

Chapter 3

Racial and Ethnic Inequality

1. Racial and Ethnic Inequality: A Historical Prelude

- Describe the targets of nineteenth-century mob violence in US cities.
- Discuss why the familiar saying “The more things change, the more they stay the same” applies to the history of race and ethnicity in the United States.

Section Outline

- **Racial History:** Race and ethnicity have torn at the fabric of American society ever since the time of Christopher Columbus, when an estimated 1 million Native Americans populated the eventual United States. African Americans also have a history of maltreatment that began during the colonial period, when Africans were forcibly transported from their homelands to be sold as slaves in the Americas.

Key Takeaways

- US history is filled with violence and other maltreatment against Native Americans, blacks, and immigrants.
- Social scientists warn that the status of people of color has been worsening.

For Your Review

1. Describe why Myrdal said US race relations were an “American dilemma.”
2. How much did you learn in high school about the history of race and ethnicity in the United States? Do you think you should have learned more?

2. The Meaning of Race and Ethnicity

- Critique the biological concept of race.

- Discuss why race is a social construction.
- Explain why ethnic heritages have both good and bad consequences.

Section Outline

- **Race:** A key question about race is whether it is more of a biological category or a social category. Most people think of race in biological terms.
- **Race as a Social Construction:** Some believe that race is a social construction, a concept that has no objective reality but rather is what people decide it is. In this view, race has no real existence other than what and how people think of it.
- **Ethnicity:** Ethnicity refers to the shared social, cultural, and historical experiences, stemming from common national or regional backgrounds, that make subgroups of a population different from one another.

Key Takeaways

- Sociologists think race is best considered a social construction rather than a biological category.
- “Ethnicity” and “ethnic” avoid the biological connotations of “race” and “racial.”

For Your Review

1. Sociologists think race is best considered a social construction rather than a biological category.
2. “Ethnicity” and “ethnic” avoid the biological connotations of “race” and “racial.”

Key Terms

- **Race** -- A category of people who share certain inherited physical characteristics,

such as skin color, facial features, and stature.

- **Social Construction** -- A concept that has no objective reality but rather is what people decide it is.
- **Ethnicity** -- The shared social, cultural, and historical experiences, stemming from common national or regional backgrounds, that make subgroups of a population different from one another.
- **Ethnic Group** -- A subgroup of a population with a set of shared social, cultural, and historical experiences; with relatively distinctive beliefs, values, and behaviors; and with some sense of identity of belonging to the subgroup.

3. Prejudice

- Define prejudice, racism, and stereotypes.
- Discuss the major social-psychological and sociological theories of prejudice.
- Describe how the nature of prejudice has changed.

Section Outline

- **Explaining Prejudice:** One of the first social-psychological explanations of prejudice centered on the authoritarian personality. According to this view, authoritarian personalities develop in childhood in response to parents who practice harsh discipline. Another early and still popular social-psychological explanation is called frustration theory (or scapegoat theory) In this view individuals with various problems become frustrated and tend to blame their troubles on groups that are often disliked in the real world. A popular sociological explanation emphasizes *conformity* and *socialization* and is called *social learning theory*.

- **Correlates of Prejudice:** Correlates that have been studied include age, education, gender, region of country, race, residence in integrated neighborhoods, and religiosity.
- **The Changing Nature of Prejudice:** Many scholars say that Jim Crow racism has been replaced by a more subtle form of racial prejudice, termed *laissez-faire*, *symbolic*, or *modern* racism, that amounts to a “kinder, gentler, antiblack ideology” that avoids notions of biological inferiority.
- **Prejudice and Public Policy Preferences:** If whites do continue to believe in racial stereotypes, say the scholars who study modern prejudice, they are that much more likely to oppose government efforts to help people of color.

Key Takeaways

- Social-psychological explanations of prejudice emphasize authoritarian personalities and frustration, while sociological explanations emphasize social learning and group threat.
- Education and region of residence are related to racial prejudice among whites; prejudice is higher among whites with lower levels of formal education and among whites living in the South.
- Jim Crow racism has been replaced by symbolic or modern racism that emphasizes the cultural inferiority of people of color.
- Racial prejudice among whites is linked to certain views they hold about public policy. Prejudice is associated with lower support among whites for governmental efforts to help people of color and with greater support for a more punitive

criminal justice system.

For Your Review

1. Think about the last time you heard someone say a remark that was racially prejudiced. What was said? What was your reaction?
2. The text argues that it is inappropriate in a democratic society for racial prejudice to influence public policy. Do you agree with this argument? Why or why not?

Key Terms

- **Prejudice** -- A set of negative attitudes, beliefs, and judgments about whole categories of people, and about individual members of those categories, because of their perceived race and/or ethnicity.
- **Racism** -- The belief that certain racial or ethnic groups are inferior to one's own.
- **Stereotypes** -- Simplified, mistaken generalizations about people because of their race and/or ethnicity.
- **Authoritarian Personality** -- A personality emphasizing such things as obedience to authority, a rigid adherence to rules, and low acceptance of people not like oneself and said to help account for racial and ethnic prejudice.
- **Frustration Theory (or Scapegoat Theory)** -- As an explanation of racial and ethnic prejudice, the view that individuals blame the problems they experience on racial and ethnic minorities and thus scapegoat them instead of recognizing the real sources of their own misfortunes.

4. Discrimination

- Discuss Merton's views on whether prejudice and discrimination always coincide.
- Distinguish between individual discrimination and institutional discrimination.
- Provide two examples of institutional discrimination.

Section Outline

- **Individual Discrimination:** Individual discrimination is common, as Joe Feagin (1991), a former president of the American Sociological Association, found when he interviewed middle-class African Americans about their experiences.
- **Institutional Discrimination:** Discrimination that pervades the practices of whole institutions, such as housing, medical care, law enforcement, employment, and education does not just affect a few isolated people of color. Instead, it affects large numbers of individuals simply because of their race or ethnicity.
- **Mortgages, Redlining, and Residential Segregation:** The law forbids bankers and other financial lenders to consider race and ethnicity. Yet African Americans and Latinos are more likely than whites to have their mortgage applications declined. Because members of these groups tend to be poorer than whites and to have less desirable employment and credit histories, the higher rate of mortgage rejections may be appropriate, albeit unfortunate.
- **Employment Discrimination:** Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned racial discrimination in employment, including hiring, wages, and firing. However, African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans still have much lower earnings than whites. Several factors explain this disparity.

Key Takeaways

- People who practice racial or ethnic discrimination are usually also prejudiced,

but not always. Some people practice discrimination without being prejudiced, and some may not practice discrimination even though they are prejudiced.

- Individual discrimination is common and can involve various kinds of racial slights. Much individual discrimination occurs in the workplace.
- Institutional discrimination often stems from prejudice, but institutions can also practice racial and ethnic discrimination when they engage in practices that seem to be racially neutral but in fact have a discriminatory effect.

For Your Review

1. If you have ever experienced individual discrimination, either as the person committing it or as the person affected by it, briefly describe what happened. How do you now feel when you reflect on this incident?
2. Do you think institutional discrimination occurs because people are purposely acting in a racially discriminatory manner? Why or why not?

Key Terms

- **Discrimination** -- With regard to racial and ethnic inequality, the arbitrary denial of rights, privileges, and opportunities to members of subordinate racial and ethnic groups.
- **Individual Discrimination** -- Discrimination that individuals practice in their daily lives.
- **Institutional Discrimination** -- Discrimination that pervades the practices of

whole institutions, such as housing, medical care, law enforcement, employment, and education, even if such discrimination is not intended.

5. Dimensions of Racial and Ethnic Inequality

- Describe any two manifestations of racial and ethnic inequality in the United States.
- Explain how and why racial inequality takes a hidden toll on people of color.
- Provide two examples of white privilege.

Section Outline

- **The Increasing Racial/Ethnic Wealth Gap:** The report found that the wealth gap between white households on the one hand and African American and Latino households on the other hand was much wider than just a few years earlier, thanks to the faltering US economy since 2008 that affected blacks more severely than whites.
- **The Hidden Toll of Racial and Ethnic Inequality:** African Americans on the average have worse health than whites and die at younger ages. In fact, every year there are an additional 100,000 African American deaths than would be expected if they lived as long as whites do. Although many reasons probably explain all these disparities, scholars are increasingly concluding that the stress of being black is a major factor.
- **White Privilege: The Benefits of Being White:** US whites enjoy privileges in their daily lives simply because they are white. Social scientists term these advantages white privilege and say that whites benefit from being white whether or not they are aware of their advantages.

Key Takeaways

- Compared to non-Latino whites, people of color of lower incomes, lower

educational attainment, higher poverty rates, and worse health.

- Racial and ethnic inequality takes a hidden toll on people of color, as the stress they experience impairs their health and ability to achieve.
- Whites benefit from being white, whether or not they realize it. This benefit is called white privilege.

For Your Review

1. Write a brief essay that describes important dimensions of racial and ethnic inequality in the United States.
2. If you are white, describe a time when you benefited from white privilege, whether or not you realized it at the time. If you are a person of color, describe an experience when you would have benefited if you had been white.

6. Explaining Racial and Ethnic Inequality

- Understand cultural explanations for racial and ethnic inequality.
- Describe structural explanations for racial and ethnic inequality.

Section Outline

- **Biological Inferiority:** One long-standing explanation is that blacks and other people of color are *biologically inferior*: They are naturally less intelligent and have other innate flaws that keep them from getting a good education and otherwise doing what needs to be done to achieve the American Dream. As discussed earlier, this racist view is no longer common today
- **Cultural Deficiencies:** Another explanation of racial and ethnic inequality focuses on supposed *cultural deficiencies* of African Americans and other people

of color (Murray, 1984). These deficiencies include a failure to value hard work and, for African Americans, a lack of strong family ties, and are said to account for the poverty and other problems facing these minorities.

Key Takeaways

- Although a belief in biological inferiority used to be an explanation for racial and ethnic inequality, this belief is now considered racist.
- Cultural explanations attribute racial and ethnic inequality to certain cultural deficiencies among people of color.
- Structural explanations attribute racial and ethnic inequality to problems in the larger society, including discriminatory practices and lack of opportunity.

For Your Review

1. Which of the three explanations of racial and ethnic inequality makes the most sense to you? Why?
2. Why should a belief in the biological inferiority of people of color be considered racist?

Key Terms

- **White Privilege** -- The advantages that US whites enjoy in their daily lives simply because they are white, whether or not they are aware of these advantages.

7. Reducing Racial and Ethnic Inequality

- Summarize the debate over affirmative action.
- Describe any three policies or practices that could reduce racial and ethnic inequality in the United States.

Section Outline

- **Affirmative Action:** Affirmative action refers to special consideration for minorities and women in employment and education to compensate for the discrimination and lack of opportunities they experience in the larger society. Affirmative action programs were begun in the 1960s to provide African Americans and, later, other people of color and women access to jobs and education to make up for past discrimination.

Key Takeaways

- There is reason to be both hopeful and less hopeful in regard to the future of racial and ethnic relations and inequality in the United States.
- Affirmative action continues to be a very controversial issue. Proponents think it is necessary to compensate for past and continuing racial and ethnic discrimination and lack of opportunity, while opponents think it discriminates against qualified whites.
- A variety of policies and practices hold strong potential for reducing racial and ethnic inequality, providing they are adequately funded and successfully implemented.

For Your Review

1. How hopeful are you in regard to the future of race and ethnicity in the United States? Explain your answer.
2. Do you favor or oppose affirmative action? Why?

Key Terms

- **Affirmative Action** -- Special consideration for minorities and women in

employment and education to compensate for the discrimination and lack of opportunities they experience in the larger society.