prejudice

- **Authoritarian personality** – is submissive to those in authority and antagonistic toward those lower in status.
- **Socialization** – may include hateful norms directed at racial or ethnic categories.
- **Scapegoating** – when people or groups who are blocked in their own goal attainment blame others for their own failures.
- **Competition** - related to economic competition or conflict over scarce resources.
Racial and Ethnic Inequality

*Maintaining Prejudice: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy…*

If we believe that Jews think they are better than others, then we don’t invite them to our homes. When we subsequently observe that they associate only with one another, we take this as confirmation of our belief.
Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Institutionalized Racism

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

Example: school segregation and tracking reinforce racial inequality in the United States.

Example: the administration of ‘standardized’ tests reinforces racial inequality in the U.S.
Environmental Racism

- The disproportionately large number of health and environmental risks that minorities face daily in their neighborhoods and workplaces.
- Race is the best predictor of exposure to environmental pollution; poverty is the second best predictor.
Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Multiplying Disadvantages

- Conflict theory suggests that advantaged groups work to keep others from getting access to advantages and thus maintain their power.

- Two stratification systems:
  - class
  - race & ethnicity

- The two systems work together to multiply disadvantage and inequality.
Racial and Ethnic Inequality

- Between group comparisons of white Non-Hispanic, Hispanic and African American families:
  1. Median income of white Non-Hispanic families is about 1.5 times that of the other two groups
  2. Similar patterns of *internal* income inequality exist within groups
  3. White Non-Hispanic families have 10 times the wealth of Hispanic and African American families
Patterns of Interaction

- Relations between racial and ethnic groups can take one of three general forms:
  1. Pluralism
  2. Assimilation
  3. Conflict
Understanding Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Patterns of Interaction

- **Pluralism** – the peaceful coexistence of separate and equal cultures in the same society.
- **Assimilation** – exists when minority group members adopt aspects of the majority culture.
- **Conflict** – has taken the form of social exclusion, slavery, expulsion, imprisonment, and genocide.
- **Genocide** – mass killings aimed at destroying a population.
Maintaining Racial and Ethnic Inequality

**Segregation**

Refers to the physical separation of minority – majority group members.

- Segregation continues for two reasons:
  1. economic across racial/ethnic groups
  2. prejudice and discrimination
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.
Maintaining Racial and Ethnic Inequality

- Population Transfer – the forced relocation of a minority group
  1. Indirect transfer
  2. Direct transfer

- Internal Colonialism – the policy of economically exploiting minority groups
White Americans

- White ethnicity includes French, Dutch, Spanish, and English, Italians, Greeks, Poles, Norwegians…
- Ethnicity is no longer a primary standard for stratification among whites due to mixed heritage.
- The place of “unhyphenated whites” in the multicultural mix of the United States is less a melting pot and more an assimilation to a dominant language and culture.
- More of a focus on white as ‘race’ than ethnicity.
- White privilege – the benefits whites receive simply because they are white.
In the 1840s, employers posted signs saying “No Irish Need Apply”. Today being Irish has little impact on most Irish Americans’ lives, and many enjoy celebrating their cultural heritage, like these boys at a St. Patrick’s Day parade.
Racial & Ethnic Inequality in U.S.

African-Americans

- Comprise 12.3% of the U.S. population.
- Arrived involuntarily - as slaves. Most can trace their ancestry in America to slavery.
- After slavery ended, legal and violent illegal barriers systematically excluded African Americans.
- Current concerns: neighborhood segregation, infant mortality, short lifespan for males, continued economic disadvantage, lag in educational attainment, female headed families.
Hispanics

- Majority (66%) are of Mexican heritage, Latinos have also arrived in America from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and many Central and South American nations.
- Hispanics constitute 12.5% of the U.S. population, making them the largest minority group in the country.
- **Concerns**: most poorly educated group, greatest likelihood of living in poverty
Education by Race and Hispanic Origin, 2004

Percent completing high school, age 25 or older

- White: 86%
- African American: 79%
- Asian: 85%
- All Hispanics: 59%
- Mexican: 51%
- Puerto Rican: 67%
- Cuban: 71%
- Central and S. American: 65%
Poverty by Race and Hispanic Origin, 2004

- White: 8%
- African American: 22%
- Asian: 10%
- All Hispanics: 21%
- Mexican: 23%
- Puerto Rican: 26%
- Cuban: 16%
- Central and S. American: 15%

Percent of families below poverty level
Racial & Ethnic Inequality in U.S.

Asian Americans

- Comprised of Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, Laotians, Vietnamese…
- About 3.6% of U.S. population.
- Segmented immigration: descendents of 19th century immigrants (Japan & China); post-WWII immigrants (Philippines, Korea, India); recent refugees from Southeast Asia.
- *Concerns*: discrimination persists, earning disparity with comparable whites.
Racial & Ethnic Inequality in U.S.

Native Americans

- Less than 1% of U.S. population.
- Nearly half live in Oklahoma, Arizona, California and New Mexico.
- More than 200 tribal groups with different cultures and languages.
- **Concerns**: lowest levels of education, highest levels of alcoholism and premature death, poor economic conditions on isolated reservations, continued prejudice and discrimination by whites.
Racial & Ethnic Inequality in U.S.

Multiracial Americans

- Comprise about 1.6% of American population.
- Absolute number of Multiracial Americans has increased 10 times over last half century; significant numbers of mixed race individuals are self identifying as multiracial rather than choosing only one parent’s race.
- **Concerns**: social and systemic resistance to multiracial identification rather than a predetermined racial slot.
Racial & Ethnic Inequality in U.S.

Arab Americans

- Much less than 1% of U.S. population.
- Immigrants or children of immigrants from North Africa and Middle East (Morocco, Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Iraq)
- Common linguistics, cultural and historical traditions.
- High education attainment and income levels.
- *Concerns*: continued prejudice and some increased unease by other Americans since attacks of 9/11.
Arab Americans, like these Michigan schoolchildren, are an increasingly important minority group in the United States.
The Future of Racial and Ethnic Inequality in the U.S.

Strategies for Ending Inequality

- **Antidiscrimination laws**: outlaw discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex and national origin.

- **Affirmative action laws**: require employers, schools and others to increase the representation of groups that historically have experienced discrimination.

- **Affirmative action laws have proven more contentious than antidiscrimination laws.**