What does it mean to be an American? Does the high rate of recent immigration threaten the traditional values and lifestyles of the United States? Does the election of President Barack Obama mean that we have put racism behind us? Should Spanish be recognized as an official second language? How should slavery and the Indian wars be presented to public school children? Is the United States becoming too diverse? How should we think about ourselves as Americans? What traditions and heritages should be included in an American identity? What should it mean to be an American?

Questions such as these are crucial, but they are not new. They have been debated in one form or another over and over in our past, and continuing controversies about race, immigration, ethnicity, and language show that these questions are far from settled. We are a nation of immigrants, and we have been arguing, often passionately, about exclusion and inclusion and unity and diversity since the infancy of American society. Every member of our society is in some sense an immigrant or the descendant of immigrants. Even Native Americans “immigrated” to this continent, albeit thousands of years ago. We are all from somewhere else, with roots in another part of the globe. Some came here in chains; others came on ocean liners, on jet planes, or on foot. Some arrived last week, and others have had family here for centuries. Each wave of newcomers has in some way altered the social landscape of the United States. As many have observed, American society is continually becoming, permanently unfinished.

Our immigrant heritage and cultural diversity have made us a nation of both groups and individuals. Some of us feel intensely connected to the groups to which we belong and...
identify closely with our heritage. For others, the group connection is tenuous and distant. Either way, our groups influence our lives and perceptions. They help shape who we are and how we fit into the larger society.

**SOME AMERICAN STORIES**

To illustrate the influences of our connections with others who share our heritage, consider the life stories of some members of American society. Each represents millions of others, and each exemplifies a part of what it means to be an American.

Kim Park is a 24-year-old immigrant from Korea. He arrived in New York City about 3 years ago to work in his uncle’s grocery store. Kim typically works a 14-hour shift every day, 7 days a week. His duties include stocking and cleaning, and he operates the register when necessary. He is also learning how to do the bookkeeping. Instead of wages, Kim receives room and board and some spending money.

Kim is outgoing and gregarious. His English is improving rapidly, and he practices it whenever possible. He has twice enrolled in English language classes, but the demands of his job prevented him from completing the courses. On a third occasion, he was turned away because the course was already filled and there was no money to hire additional teachers. Eventually, Kim wants to become a U.S. citizen, bring his siblings to America, get married and start a family, and take over the store when his uncle retires. The store is located in a neighborhood that is changing in ethnic composition. Many different minority groups have called this neighborhood home over the years. During the late 1950s, the area was almost exclusively Jewish. The Jewish residents have since died or moved out, and they were followed by a mixture of African Americans and Hispanic and Asian groups.

Not far from Kim’s store is the apartment building where Shirley Umphlett, an African American, spent much of her childhood. In search of work, her family moved to New York from Alabama in the 1920s. Both her grandfather and father were construction workers, but because most labor unions and employers were white only, they had no access to the better-paying, more stable jobs and were often unemployed. Shirley’s mother worked as a housekeeper in a large downtown hotel to help meet family expenses. Shirley did well in school, attended college on scholarship, and is now a successful executive with a multinational corporation. She is in her 40s, is married with two children, and is career oriented and ambitious. At the same time, she is committed to helping other African Americans and poor Americans. She and her spouse volunteer in several community action programs and maintain memberships in three national organizations that serve and represent African Americans.

Shirley’s two children attend public school. One of their teachers is Mary Ann O’Brien, a fourth-generation Irish Catholic. Mary Ann’s great-grandparents were born in Ireland and came to New York as young adults in the 1880s. Her great-grandfather found work on the docks, and her great-grandmother worked as a housekeeper before her marriage. They had 7 children and 23 grandchildren. Mary Ann keeps in touch with more than 50 of her cousins, most of whom live within an hour of New York City. Each successive generation of Mary Ann’s family tended to do a little better educationally and occupationally. Mary Ann’s father was a fireman, and her sister is a lawyer. Mary Ann does not think much about her Irish ancestry. She does attend Mass regularly, mostly because she likes the ritual and the connection with tradition. She has a vague interest in Ireland and admits she goes a little crazy on St. Patrick’s Day, but otherwise, her energies are completely focused on her family and her job.

In one of her fourth-grade classes, Mary Ann took a liking to a young Native American student named George Snyder. George was born on a reservation in upstate New York, but his family moved to the city when he was a baby. The unemployment rate on the reservation often exceeded 50%, and George’s father thought the city would offer a better chance for work. Mary Ann and George kept in touch after he left elementary school, and George
stopped by occasionally for a chat. Then, when George was in high school, his father was laid off, and the family returned to the reservation. Shortly thereafter, George became rebellious, and his grades began to slip. He was arrested for shoplifting and later for selling drugs, spent some time in a state correctional facility, and never finished school. The last time Mary Ann saw him, she tried to persuade him to return to school or pursue a GED but got nowhere. She pointed out that he was still young and told him there were many things he could do in the future, that life was full of opportunities. He responded, “What’s the use? I’m an Indian with a record—I’ve got no future.”

George’s parole officer is Hector Gonzalez. Hector’s parents came to the United States from Mexico. Every year, they crossed the border to join the stream of agricultural migrant laborers and then returned to their village in Mexico at the end of the season. With the help of a cousin, Hector’s father eventually got a job as a cabdriver in New York City, where Hector was raised. Hector’s mother never learned much English but worked occasionally in a garment factory located in her neighborhood. Hector thinks of himself as American but is interested in his parents’ home village back in Mexico, where most of his extended family still lives. Hector is bilingual and has visited the village several times. His grandmother still lives there, and he calls her once a month.

Hector worked his way through college in 7 years. After 10 years as a parole officer, he is becoming increasingly burned out and discouraged, especially about young men such as George. “There are no jobs in the city, no real opportunities. What’s the point of working with these guys if all they have the chance to do is hustle dope?”

Hector regularly has lunch at a restaurant around the corner from his office. Two of the three managers of the restaurant are white, most of the waitresses are black, and the kitchen staff is Latino. One of the bus boys who often clears Hector’s table is in the country illegally. He left his home village in Guatemala 5 years ago, traveled the length of Mexico on freight trains and on foot and crossed the border through the desert of Southern Arizona. He lives in a tiny apartment with five others and sends 40% of his wages to his family back in Guatemala. He enjoys living in the United States but is not particularly interested in legalizing his status: His most fervent wish is to go home, get married, and start a family.

The restaurant is in a building owned by a corporation headed by William Buford III, a white American. The Bufords have been a part of New York’s high society for generations. The family invests the bulk of its fortune in real estate and owns land and buildings throughout the New York metropolitan area. The Bufords have a three-story luxury townhouse in Manhattan but rarely go into town, preferring to spend their time on their rural Connecticut estate. William Buford attended the finest private schools and graduated from Harvard University. At age 57, he is semi-retired, plays golf twice a week, vacations in Europe, and employs a staff of five to care for himself and his family. He has little interest in the history of his family but knows that his ancestors came to America from England. Family legend has it that a distant relative played an important role in the Revolutionary War, but no one has ever bothered to investigate this claim.

These individuals belong to groups that vary along some of the most consequential dimensions within our society—ethnicity, race, immigration status, social class, gender, and religion—and their lives have been shaped by these affiliations (some more than others, of course). Similarly, our group memberships affect the ways others perceive us, the opportunities available to us, the way we think about ourselves, and our view of American society and the larger world. They affect our perception of what it means to be American.

THE INCREASING VARIETY OF AMERICAN MINORITY GROUPS

Trends and Questions

Our group memberships also shape the choices we make in the voting booth and in other areas of social life. We face important decisions that will affect our lives and the lives of
countless millions, and we need to contemplate these choices systematically and thoroughly. We also need to be aware that members of different groups will evaluate these decisions in different ways. The issues will be filtered through the screens of divergent experiences, group histories, and present situations. The debates over which direction our society should take are unlikely to be meaningful or even mutually intelligible without some understanding of the variety of ways of being American.

**Increasing Diversity**

The choices about the future of our society are especially urgent because the diversity of U.S. society is increasing dramatically, largely due to high rates of immigration. Since the 1960s, the number of immigrants arriving in the United States each year has tripled and includes groups from all over the globe, literally (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2009).

Can our society deal successfully with this diversity of cultures, languages, and races? Concerns about increasing diversity are compounded by other long-standing minority issues and grievances that remain unresolved. For example, charts and graphs presented in Part III of this text document continue gaps in income, poverty rates, and other measures of affluence and equality between minority groups and national norms. In fact, in many ways, the problems of African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans today are just as formidable as they were a generation ago.

As one way of gauging the dimensions of diversity in our nation, consider the changing makeup of U.S. society. Exhibit 1.1 presents the percentage of the total U.S. population in each of five groups. We will first consider this information “on its face” and analyze some of its implications. Then, we will consider (and question) the terms in which this information is framed.

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**Exhibit 1.1 Groups in U.S. Society, Percentage of Total Population 1980 to 2050**

![Graph showing percentage of total population by group from 1980 to 2050](image)

**NOTE:** “Hispanics” may be of any race.

**SOURCE:** U.S. Bureau of the Census (2008c).
Chapter 1  Diversity in the United States

The exhibit reports the actual relative sizes of the groups for 1980, 1990, and 2000 and the projected or estimated relative sizes through 2050. Note how the increasing diversity of U.S. society is reflected in the declining numerical predominance of non-Hispanic whites. As recently as 1980, more than 8 out of 10 Americans were members of this group, but, by the middle of this century, non-Hispanic whites will become a numerical minority. Several states (Texas, California, Hawaii, and New Mexico) are already “majority-minority,” and seven more are less than 60% white (Wall Street Journal, 2010). These states are a preview of what the entire nation will look like within several decades.

African Americans and American Indians are projected to remain stable in their relative size, but Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders will grow dramatically. Asian and Pacific Islander groups composed only 2% of the population in 1980 but will grow to almost 10% by midcentury. The most dramatic growth, however, will be for Hispanic Americans, who became the largest minority group in 2002, surpassing African Americans. This group will grow to 30% of the population by midcentury.

The projections into the future are just educated guesses, of course, but they presage profound change for the United States. As this century unfolds, our society will grow more diverse racially, culturally, and linguistically. The United States will become less white, less European, and more like the world as a whole. Some see these changes as threats to traditional white, middle-class American values and lifestyles. Others see them as providing an opportunity for the emergence of other equally attractive and legitimate value systems and lifestyles.

What’s in a Name?

Let’s take a moment to reflect on the categories used in Exhibit 1.1. The group names I used are arbitrary, and none of these groups have clear or definite boundaries. We will use these terms because they are convenient, familiar, and consistent with the labels found in Census reports, much of the sociological research literature, and other sources of information. This does not mean that the labels are “true” in any absolute sense or equally useful in all circumstances. In fact, these group names have some serious shortcomings, several of which I note here.

First, the people within these groups are not necessarily similar to one another. Two people within any of these categories might be as different from each other as any two people selected from different categories. They may share some general, superficial physical or cultural traits, but they will also vary by social class, religion, gender, and in thousands of other ways. People classified as “Asian and Pacific Islander,” for example, represent scores of different national and linguistic backgrounds (Japanese, Samoans, Vietnamese, Pakistanis, and so forth), and “American Indian or Alaska Native” includes people from hundreds of different tribal groups.

Also, the people within these categories do not necessarily think about themselves in terms of these labels. For example, a Hispanic American may think of herself more in national terms, as a Mexican or Cuban, or, even more specifically, she may identify with a particular region or village in her homeland. Thus, the labels often do not reflect the ways people think about who they are or where they come from. These statistical classifications do not necessarily reflect the everyday realities of the people in the category.

Third, even though the categories in Exhibit 1.1 are broad, they still provide no place for a number of groups. For example, where should we place Arab Americans and recent immigrants from Africa? These groups are relatively small in size (about 1 million people each), but there is no clear place for them in the categories listed in the exhibit. Should Arab Americans be classified as “Asian”? Should recent immigrants from Africa be placed in the same category as African Americans? Of course, we don’t need to have a category for every single group and every person, but we should recognize that classification schemes such as the one used in this exhibit (and in many other contexts) have limited utility and application.

A related problem with this classification scheme will become increasingly apparent in the years to come: There are no categories for the growing number of mixed-race individuals. The
number of “mixed” Americans is relatively small today—about 2% or 3% of the population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008b)—but is likely to increase rapidly because of the growing number of marriages across group lines. The number of these marriages has increased more than 10 times over since 1960 and by a factor of three between 1980 and 2008 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010d, Table 60). Obviously, the greater the number of mixed marriages, the greater the number of mixed Americans: One study estimates that 21% of the population will claim membership in this category by 2050 (Smith & Edmonston, 1997, p. 119).

Finally, we should note that these categories and group names are social constructions, fabricated in particular historical circumstances and reflective of particular power relationships. For example, the group called “American Indians” today didn’t exist prior to the period of European exploration and colonization of North America (and, in many ways, doesn’t exist today). Before the arrival of Europeans, there were hundreds of separate societies spread across the North American continent, each with their own language and culture. American Indians thought of themselves primarily in terms of their tribe and had no sense of a common identity with (and little awareness of) the other peoples that inhabited North America. They became a group first in the perceptions of European conquerors, who stressed their similarities and cast them as an enemy or out-group. The fact that American Indians are often defined as a single group today reflects their defeat and subordination and their status as a minority group: They became the “others” in contrast to the dominant group. In the same way (although through different processes), African, Hispanic, and Asian Americans came to be seen as separate groups not by their own choices but as one outcome of an unequal interaction with white Americans. These groups have become “real,” and much of this text is organized around a consideration of each of them (e.g., see the chapter titles in Part III). Nonetheless, we use the terms and labels as a convenience, not as a reflection of some unchangeable reality. These groups are real because they are seen as real from a particular perspective—that of the dominant group in this society: white Americans.

Questions About the Future, Sociology, and the Plan of This Book

Even though the labels used in Exhibit 1.1 are arbitrary, the trends displayed have important implications for the future of the United States. What kind of society are we becoming? What should it mean to be American? In the past, opportunity and success have been far more available to white Anglo-Saxon Protestant males than to members of other groups. Most of us, even the favored males such as William Buford III, would agree that this definition of American is far too narrow, but how inclusive should the definition be? Should we stress unity or celebrate diversity? How wide can the limits be stretched before national unity is threatened? How narrow can they be before the desire to preserve cultural and linguistic diversity is unjustly and unnecessarily stifled?

These first few pages have raised a lot of questions. The purpose of this book is to help you develop some answers and some thoughtful, informed positions on these issues. You should be aware from the beginning that the questions addressed here are complex and that the answers we seek are not obvious or easy. Indeed, there is no guarantee that we as a society will be able or willing to resolve all the problems of intergroup relations in the United States. However, we will never make progress in this area unless we confront the issues honestly and with an accurate base of knowledge and understanding. Certainly, these issues will not resolve themselves or disappear if they are ignored.

In the course of our investigation, we will rely on sociology and other social sciences for concepts, theory, and information. Chapters 1 to 3 introduce and define many of the ideas that will guide our investigation. Part II explores how relations between the dominant group and minority groups have evolved in American society. Part III analyzes the current situation of U.S. minority groups. In Part IV, the final section of the book, we explore many of the challenges and issues facing our society (and the world) and see what conclusions we can glean from our investigations and how they might shape the future.
What Does It Mean to Be an American?

In some ways, Butch is a typical American, a walking melting pot with a diverse ancestry. His multiple heritages symbolize the way Americans sometimes like to think of our society, as a blending of diversity, a unity forged from multiplicity. But are we really so flexible and accepting? Butch wonders if he really has a place in U.S. society. Like many people with multiple group memberships, he feels marginalized—partially a member of several groups but not fully accepted by any. According to projections, the number of people like Butch will increase in the future. What are the implications of this trend on the individual level, for identity and sense of belonging, and on the societal level, for unity and cohesion? Will we become more tolerant and accepting as people with multiple group memberships become more common? Will struggles like Butch’s continue?

BUTCH’S STORY

Who am I? What race am I? What nationality am I? Where do I fit into American society? Where can I find total acceptance? For most of my 47 years, I have struggled to find answers to these questions. I am an American of multiracial descent and culture. In this aspect, I am not very different from many Americans. The difference for me is that I have always felt an urge to feel and live the intermingling of blood that runs through my veins. American society has a way of forcing multiracial and biracial people to choose one race over the other. I personally feel this pressure every time I have to complete an application form with instructions to check just one box for race category.

My own racial and cultural background consists of American Indian from two nations, Lakota and Creek; African American; Italian American; and Puerto Rican. I am Spanish speaking, with some knowledge of the Lakota language. Possessing such a diverse background has often placed me in a position to hear many insensitive and racist remarks from one group or another—obviously, I have often been the target. In the eyes of white Italian people, I am viewed as a black person. Blacks often view me as a weak and tainted half-breed. American Indians have either cautiously accepted or rejected me. The Puerto Rican community has offered the most acceptance.

A family tree would be next to impossible in our family, largely due to secrets (skeletons in the closet), question marks, and taboo subjects. The matriarch of our family was my maternal grandmother, Anna, who was half black and half Creek Indian. My paternal grandfather was Oglala Lakota from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. He was called Jimbo, which was short for Jim Bull. I am told that my mother’s father was an Italian immigrant who lived in a “Little Italy” neighborhood. My father, Jimbo, called her Pipe because she always smoked a pipe. So when all this finally sorted out, it looked like this: My mother, Laura, is one-fourth black, one-fourth Creek, and half Italian. My father is half black and half Oglala Lakota.

The Italian side of our family was—and to a large extent remains—a mystery seldom discussed in our family. My mother and her siblings were born and raised in a “little Italy” neighborhood. At about the age of 12 or 13 years, I learned of our Italian ancestry. I received this information through one of our family historians, or storytellers, our Aunt June. Aunt June was one of my mother’s younger sisters. Aunt June was fair skinned, with dark eyes and hair. . . .

We have fond memories of Aunt June babysitting for us on the weekends. . . . [She] would tell us old family stories of when she and her brothers and sisters were young children. Sometimes, [she] would cross the forbidden line and tell us things that my mother and her other sisters had secretly kept hidden. . . .

One day, Aunt June pulled out this old wallet-size photo of a dark-haired white man with a Hitler-style moustache. She said to me, “This is your grandfather, my father. You can keep this picture, but don’t let my sisters know.” [She] told me that my grandfather was an Italian immigrant from Calabria, Italy. . . . In some ways, learning about my grandfather helped me make sense of some things. Between the ages of 5 and 7 years, I began to perceive and question the differences in skin colors, which were quite evident in our family. My mother and Aunt June were fair skinned, while my aunts Candace and Lily were brown and olive. Their brother, Tony, had black skin.

So, as a child, I popped this question to my mother: “If Uncle Tony is your brother, then why is he so dark, and you are so white?” My mother responded with a quick, sharp slap to my face and told me, “It’s not your business, and Tony is my brother, and that’s that.” As I was to learn . . . , this was just the beginning of hard questions to come with no easy answers.
Before we can begin to sort out the issues, we need common definitions and a common vocabulary for discussion. We begin with the term minority group. Taken literally, the mathematical connotation of this term is a bit misleading because it implies that minority groups are small. In reality, a minority group can be quite large and even can be a numerical majority of the population. Women, for example, are sometimes considered to be a separate minority group, but they are a numerical majority of the U.S. population. In South Africa, as in many nations created by European colonization, whites are a numerical minority (less than 10% of the population), but they have been by far the most powerful and affluent group and, despite recent changes, they retain their advantage in many ways.

Minority status has more to do with the distribution of resources and power than with simple numbers. The definition of minority group used in this book is based on Wagley and Harris (1958). According to this definition, a minority group has five characteristics:

1. The members of the group experience a pattern of disadvantage or inequality.
2. The members of the group share a visible trait or characteristic that differentiates them from other groups.
3. The minority group is a self-conscious social unit.
4. Membership in the group is usually determined at birth.
5. Members tend to marry within the group.

We will examine each of the defining characteristics here, and, a bit later, we will return to examine the first two—inequality and visibility—in greater detail, because they are the most important characteristics of minority groups.

The first and most important defining characteristic of a minority group is inequality—that is, some pattern of disability and disadvantage. The nature of the disability and the degree of disadvantage are variable and can range from exploitation, slavery, and genocide to slight irritants such as a lack of desks for left-handed students or a policy of racial exclusion at an expensive country club. (Note, however, that you might not agree the irritant is slight if you are a left-handed student awkwardly taking notes at a right-handed desk or if you are a golf aficionado who happens to be African American.) Whatever its scope or severity, whether it extends to wealth, jobs, housing, political power, police protection, or health care, the pattern of disadvantage is the key characteristic of a minority group. Because the group has less of what is valued by society, the term subordinate group is sometimes used instead of minority group. The pattern of disadvantage is the result of the actions of another group, often in the distant past, that benefits from and tries to sustain the unequal arrangement. This group can be called the core group or the dominant group. The latter term is used most frequently in this book because it reflects the patterns of inequality and the power realities of minority group status.

The second defining characteristic of a minority group is some visible trait or characteristic that sets members of the group apart and that the dominant group holds in low esteem. The trait can be cultural (e.g., language, religion, speech patterns, or dress styles), physical (e.g., skin color, stature, or facial features), or both. Groups that are defined primarily by their cultural characteristics are called ethnic minority groups. Examples of such groups are Irish Americans and Jewish Americans. Groups defined primarily by their physical characteristics are racial minority groups, such as African Americans or Native Americans. Note that these categories overlap. So-called ethnic groups may have (or may be thought to have) distinguishing physical characteristics (for example, the stereotypical Irish red hair or Jewish nose), and racial groups commonly have (or are thought to have) cultural traits that differ from the dominant group (for example, differences in dialect, religious values, or cuisine).
These distinguishing traits set boundaries and separate people into distinct groups. The traits are outward signs that identify minority group members and help maintain the patterns of disadvantage. The dominant group has (or at one time had) sufficient power to create the distinction between groups and, thus, solidify a higher position for itself. These markers of group membership are crucial: Without these visible signs, it would be difficult or impossible to identify who was in which group, and the system of minority group oppression would soon collapse.3

It is important to realize that the characteristics that mark the boundaries between groups usually are not significant in and of themselves. They are selected for their visibility and convenience, and objectively, they may be quite trivial and unimportant. For example, scientists have concluded that skin color and other so-called racial traits have little scientific, evolutionary, medical, or biological importance. As we shall see, skin color is an important marker of group membership in our society because it was selected during a complex and lengthy historical process, not because it has any inherent significance. These markers are social constructions that become important because we attribute significance to them.

A third characteristic of minority groups is that they are self-conscious social units, aware of their differentiation from the dominant group and of their shared disabilities. This shared social status can provide the basis for strong intragroup bonds and a sense of solidarity and can lead to views of the world that are quite different from those of the dominant group and other minority groups: In some ways, minority and dominant groups can live in different cultural worlds. For example, public opinion polls frequently show vast differences between dominant and minority groups in their views of the seriousness and extent of discrimination in American society. Exhibit 1.2 shows persistent and sizeable gaps in the percentage of nationally representative samples of whites and blacks who agree that blacks and whites have equal job opportunities. As would be expected, given their different histories, experiences, and locations in the social structure, blacks have much more negative views of racial equality, even though both groups have become somewhat more optimistic over the years. Even after the election of President Barack Obama, the percentage of black Americans who perceived equal racial opportunity was about half the percentage of white Americans.

ACTUAL QUESTION: In general, do you think that blacks have as good a chance as white people in your community to get any kind of job for which they are qualified, or do you think they don’t have as good a chance?

SOURCE: Gallup (2010).
A fourth characteristic of minority groups is that in general, membership is an ascribed status, or a status acquired at birth. The traits that identify minority group membership are typically not easy to change, and minority group status is usually involuntary and for life.

Finally, minority group members tend to marry within their own groups. This pattern can be voluntary, or the dominant group can dictate it. In fact, interracial marriages traditionally have been illegal in many states. Laws against miscegenation were declared unconstitutional only 40 years ago, in the late 1960s, by the U.S. Supreme Court (Bell, 1992).

This is a lengthy definition, but note how inclusive it is. Although it encompasses “traditional” minority groups such as African Americans and Native Americans, it also could be applied to other groups (with perhaps a little stretching). For instance, women arguably fit the first four criteria and can be analyzed with many of the same concepts and ideas that guide the analysis of other minority groups. Also, gay, lesbian, and transgendered Americans; disabled Americans; left-handed Americans; the aged; and very short, very tall, or very obese Americans could fit the definition of minority group without much difficulty. Although we should not be whimsical or capricious about definitions, it is important to note that the analyses developed in this book can be applied more generally than you might realize at first and may lead to some fresh insights about a wide variety of groups and people.

THE PATTERN OF INEQUALITY

As I mentioned earlier, the most important defining characteristic of minority group status is inequality. As documented in later chapters, minority group membership can affect access to jobs, education, wealth, health care, and housing. It is associated with a lower (often much lower) proportional share of valued goods and services and more limited (often much more limited) opportunities for upward mobility.

Stratification, or the unequal distribution of valued goods and services, is a basic feature of society. Every human society, except perhaps the simplest hunter-gatherer societies, is stratified to some degree; that is, the resources of the society are distributed so that some get more and others less of whatever is valued. Societies are divided into horizontal layers (or strata), often called social classes, which differ from one another by the amount of resources they command. Many criteria (such as education, age, gender, and talent) may affect a person’s social class position and his or her access to goods and services. Minority group membership is one of these criteria, and it has had a powerful impact on the distribution of resources in the United States and many other societies.

This section begins with a brief consideration of theories about the nature and important dimensions of stratification. It then focuses on how minority group status relates to stratification. During the discussion, I identify several concepts and themes used throughout this book.

Theoretical Perspectives

Sociology and the other social sciences have been concerned with stratification and human inequality since the formation of the discipline in the 19th century. An early and important contributor to our understanding of the nature and significance of social inequality was Karl Marx, the noted social philosopher and revolutionary. Half a century later, a sociologist named Max Weber, a central figure in the development of the discipline, critiqued and elaborated on Marx’s view of social inequality. Here, we also will consider the views of Gerhard Lenski, a contemporary sociologist whose ideas about the influence of economic and technological development on social stratification have considerable relevance when comparing societies and understanding the evolution of intergroup relations. We close with
a consideration of the views of another contemporary sociologist, Patricia Hill Collins, who argues that we need to view class, racial, gender, and other inequalities as a single, interlocking pattern.

**Karl Marx**

Although best known as the father of modern communism, Karl Marx was also the primary architect of a political, economic, and social philosophy that has played a major role in world affairs for more than 150 years. Marxism is a complex theory of history and social change in which inequality is a central concept and concern.

Marx argued that the most important source of inequality in society was the system of economic production. More specifically, he focused on the means of production, or the materials, tools, resources, and organizations by which the society produces and distributes goods and services. In an agricultural society, the means of production include land, draft animals, and plows. In an industrial society, the means of production include factories, commercial enterprises, banks, and transportation systems, such as railroads.

All societies include two main social classes that struggle over the means of production. One class owns or controls the means of production, and in the case of an industrial society, Marx called this elite or ruling class the bourgeoisie. The other class is the working class, or the proletariat. Marx believed that conflict between these classes was inevitable and that the ultimate result of this class struggle would be the victory of the working class, followed by the creation of a utopian society without exploitation, coercion, or inequality: in other words, a classless society.

Marxism has been extensively revised and updated over the past century and a half. Still, modern social science owes a great deal to Marx’s views on inequality and his insights on class struggle and social conflict. As you shall see, Marxism remains an important body of work and a rich source of insight into group relations in industrial society.

**Max Weber**

One of Marx’s major critics was Max Weber, a German sociologist who did most of his work around the turn of the 20th century. Weber thought that Marx’s view of inequality was too narrow. Marx saw social class as a matter of economic position or relationship to the means of production, but Weber argued that inequality was more complex and included dimensions other than just the economic. Individuals could be members of the elite in some ways but not in others. For example, an aristocratic family that has fallen on hard financial times might belong to the elite in terms of family lineage but not in terms of wealth. To use a more contemporary example, a major figure in the illegal drug trade could enjoy substantial wealth but be held in low esteem otherwise.

Weber expanded on Marx’s view of inequality by identifying three separate stratification systems. First, economic inequality is based on ownership or control of property, wealth, and income. This is similar to Marx’s concept of class, and in fact, Weber used the term class to identify this form of inequality.

A second system of stratification revolves around differences in prestige, or the amount of honor, esteem, or respect given to us by others. Class position is one factor that affects the amount of prestige enjoyed by a person. Other factors might include family lineage,
athletic ability, and physical appearance. In the United States and other societies, prestige is affected by the groups to which people belong, and members of minority groups typically receive less prestige than members of the dominant group. The difference between prestige and class can be illustrated by Shirley Umphlett, one of the Americans introduced earlier. As a minority group member with an economically rewarding career, she is ranked higher on one dimension of stratification (class or control of property, wealth, and income) but lower on another (status or amount of prestige).

Weber’s third stratification system is power, or the ability to influence others, make an impact on the decision-making process of society, and pursue and protect one’s self-interest and achieve one’s goals. One source of power is a person’s standing in politically active organizations, such as labor unions or pressure groups, which lobby state and federal legislatures. Some politically active groups have access to great wealth and can use their riches to promote their causes. Other groups may rely more on their size and their ability to mobilize large demonstrations to achieve their goals. Political groups and the people they represent vary in their abilities to affect the political process and control decision making; that is, they vary in the amount of power they can mobilize.

Typically, these three dimensions of stratification go together: Wealthy, prestigious groups will be more powerful (more likely to achieve their goals or protect their self-interest) than low-income groups or groups with little prestige. It is important to realize, however, that power is a separate dimension: Even very impoverished groups have sometimes found ways to express their concerns and pursue their goals.

Gerhard Lenski

Gerhard Lenski is a contemporary sociologist who follows Weber and distinguishes between class (or property), prestige, and power. Lenski expands on Weber’s ideas, however, by analyzing stratification in the context of societal evolution or the level of development of a society (Nolan & Lenski, 2004). He argues that the nature of inequality (the degree of inequality or the specific criteria affecting a group’s position) is closely related to subsistence technology, the means by which the society satisfies basic needs such as hunger and thirst. A preindustrial agricultural society relies on human and animal labor to generate the calories necessary to sustain life. Inequality in this type of society centers on control of land and labor because they are the most important means of production at that level of development.

In a modern industrial society, however, land ownership is not as crucial as ownership of manufacturing and commercial enterprises. At the industrial level of development, control of capital is more important than control of land, and the nature of inequality will change accordingly.

The United States and other societies recently have entered still another stage of development, often referred to as postindustrial society. In this type of society, economic growth is powered by developments in new technology, computer-related fields, information processing, and scientific research. In the postindustrial era, economic success will be closely related to specialized knowledge, familiarity with new technologies, and education in general (Chirot, 1994, p. 88; see also Bell, 1973).

These changes in subsistence technology, from agriculture to industrialization to the “information society,” alter the stratification system. As the sources of wealth, success, and power change, so do the relationships between minority and dominant groups. For example, the shift to an information-based, “hi-tech,” postindustrial society means that the advantages conferred by higher levels of education will be magnified and that groups that have less access to schooling are likely to fall even lower in the stratification system.
Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins calls for a new approach to the study of inequality and group relations. She argues that it is insufficient to examine the dimensions of inequality—class, race, and gender—separately or one at a time. Rather, they need to be seen as interlocked and mutually reinforcing. Traditionally, inequality tends to be viewed by social scientists as a series of dichotomies: elite vs. masses, powerful vs. powerless, men vs. women, blacks vs. whites, and so forth. Intersectionality theorists urge us to analyze how these statuses are linked to one another and form a “matrix of domination.” For example, white Americans should not be seen as simply the “dominant group,” undifferentiated and homogenous. Some segments of this group, such as women or poor whites, may occupy a privileged status in terms of their race but be subordinate in others, as defined by their gender or economic status. In the same way, minority groups are internally differentiated along lines of class and gender and members of some segments are more privileged than others. Who is the oppressed and who is the oppressor changes across social contexts, and people can occupy both statuses simultaneously.

All groups experience some relative degree of advantage and disadvantage, and Hill urges us to focus on how the separate systems of domination and subordination crosscut and overlap one another, how opportunity and individual experience is shaped by the matrix of domination. In this text, one of our main concerns will be to explore how minority group experience is mediated by class and gender, but you should be aware that this approach can be applied to many other dimensions of power and inequality, including disability, sexual preference, and religion.

**Minority Group Status and Stratification**

The theoretical perspectives we have just reviewed raise three important points about the connections between minority group status and stratification. First, as already noted, minority group status affects access to wealth and income, prestige, and power. A society in which minority groups systematically receive less of these valued goods is stratified, at least partly, by race and ethnicity. In the United States, minority group status has been and continues to be one of the most important and powerful determinants of life chances, health and wealth, and success. These patterns of inequality are documented and explored in Part III, but even casual observation of U.S. society will reveal that minority groups control proportionately fewer resources and that minority group status and stratification are intimately and complexly intertwined.

Second, although social classes and minority groups are correlated, they are separate social realities. The degree to which one is dependent on the other varies from group to group. Mary Ann O’Brien, the Irish American schoolteacher introduced at the beginning of this chapter, belongs to a group that today enjoys considerable social mobility, or easy access to opportunities, even though the Irish faced extensive discrimination in the past. Although her ethnicity may not matter much these days, her gender can still be an extremely consequential factor in shaping her life chances. As stressed by the intersectionality approach, degrees of domination and subordination are variable and all groups are subdivided by cross-cutting lines of differentiation.

Social class and minority group status are different dimensions of inequality, and they can vary independently. Some members of a minority group can be successful economically, wield great political power, or enjoy high prestige even though the vast majority of their group languishes in poverty and powerlessness. Each minority group is internally divided by systems of inequality based on class, status, or power, and in the same way, members of the same social class may be separated by ethnic or racial differences.

The third point concerning the connections between stratification and minority groups brings us back to group conflict. Dominant-minority group relationships are created by struggle over the control of valued goods and services. Minority group structures (such as
slavery) emerge so that the dominant group can control commodities such as land or labor, maintain its position in the stratification system, or eliminate a perceived threat to its well-being. Struggles over property, wealth, prestige, and power lie at the heart of every dominant-minority relationship. Karl Marx believed that all aspects of society and culture were shaped to benefit the elite or ruling class and to sustain the economic system that underlies its privileged position. The treatment of minority groups throughout American history provides a good deal of evidence to support Marx’s point.

VISIBLE DISTINGUISHING TRAITS

In this section, we focus on the second defining characteristic of minority groups: the visible traits that denote membership. The boundaries between dominant and minority groups have been established along a wide variety of lines, including religion, language, and occupation. Here, we consider race and gender, two of the more physical and permanent—and, thus, more socially visible—markers of group membership.

Race

In the past, race has been widely misunderstood, but the false ideas and exaggerated importance attached to race have not been mere errors of logic, subject to debate and refutation. At various times and places, they have been associated with some of the greatest tragedies in human history: massive exploitation and mistreatment, slavery, and genocide. Many myths about race survive in the present, although perhaps in diluted or muted form, and it is important to cultivate accurate understandings (although the scientific knowledge that has accumulated about race is no guarantee that it will not be used to instigate or justify further tragedies in the future).

Thanks to advances in the sciences of genetics, biology, and physical anthropology, we know more about what race is and, more importantly, what it is not. We cannot address all the confusion in these few pages, but we can establish a basic framework and use the latest scientific research to dispel some of the myths.

Race and Human Evolution

Our species first appeared in East Africa about 100,000 years ago. Our ancient ancestors were hunters and gatherers who slowly wandered away from their ancestral region in search of food and other resources. Over the millennia, our ancestors slowly wandered across the entire globe, first to what is now the Middle East and then to Asia, Europe, Australia, and North and South America.

Human “racial” differences evolved during this period of dispersion, as our ancestors adapted, physically as well as culturally, to different environments and ecological conditions. For example, consider skin color, the most visible “racial” characteristic. Skin color is derived from a pigment called melanin. In areas with intense sunlight, at or near the equator, melanin screens out the ultraviolet rays of the sun that cause sunburn and, more significantly, protects against skin cancer. Thus, higher levels of melanin and darker skin colors are found in peoples who are adapted to equatorial ecologies.

In peoples adapted to areas with less intense sunlight, the amount of melanin is lower, and skin color is lighter. The lower concentration of melanin also may be an adaptation to a particular ecology. It maximizes the synthesis of vitamin D, which is important for the absorption of calcium and protection against disorders such as rickets. Thus, the skin color
(amount of melanin) of any group balances the need for vitamin D and the need for melanin to protect against ultraviolet rays.

The map in Exhibit 1.3 shows the distribution of skin color. Note the rough correlation with proximity to the equator: Peoples with darker skin are generally found within 20 degrees of the equator, while peoples with lighter skin are found primarily in the Northern Hemisphere, in locales distant from tropical sunlight. Note also that our oldest ancestors were adapted to the equatorial sun of Africa. This almost certainly means that they were dark skinned (had a high concentration of melanin) and that lighter skin colors are the more recent adaptation.

The period of dispersion and differentiation began to come to a close about 10,000 years ago when some of our hunting and gathering ancestors developed a new subsistence technology and settled down in permanent agricultural villages. Over the centuries, some of these settlements grew into larger societies and kingdoms and empires that conquered and absorbed neighboring societies, some of which differed culturally, linguistically, and racially from one another. The great agricultural empires of the past—Roman, Egyptian, Chinese, Aztec—united different peoples, reversed the process of dispersion and differentiation, and began a phase of consolidation and merging of human cultures and genetics. Over the next 10,000 years, human genes have been intermixed and spread around the globe, eliminating any “pure” races (if such ever existed). The differentiation created during the 90,000 years of dispersion was swamped by the consolidation that continues in the present. In our society, consolidation manifests itself in the increasing numbers of mixed-race folks, but similar patterns are common across the globe and throughout more recent human history. The consolidation phase accelerated beginning about 500 years ago with the expansion of European power that resulted in the exploration and conquest of much of the rest of the world.

**Race and Western Traditions**

The U.S. concept of race has its origins in Western Europe. Race became a matter of concern in the Western European tradition beginning in the 1400s when Europeans,
part I

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aided by breakthroughs in navigation and ship design, began to travel to Africa, Asia, and, eventually, North and South America. They came into continuous contact with the peoples of these continents and became more aware of and curious about the physical differences they saw. Europeans also conquered, colonized, and sometimes destroyed the peoples and cultures they encountered. From the beginning, the European awareness of the differences between the races was linked to notions of inferior and superior (conquered vs. conquering) peoples. For centuries, the European tradition has been to see race in this political and military context and to intermix biological and physical variation with judgments about the relative merits of the various races. Racist thinking was used to justify military conquest, genocide, exploitation, and slavery. The toxic form of racism that bloomed during the expansion of European power continues to haunt the world today.

Race and Biology

While Europeans used race primarily to denigrate, reject, and exclude non-whites, there were also attempts to apply the principles of scientific research to the concept. These investigations focused on the construction of typologies or taxonomies, systems of classification that were intended to provide a category for every race and every person. Some of these typologies were quite elaborate and included scores of races and subraces. For example, the “Caucasian” race was often subdivided into Nordics (blond, fair-skinned Northern Europeans), Mediterraneans (dark-haired Southern Europeans), and Alpines (those falling between the first two categories).

One major limitation of these systems of classification was that the dividing lines between the so-called racial groups are arbitrary and blurred. There is no clear or definite point where, for example, “black” skin color stops and “white” skin color begins. The characteristics used to define race blend imperceptibly into one another, and one racial trait (skin color) can be blended with others (e.g., hair texture) in an infinite variety of ways. A given individual might have a skin color that is associated with one race, the hair texture of a second, the nasal shape of a third, and so forth. Even the most elaborate racial typologies could not handle the fact that many individuals fit into more than one category or none at all. Although people undeniably vary in their physical appearance, these differences do not sort themselves out in a way that permits us to divide people up like species of animals: The differences between the so-called human races are not at all like the differences between elephants and butterflies. The ambiguous and continuous nature of racial characteristics makes it impossible to establish categories that have clear, nonarbitrary boundaries.

Over the past several decades, rapid advances in genetics have provided additional information and new insights into race that continue to refute many racial myths and further undermine the validity of racial typologies. Perhaps the most important single finding of modern research is that genetic variation within the “traditional” racial groups is greater than the variation between those groups (American Sociological Association, 2003). In other words, any two randomly selected members of, say, the “black” race are likely to vary genetically from each other at least as much as they do from a randomly selected member of the “white” race. No single finding could be more destructive to traditional racial categories, which are, after all, supposed to group people into homogenous
categories. Just as certainly, the traditional American perception of race based primarily on skin color has no scientific validity.

**The Social Construction of Race**

Despite its limited scientific usefulness, race continues to animate intergroup relations in the United States and around the world. It continues to be socially important and a significant way of differentiating among people. Race, along with gender, is one of the first things people notice about one another. In the United States, we still tend to see race as a simple, unambiguous matter of skin color alone and to judge everyone as belonging to one and only one group, ignoring the realities of multiple ancestry and ambiguous classification.

How can such an unimportant scientific concept retain its relevance? Because of the way they developed, Western concepts of race have a social as well as a biological or scientific dimension. To sociologists, race is a social construction and its meaning has been created and sustained not by science but by historical, social, economic, and political processes (see Omi & Winant, 1986; Smedley, 2007). For example, in Chapter 4, we will analyze the role of race in the creation of American slavery and will see that the physical differences between blacks and whites became important as a result of the creation of that system of inequality. The elites of colonial society needed to justify their unequal treatment of Africans and seized on the obvious difference in skin color, elevated it to a matter of supreme importance, and used it to justify the enslavement of blacks. In other words, the importance of race was socially constructed as the result of a particular historical conflict, and it remains important not because of objective realities but because of the widespread, shared social perception that it is important.

**Gender**

You already have seen that minority groups can be internally divided by social class and other factors. An additional source of differentiation is gender. Like race, gender has both a biological and a social component and can be a highly visible and convenient way of judging and sorting people. From birth, the biological differences between the sexes form the basis for different gender roles, or societal expectations about proper behavior, attitudes, and personality traits. In virtually all societies, including those at the advanced industrial stage, adult work roles tend to be separated by gender, and boys and girls are socialized differently in preparation for these roles. In hunter-gatherer societies, for example, boys typically train for the role of hunter, whereas girls learn the skills necessary for successful harvesting of vegetables, fruit, and other foodstuffs. Even in highly developed, modern societies, there is still a tendency for girls to learn nurturing skills while boys learn to be assertive and nonemotional.

Gender roles and relationships vary across time and from society to society, but gender and inequality usually have been closely related, and men typically claim more property, prestige, and power. Exhibit 1.4 provides some perspective on the variation in gender inequality across the globe. The map shows the distribution of a statistic called the gender development index, which measures the amount of inequality between men and women across a range of variables, including education, health, and income. As you can see, gender equality is generally highest in the more developed, industrialized nations of North America and Western Europe and lowest in the less developed, more agricultural nations of sub-Saharan Africa.
Although they rank relatively high on gender equality, the societies of Western Europe and North America have strong traditions of patriarchy, or male dominance. In a patriarchal society, men have more control over the economy and more access to leadership roles in religion, politics, and other institutions. In these societies, women possess many characteristics of a minority group (namely, a pattern of disadvantage based on group membership marked by a physical stigma). Thus, women could be, and in many ways should be, treated as a separate minority group.

In this book, however, rather than discussing women as a separate group, I will focus on the divergent experiences of men and women within each minority group. This approach will permit us to analyze the ways in which race, ethnicity, gender, and class combine, overlap, and cross-cut one another to form a “matrix of domination” (Hill-Collins, 1991, pp. 225–227). We will consider how the interests and experiences of females of different groups and classes coincide with and diverge from each other and from the men in their groups. For example, on some issues, African American females might have interests identical to those of white females and opposed to those of African American males. On other issues, the constellations of interests might be reversed. As you shall see, the experience of minority group membership varies by gender, and the way gender is experienced is not the same for every group.

History generally has been and is written from the standpoint of the “winners”—that is, those in power. The voices of minority groups generally have been repressed, ignored, forgotten, or trivialized. Much of the history of slavery in America, for instance, has been told from the viewpoint of the slave owners. Slaves were kept illiterate by law and had few mechanisms for recording their thoughts or experiences. A more balanced and accurate picture of slavery began to emerge only in the past few decades, when scholars began to dig beneath the written records and memoirs of the slave owners and reconstruct the experiences of African Americans from nonwritten materials such as oral traditions and the physical artifacts left by the slaves.

However, our understanding of the experiences of minority groups is often based almost entirely on the experiences of minority group males alone, and the experiences of minority group females are much less well-known and documented. If the voices of minority groups have been hushed, those of female minority group members have been virtually silenced. One of the important trends in contemporary scholarship is to adjust this skewed focus and systematically incorporate gender as a factor in the minority group experience (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1994; Espiritu, 1997).
The Social Construction of Gender

Social scientists see race as a social construction formulated in certain historical circumstances (such as the era of European colonialism) when it was needed to help justify the unequal treatment of nonwhite groups. What about gender? Is it also merely a social creation designed to rationalize the higher status of men and their easier access to power, prestige, and property? Exhibit 1.4 shows that all contemporary nations have some degree of gender inequality. Is this because—as many people believe—boys and men are “naturally” more aggressive and independent and girls and women are more emotional and expressive? What is the basis of these distinctions? What connection, if any, do they have with biology and genetics?

First of all, the traits commonly seen as “typical” of men or women—aggressiveness or emotional expressiveness, for example—are not discrete, separate categories. Every person has them to some degree, and, to the extent that gender differences exist at all, they are manifested not in absolutes but in averages, tendencies, and probabilities. Aggressiveness is often thought of as a male characteristic, but many women are more aggressive than many men. Likewise, emotionality tends to be associated with women, but many males are more expressive and emotional than many females. As was the case with racial differences, research has shown that there is more variation *within* categories than between—a finding that undermines the view that gender differences are genetic or biological (Basow, cited in Rosenblum & Travis, 2002).

Second, the fact that gender is a social construction is illustrated by the fact that what is thought to be “appropriate” gender behavior varies from time to time and society to society. The behavior expected of a female in Victorian England would be thoroughly out of place in 21st-century America, and the typical behavior of a contemporary male would be regarded as outrageously scandalous in Puritan America. This variability makes it difficult to argue that the differences between the genders are “hard-wired” in the genetic code: If they were, the variations would be nonexistent.

Third, the essentially social nature of gender roles is further illustrated by the relationship between subsistence technology and gender inequality. As we noted previously, our species evolved in East Africa and our ancestors relied on hunting and gathering to satisfy their need for food. They lived in small, nomadic bands that relied on cooperation and sharing for survival. Societies at this level of development typically divide adult labor roles by gender (with men hunting and women gathering), and, although they may tend toward patriarchy, women and women’s work are highly valued and gender inequality is minimal. The subordination of women is more associated with settled agricultural communities, the first of which appeared in what is now the Middle East about 10,000 years ago. Survival in preindustrial farming societies requires the combined efforts of many people, and large families are valued as a cheap labor force. Women are consigned to household and domestic duties, with a strong emphasis on producing and raising children. Since the infant mortality rate in these societies is high (perhaps 50% or more), women spend much of their lives confined and secluded, pregnant or nursing young children, far removed from the possibility of contending for leadership roles in their communities.

Industrialization and urbanization, linked processes that began in the mid-1700s in Great Britain, changed the cost/benefit ratios for childbearing. The expenses associated with raising children increase in the city, and the nature of industrial work increasingly required education and literacy—qualities and abilities available to both genders. Thus, gender inequality probably reached its peak in preindustrial agrarian societies and has tended to decline as societies industrialize. It is no accident of timing that the push for gender equality and the women’s liberation movement are associated with industrial societies and that gender equality is highest today in industrial and postindustrial societies (see Exhibit 1.4).

To be sure, biology shapes the production of personality and researchers are still exploring the possible links between genetics and gender roles (e.g., see Hopcroft, 2009; Huber, 2007; Udry, 2000), but the key to understanding gender is social and experiential (Booth, Granger, Mazur, & Kivligham, 2006, pp. 167–191). Gender, like race, is a social construction, especially when the supposed differences between men and women are treated as categorical, “natural,” and fixed and then used to deny opportunity and equality to women.
Whenever sensitive issues such as dominant-minority group relations are raised, the discussion turns to (or on) matters of prejudice and discrimination. We will be very much concerned with these subjects in this book, so we need to clarify what we mean by these terms. This section introduces and defines four concepts that will help you understand dominant-minority relations in the United States.

This book addresses how individuals from different groups interact, as well as relations among groups. Thus, we need to distinguish between what is true for individuals (the psychological level of analysis) and what is true for groups or society as a whole (the sociological level of analysis). Beyond that, we must attempt to trace the connections between the two levels of analysis.

We also need to make a further distinction on both the individual and the group levels. At the individual level, what people think and feel about other groups and how they actually behave toward members of that group may differ. A person might express negative feelings about other groups in private but deal fairly with members of the group in face-to-face interactions. Groups and entire societies may display this same kind of inconsistency. A society may express support for equality in its official documents or formal codes of law and simultaneously treat minority groups in unfair and destructive ways. An example of this kind of inconsistency is the contrast between the commitment to equality stated in the Declaration of Independence (“All men are created equal”) and the actual treatment of black slaves, Anglo-American women, and Native Americans at that time.

At the individual level, social scientists refer to the “thinking/feeling” part of this dichotomy as prejudice and the “doing” part as discrimination. At the group level, the term ideological racism describes the “thinking/feeling” dimension and institutional discrimination describes the “doing” dimension. Exhibit 1.5 depicts the differences among these four concepts.

### Exhibit 1.5 Four Concepts in Dominant-Minority Relations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Group or Societal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking/feeling</td>
<td>Prejudice</td>
<td>Ideological racism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doing</td>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>Institutional discrim</td>
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**Prejudice**

Prejudice is the tendency of an individual to think about other groups in negative ways, to attach negative emotions to those groups, and to prejudge individuals on the basis of their group memberships. Individual prejudice has two aspects: the cognitive, or thinking, aspect and the affective, or feeling, part. A prejudiced person thinks about other groups in terms of stereotypes (cognitive prejudice), generalizations that are thought to apply to group members. Examples of familiar stereotypes include notions such as “women are emotional,” “Jews are stingy,” “blacks are lazy,” “the Irish are drunks,” and “Germans are authoritarian.” A prejudiced person also experiences negative emotional responses to other groups (affective prejudice), including contempt, disgust, arrogance, and hatred. People vary in their levels of prejudice, and levels of prejudice vary in the same person from one time to another and from one group to another. We can say that a person is prejudiced to the extent that he or she uses stereotypes in his or her thinking about other groups or has negative emotional reactions to other groups.
Generally, the two dimensions of prejudice are highly correlated with each other. However, they are also distinct and separate aspects of prejudice and can vary independently. One person may think entirely in stereotypes but feel no particular negative emotional response to any group. Another person may feel a strong aversion toward a group but be unable to articulate a clear or detailed stereotype of that group.

We should note here that individual prejudice, like all aspects of society, evolves and changes. In the past, American prejudice was strongly felt, baldly expressed, and laced with clear, detailed stereotypes. Today, in the modern atmosphere of “political correctness,” prejudice tends to be expressed in subtle, indirect ways. For example, it might be manifested in code words, as when people disparage “welfare cheats” or associate criminality with certain minority groups. We will explore these modern forms of prejudice in Chapter 3, but we need to be clear that the relative absence of blatant stereotyping or the expression of strong public emotions against minority groups in modern society does not mean that we have eliminated individual prejudice in the United States.

**Discrimination**

Discrimination is defined as the unequal treatment of a person or persons based on group membership. An example of discrimination is an employer who decides not to hire an individual because he or she is African American (or Puerto Rican, Jewish, Chinese, etc.). If the unequal treatment is based on the group membership of the individual, the act is discriminatory.

Just as the cognitive and affective aspects of prejudice can be independent, discrimination and prejudice do not necessarily occur together. Even highly prejudiced individuals may not act on their negative thoughts or feelings. In social settings regulated by strong egalitarian codes or laws (e.g., restaurants and other public facilities), people who are highly bigoted in their private thoughts and feelings may abide by the codes in their public roles.

On the other hand, social situations in which prejudice is strongly approved and supported might evoke discrimination in otherwise unprejudiced individuals. In the Southern United States during the height of segregation or in South Africa during the period of state-sanctioned racial inequality called *apartheid*, it was usual and customary for whites to treat blacks in discriminatory ways. Regardless of a person’s actual level of prejudice, he or she faced strong social pressure to conform to the official patterns of racial superiority and participate in acts of discrimination.

**Ideological Racism**

Ideological racism, a belief system that asserts that a particular group is inferior, is the group or societal equivalent of individual prejudice. These ideas and beliefs are used to legitimize or rationalize the inferior status of minority groups and are incorporated into the culture of a society and passed on from generation to generation during socialization.

Because it is a part of the cultural heritage, ideological racism exists apart from the individuals who inhabit the society at a specific time (Andersen, 1993, p. 75; See & Wilson, 1988, p. 227). An example of a racist ideology is the elaborate system of beliefs and ideas that attempted to justify slavery in the American South. The exploitation of slaves was “explained” in terms of the innate racial inferiority of blacks and the superiority of whites.

Distinguishing between individual prejudice and societal racist ideologies naturally leads to a consideration of the relationship between these two phenomena. We will explore this relationship in later chapters, but for now, I can make what is probably an obvious point:
People socialized into societies with strong racist ideologies are very likely to absorb racist ideas and be highly prejudiced. It should not surprise us that a high level of personal prejudice existed among whites in the antebellum American South or in other highly racist societies, such as South Africa. At the same time, we need to remember that ideological racism and individual prejudice are different things with different causes and different locations in the society. Racism is not a prerequisite for prejudice; prejudice may exist even in the absence of an ideology of racism.

**Institutional Discrimination**

The final concept is the societal equivalent of individual discrimination. Institutional discrimination refers to a pattern of unequal treatment based on group membership that is built into the daily operations of society, whether or not it is consciously intended. The public schools, the criminal justice system, and political and economic institutions can operate in ways that put members of some groups at a disadvantage.

Institutional discrimination can be obvious and overt. For many years following the Civil War, African Americans in the American South were prevented from voting by practices such as poll taxes and rigged literacy tests. For nearly a century, well into the 1960s, elections and elected offices in the South were confined to whites only. The purpose of this blatant pattern of institutional discrimination was widely understood by African American and white Southerners alike: It existed to disenfranchise the African American community and keep it politically powerless.

At other times, institutional discrimination may operate more subtly and without conscious intent. If public schools use aptitude tests that are biased in favor of the dominant group, decisions about who does and who does not take college preparatory courses may be made on racist grounds, even if everyone involved sincerely believes that they are merely applying objective criteria in a rational way. If a decision-making process has unequal consequences for dominant and minority groups, institutional discrimination well may be at work.

Note that although a particular discriminatory policy may be implemented and enforced by individuals, the policy is more appropriately thought of as an aspect of the operation of the institution as a whole. Election officials in the South during segregation did not and public school administrators today do not have to be personally prejudiced themselves to implement these discriminatory policies.

However, a major thesis of this book is that both racist ideologies and institutional discrimination are created to sustain the positions of dominant and minority groups in the stratification system. The relative advantage of the dominant group is maintained from day to day by widespread institutional discrimination. Members of the dominant group who are socialized into communities with strong racist ideologies and a great deal of institutional discrimination are likely to be personally prejudiced and to practice acts of individual discrimination routinely. The respective positions of dominant and minority groups are preserved over time through the mutually reinforcing patterns of prejudice, racism, and discrimination on both the individual and the institutional levels. Institutional discrimination is but one way in which members of a minority group can be denied access to valued goods and services, opportunities, and rights (such as voting). That is, institutional discrimination helps sustain and reinforce the unequal positions of racial and ethnic groups in the stratification system.
A White Male Reflects on Privilege

Tim Wise is a sociologist, lecturer, writer, and antiracism activist. In the passage below, he reflects on his whiteness and the fact that he has been accorded a higher status in this society simply because of his race. As he points out, it is usually minority group members who must consciously confront the realities of discrimination and racism: Whites tend to take their higher status for granted and ignore the ways in which society is organized to sustain their privilege. Although whites vary across a range of criteria—class, gender, region, and so forth—the group is connected by the privilege of whiteness, an advantage largely unexamined and unquestioned. Structures of racial privilege are largely invisible to whites because, unlike minority group members, they don’t have to deal with the restrictions they impose. Institutionalized discrimination and racist cultural traditions conspire to make whiteness seem “normal,” the standard against which “others” are contrasted and differentiated. From the white perspective, only nonwhites have race and ethnicity. In the same way, the limitations imposed by traditional gender roles can be invisible to males.

THE PRIVILEGES OF WHITENESS

When we first draw breath outside the womb, we inhale tiny particles of all that came before, both literally and figuratively. We are never merely individuals; we are never alone; we are always in the company, as uncomfortable as it sometimes can be, of others, the past, of history. We become part of that history just as surely as it becomes part of us. There is no escaping it; merely different levels of coping. . . .

Once born, I inherited my family and all that came with it. I also inherited my nation and all that came with that. And I inherited my “race” and all that came with that, too. In all three cases, the inheritance was far from inconsequential. More than that, all three inheritances were intimately connected, interwoven in ways I could not possibly have understood at the time, but which are all too clear today. To be the child of Michael Julius Wise and Lucinda Anne (McLean) Wise meant something; to be born in the richest and most powerful nation on earth meant something; and to be white, especially in the United States, most assuredly meant something—a lot of things, truth be told. . . .

What does it mean to be white, especially in a nation created for the benefit of people like you? We [white people] don’t often ask this question, mostly because we don’t have to. Being a member of the majority, the dominant group, allows one to ignore how race shapes one’s life. For those of us called white, whiteness simply is. Whiteness becomes, for us, the unspoken, uninterrogated norm, taken for granted, much as water can be taken for granted by a fish.

In high school, whites are sometimes asked to think about race, but rarely about whiteness. In my case, we read John Howard Griffin’s classic book, Black Like Me, in which the author recounts his experiences in the Jim Crow South in 1959, after taking a drug that turned his skin brown and allowed him to experience apartheid for a few months from the other side of the color line.

It was a good book, especially for its time. Yet I can’t help but find it a bit disturbing that it remains one of the most assigned volumes on summer reading lists dealing with race. That it continues to prove so popular signifies the extent to which race is considered a problem of the past . . . surely there are some more contemporary racial events students could discuss—not to mention the degree to which race is still viewed as something that can only be understood from the perspective of “the other.” Whites are encouraged to think about race from the perspective of blacks, which is nice. Indeed, whites should listen to and learn from the stories of black and brown peoples—real black and brown people, not white people pretending to be black until the drugs wear off. But Black Like Me leaves another aspect of the discussion untouched: namely, the examination of the white experience.

Although whiteness may mean different things in different places and at different times, one thing I feel confident saying up front, without fear of contradiction, is that to be white in the United States, whether from the South, as I am, or from the North, West, or Midwest, whether one is rich or poor, male or female; Jew or Gentile; straight or gay, is to have certain common experiences based solely upon race. These experiences have to do with advantage, privilege (in the relative sense, vis-a-vis people of color), and belonging. We are, unlike people of color, born to belonging, and have rarely had to prove ourselves deserving of our presence here. . . .

While some might insist that whites have a wide range of experiences, and so, presumably, it isn’t fair to make generalizations about whites as a group, this is a dodge, and not a particularly artful one at that. Of course we’re all different, sort of like snowflakes, which come to think of it are also white. None of us have led the exact same life. But irrespective of one’s particular history, all whites were placed above all persons of color when it came to the economic, social, and political hierarchies that were to form in the United States, without exception. This formal system of racial preference was codified in law from the 1600s until at least 1964, at which time the Civil Rights Act was passed, if not 1965, with the passage of the Voting Rights Act, or 1968, when our nation finally passed a law making racial housing discrimination illegal.

Prior to that time we didn’t even pretend to be a nation based on equality. Or rather, we did pretend, but not very well, at least not to the point where the rest of the world believed it, or to the point where people of color in this country ever did. Most white folks believed it, but that’s simply more proof of our privileged status. Our ancestors had the luxury of believing those things that black and brown folks could never take as givens: all that stuff about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Several decades later, whites can, indeed must, still believe it, while people of color have little reason to join the celebration, knowing as they do that there is still a vast gulf between who we say we are as a nation and people, and who we really are.

In other words, there is enough commonality about the white experience to allow us to make some general statements about whiteness and never be too far from the mark. Returning to the snowflake analogy: Although as with snowflakes, no two white people are exactly alike, it is also true that few snowflakes have radically different experiences from those of the average snowflake. Likewise, we know a snowflake when we see it, and in that recognition, we intuit, almost always correctly, something about its life experience.

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

In the chapters that follow, we will focus on developing a number of concepts and theories and applying those ideas to the minority groups of the United States. However, it is important to expand our perspective beyond the experiences of just a single nation. Just as you would not accept an interview with a single person as an adequate test of a psychological theory, you should not accept the experiences of a single nation as proof for the sociological perspective developed in this text. Thus, we will take time, throughout this text, to apply our ideas to other societies and non-American minority groups. If the ideas and concepts developed in this text can help us make sense of these situations, we will have some assurance that they have some general applicability and that the dynamics of intergroup relations in the United States are not unique.

On another level, we must also take account of the ways in which group relations in the United States are shaped by economic, social, and political forces beyond our borders. As we will see, the experiences of this society cannot be understood in isolation. We are part of the global system of societies, and now, more than ever, we must systematically take account of the complex interconnections between the domestic and the international, particularly with respect to issues related to immigration. The world is indeed growing smaller, and we must see our society as one part of a larger system. The next section illustrates one connection between the global and the local.

A Personal Experience
With a Global Issue

Susan burst out her front door just as I drove up, yelling at me to get in her battered, 10-year-old Volvo. She had just gotten a call from a local church secretary about two migrants that needed help. She shared the scant information she had as we drove through suburban Tucson: The migrants had been walking through the desert of southern Arizona for the past 4 days, traveling north from Mexico, and had been spotted and pursued by two Minutemen. The migrants managed to duck into an arroyo, elude their pursuers, and find shelter in a church. They apparently had picked the church at random—or out of desperation—and, fortunately for them, the secretary who answered their knocks was sympathetic to their plight. She let them in, hid them in a nursery that was used only during Sunday services, and called Susan. When we got to the church, we entered through the back door as the Minutemen, driving a pickup truck with “Security” emblazoned on the doors, drove by the front. Several minutes later, the Border Patrol—perhaps alerted by the Minutemen—slowly drove by as well.

Susan is a member of Samaritans on the Border, a group of volunteers in southern
Arizona who aid migrants trying to cross the Sonora Desert and make their way from Mexico to Tucson, Phoenix, or other U.S. destinations (see Exhibit 1.6). I had met Susan and Michael, another Samaritan, the previous summer and was in Arizona to observe their program and learn more about immigration issues “on the ground.”

The Samaritans have a simple goal—to reduce the number of migrant deaths—but they are addressing a small, local piece of a multifaceted and complex phenomenon. Emigration from Mexico to the United States and the human suffering the Samaritans are trying to reduce are the results of a constellation of forces, including the wall being constructed along the border and the increased efforts of U.S. authorities to stop migration, combined with continuing pressure to leave Mexico in search of a job—any job—in the north. These pressures have conspired to funnel migrant traffic through the trackless, forbidding desert of southern Arizona, one of the most physically challenging and demanding immigration routes. Thousands have died attempting this journey. Exhibit 1.7 displays one count of deaths in the desert for a 5-year period: Each red dot represents a migrant death. These include only the bodies that have been discovered, and, taking a longer view, they represent a small fraction of the deaths along the border between the mid-1990s and the present.

Everything the Samaritans do to assist migrants is legal, and they coordinate their activities with the Border Patrol and other law enforcement agencies. Susan and the other Samaritans maintain water supplies along the most likely migration routes and patrol the desert looking for people in trouble. When they find someone, they offer food and water, clothes and socks, and simple first aid. If the migrant is injured or simply too tired to go on, the Samaritans will alert the authorities (but only at the migrant’s request) and wait with them until the Border Patrol arrives. The Samaritans are often alerted about migrant activity by people, such as the church secretary, who are sympathetic to their humanitarian goals.
When we got to the nursery, we found the migrants exhausted, hungry, sore, and frightened. Susan, in halting Spanish, gradually learned their story. Francisco, the older of the two, had lived in the United States for nearly a decade, worked in construction, and had a wife and two children in Phoenix. His wife was a U.S. citizen, but Francisco was not: He was what some call an “illegal alien” and, others, an “undocumented immigrant” or “unauthorized migrant.” To Susan and me, he looked like someone who simply needed help.

Two weeks earlier, Francisco had returned to his village in southern Mexico—for the first time since he had left a decade earlier—to attend his father’s funeral and had brought his younger brother, Ernesto, back with him. Ernesto had been unable to find work at home and decided to accompany Francisco back to the United States in hopes of finding a job and helping support the family. Ten years earlier, Francisco’s journey had been financed by his kinfolk, who had saved for years to gather enough money to pay a guide (a coyote) to lead him across the border and through the desert. Now, continuing hard times in Mexico meant that there was no money to help the brothers. They crossed the border on their own, without a guide, in spite of the dangers. There are few markers in the trackless desert to help the inexperienced find their way, the terrain is extremely difficult, and water is nonexistent. Thorns, prickly cactus plants, loose rocks, hidden gullies, and other dangers threaten the unwary at every turn. The brothers knew they had to travel light and had brought only a few bottles of water and some snack bars for food. They had only the clothes on their backs to fight the cold desert nights (it was November, and the nightly temperatures had been in the 30s). In addition to the physical dangers, they had to avoid the drug traffickers, gangs, kidnappers, and assorted hoodlums and corrupt police on both sides of the border.

We gave them food and water and helped them doctor the blisters that had developed on their feet. The church secretary allowed them to use the shower and said she could keep the rest of the staff—not all of whom were sympathetic to migrants—out of the nursery area for the rest of the day. They rested for several hours, and then, when the coast seemed clear, they resumed their journey. We never heard if they made it to Phoenix.

Samaritans and Minutemen

The Samaritans are strongly opposed and deeply resented by many of their neighbors. Like Americans across the nation, many Arizonans regard migrants as dangerous criminals, threats to their communities, their jobs, and to U.S. culture. Individual Samaritans have been vilified by their neighbors and threatened with anonymous phone calls, and the group has been lambasted in letters to local papers, editorials, and stump speeches by politicians. One Samaritan, a minister, has had his Sunday morning church services picketed by the same lone protestor every week for years. The group is seen by many as hopelessly naive and misguided, and they are often perceived to be aiding people that are—at least—unworthy.

Some of the opposition to the Samaritans is more organized, threatening, and potentially violent. Various groups called “Minutemen” also patrol the roads of southern Arizona, sometimes armed, and keep watch on the desert, but with the intent of deterring migration and returning migrants to their homelands. Some of the Minutemen destroy or befoul any Samaritan water supplies they discover. One Samaritan reports that she found a noose hanging in a tree near a water drop, an unmistakable sign of the attitudes of Minutemen (and many Arizonans and Americans) about migrants. The Minutemen are criticized as violent vigilantes who operate outside the law. They have been characterized as racists, and some branches of the group have been listed as hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center (http://www.splcenter.org/). As illustrated in Exhibit 1.8, they see themselves as protectors of the nation, stout defenders of the American Way, warriors willing to do what the federal and state authorities will not or cannot do. As so often in the past, the controversies over immigration in general and undocumented immigrants from Mexico in particular seem to bring out the best and worst of our society: altruistic humanitarianism and racist rejection.
Chapter 1  Diversity in the United States

Immigration, Concepts, Globalization, and This Text

We will explore immigration in detail in chapters to come. Here, we can use the topic to illustrate several of the concepts we have introduced in this chapter and make several points about the analysis to come.

Immigration is a good preview of many of the issues we will deal with in this text for several reasons. First, we can use it to illustrate the sociological perspective. This means, in part, that we will always focus on the larger societal context in which individuals act. Our goal as sociologists is to analyze and understand the broad forces that create the situations in which men such as Francisco and Ernesto make the decision to leave their home and family for a dangerous and uncertain future in another country. Also, the sociological perspective means that our goal is to develop an objective view anchored in a careful review of relevant data and evidence. Of course, like many topics sociologists deal with, immigration can evoke strong feelings and intense emotions, and it is often a challenge to maintain an objective approach. Whether you are a Samaritan, a Minuteman, an ordinary citizen, or a trained sociologist, there are strong temptations to choose sides and hurl invectives at those with whom we disagree rather than to sift the facts and reason through the realities. Nonetheless, our analysis will seek to find its way through the emotions and opinions and anchor itself in objectively verified realities.

Our task is further complicated by the fact that the topics we confront are not only emotional, they are also complex and lack easy or obvious solutions. For example, some would consider the cases of Francisco and Ernesto clear cut: They are in the country illegally and should be immediately deported (or worse). Others might point out the economic realities of their situation: They are in the United States seeking economic survival, and the cost of deportation would be devastating, not only for them but for their families. In many ways, the brothers are victims who have been propelled unwillingly by economic and political forces beyond their control (or even their understanding). Still, as many would be quick to point out, there is no denying the myriad problems—in schools, neighborhoods, health care clinics, and scores of other locales—created by the population movement of which Francisco and Ernesto are a tiny part. The issues surrounding immigration have many levels and facets and can be seen from a variety of viewpoints. Our goal is to see issues in all their complexity, not make accusations or invent facile “solutions.”

We can begin our analysis by applying some of the concepts we have introduced in this chapter. For example, we need to understand that one of the reasons that immigration issues stir up such intense emotions is because they tap the deep reservoirs of American prejudice and racism that have characterized this nation literally from its birth. This does not mean that people who oppose immigration or support the efforts to secure the southern border are racist: far from it. However, it is clear that many anti-immigrant sentiments resonate with the deep well of negative American feelings and stereotypes.

These traditions of prejudice and racism, in turn, stem from the fact that Mexican Americans have been a minority group since the early days of this nation, a history we will explore in detail in Chapter 8. They meet all five parts of our definition of a minority group, including a history
of systematic discrimination (both individual and institutional) and a strong pattern of inequality. They have been labeled inferior on both racial and cultural terms, and the traditions of anti-Mexican prejudice and the stereotypes and feelings that attach to this group are well established.

Another cause of the intense reactions and emotions that surround immigration may be anxiety generated by the rising diversity of U.S. society documented in Exhibit 1.1. Many Americans see these trends as daily realities manifested in the changing complexities of their neighborhoods, the sounds of languages other than English in the streets, and the appearance of “exotic” foods at their grocery stores. They feel uneasy, and they are anxious that their vision of what America should be is being threatened: Cries of “I want my country back” are heard across the nation. These concerns are not simply the products of fevered racist minds and are expressed in the thinking of otherwise moderate citizens, newspaper columnists and intellectuals, academics and scholars (e.g., see Huntington, 2004). Many people are concerned about the “Hispanization” of America, that the rising tide of immigration threatens the primacy of the English language and Anglo culture. As we shall see, these are not new concerns or fears: They have been expressed over and over in the past, often in exactly the same terms being used today, as Americans have reacted to the arrival of immigrants. The fact that society has (more or less successfully) dealt with the challenges created by immigration in the past is not necessarily a comfort in the present. People wonder if it’s different this time; if the world, the United States, and the nature of immigration are so different now that the experiences of the past are irrelevant.

Certainly, the world has changed. For one thing, globalization is linked with immigration in new ways. It is clear, for example, that immigration today must be understood in terms of changes that affect many nations and, indeed, the entire global system of societies. To illustrate, Mexico’s economy has been disrupted by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was implemented in 1994. NAFTA united the three North American nations into a single trading bloc and permitted goods and capital (but not people) to move freely between Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Among many other consequences, NAFTA opened Mexico to the importation of food products produced at very low cost by the agribusinesses of Canada and the United States. This cheap food (corn in particular) disrupted Mexican agriculture, and much of the rural Mexican population, including Francisco and Ernesto, found themselves unable to survive. Forced out of their traditional economic niche, millions have pursued the only survival strategy that seemed even remotely reasonable: migration to the North. Even the meanest job in the United States can pay many times more than the average Mexican wage. Of course, the grimmest calculation for many (including Francisco and Ernesto) is simply this: Even a very low-wage job in the United States is infinitely better than no wage at all.

We should also note that the United States is only one of many destinations for today’s immigrants. The movement is generalized, and people are moving in huge numbers from less-developed nations to more-developed, affluent economies. The wealthy nations of Western Europe, including Germany, Ireland, France, and the Netherlands are also receiving large numbers of immigrants, and the citizens of these nations are concerned about jobs, communities, housing, language, and the integrity of the national culture in the same ways as Americans.

Finally, we need to see the issue in terms of the multigroup nature of U.S. society. Does the cheap labor provided by new immigrants threaten the jobs of the more economically vulnerable members of other groups? What, if anything, do other minority groups lose when immigrants gain a foothold in the American job structure? Should the grievances of groups such as African Americans—who have been a part of this society virtually from the beginning and have numerous unresolved, continuing grievances (as we shall see)—be given less attention because the society is focused on problems associated with the arrival of new groups? Where should we focus our attention? How should we prioritize the competing claims of all of America’s groups (including white Americans)?

This chapter and this section raise a lot of questions. Let me assure you that this text will not answer them. However, by applying the sociological perspective and the concepts, theories, and body of research developed over the years, we can illuminate and clarify the issues and, in many cases, identify some approaches and ideas that are simply wrong and others that hold promise. Sociology can’t answer all questions, but it does supply research tools and ideas that can help us think more clearly and with greater depth and nuance about the issues that face our society.
Birthright Citizenship: Who Should Be an American?

Who should be granted American citizenship? The United States is one of two advanced industrial nations to automatically confer citizenship on any baby born within its boundaries, including babies born to undocumented immigrants. This policy is based on the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, passed shortly after the Civil War, which says, “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.” The amendment was intended to guarantee the citizenship rights of ex-slaves, and the qualification that these citizens must be “subject to the jurisdiction” of the United States was specifically intended to exclude American Indians (who were seen, at the time, as being subject to the jurisdiction of their tribes and were not granted citizenship rights until the 1920s) and the children of foreign diplomats and visitors from other nations.

Birthright citizenship is one of the many issues that have split public opinion and generated the intensely emotional debates that emerge whenever immigration is discussed in this society. What is at stake here? Does this policy make sense? Is it too broad a definition of who should be an American? What are the costs of maintaining it? What message would be sent by repealing it? What are people really saying when they speak about issues such as this?

Following are several points of view on the issue. The first was posted at the website of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), a national lobbying group that works to change national immigration policy and reduce the level of immigration. FAIR argues that U.S. citizens are being taken advantage of by unauthorized immigrants and that their babies add unjustly to an already heavy tax burden.

An opposing position is presented by demographer Jennifer Van Hook, who reports on the results of some research done under the sponsorship of the Migration Policy Institute, which describes itself as an “independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank dedicated to the study of the movement of people worldwide.” Van Hook uses population projections to argue that repeal of birthright citizenship would increase the size of the unauthorized immigrant population and create a large, permanent class of marginalized people, aliens to both the United States and to the native country of their ancestors. In effect, this group would be stateless, without full citizenship rights, and easily exploited.

A third point of view is presented by Martinez, Garcia, and Arons, who argue that the subtext of this debate is an emotional, racist, and sexist attack on immigrants. The authors are affiliated with the Center for American Progress, an organization dedicated to “improving the lives of Americans through progressive ideas and actions.”

BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP IS TOO COSTLY

FAIR

The term anchor baby may be unfamiliar to most Americans, but it succinctly describes a troubling aspect of American immigration. An anchor baby is defined as an offspring of an illegal immigrant or other noncitizen, who under current legal interpretation becomes a United States citizen at birth. These children may instantly qualify for welfare and other state and local benefit programs. Additionally, the child may sponsor other family members for entry into the United States when he or she reaches the age of 21. The sheer numbers are staggering.

In Parkland Memorial Hospital Dallas, the second busiest maternity ward in the United States, 70% of the women giving birth were illegal aliens. That added up to 11,200 babies for which Medicaid kicked in 34.5 million dollars to deliver these babies, the feds another 9.5 million, and Dallas taxpayers tossed in 31.3 million. The average illegal patient is 25 years old and giving birth to her second anchor baby.

According to the [provision of the] 14th Amendment, in the case of illegal aliens, their native country has a claim of allegiance on the child. Therefore, some constitutional scholars argue that the completeness of the allegiance to the United States is impaired and logically precludes automatic citizenship. However, this issue never has been directly decided by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Price We Pay

The nation’s school system faces the economic burden of providing services to the millions of children born to illegal immigrants. In a 2004 United States General Accounting Office report, three states submitted their annual cost estimates of educating illegal children. The estimates provided ranged from 50 million dollars to 87.5 million in Pennsylvania and 932 million to 1.04 billion dollars in Texas.
What Does This Mean?

**Higher taxes:** The federal government has control over immigration law for the United States. By not correcting this misapplication of the 14th Amendment, the funds that state and local governments must provide to anchor babies amounts to a virtual tax on U.S. citizens to subsidize illegal aliens.

**Disrespect for the rule of law:** Congress, by failing to act on legislation aimed at correcting the interpretation of citizenship by birth, in effect rewards law-breakers and punishes those who have chosen to follow the rules and immigrate legally.

The original intent of the 14th Amendment was clearly not to facilitate illegal aliens defying U.S. law and obtaining citizenship for their offspring, nor obtaining benefits at taxpayer expense. The United States is unusual in its offer to extend citizenship to anyone born on its soil. Other developed countries have changed their citizenship practice to eliminate the problems caused by the practice of birthright citizenship. The anchor baby problem has grown to such large proportions that the United States can no longer afford to ignore it. The logical first step for correcting the problem is for Congress to adopt legislation clarifying the meaning of the 14th Amendment.

**SOURCE:** FAIR (2010).

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**REPEALING BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP WILL INCREASE THE UNAUTHORIZED POPULATION**

**JENNIFER VAN HOOK, POPULATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE AT PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY, WITH MICHAEL FIX, MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE**

Recently, debate has resurfaced over ending the grant of birthright citizenship to the children of unauthorized immigrants . . . as a way to reduce illegal immigration to the United States. Its proponents argue that unauthorized persons illegally migrate to the United States in order to give birth to children who can sponsor them for admission. These proposals, then, raise the question: What would happen to the U.S. unauthorized population if birthright citizenship were repealed? [We offer] an answer by [investigating various] scenarios involving the end of birthright citizenship in the future to U.S.-born children of unauthorized immigrants.

We conclude that if birthright citizenship were no longer granted to U.S.-born children of unauthorized immigrants, the unauthorized population likely would increase dramatically. An estimated 11 million unauthorized immigrants currently live in the United States; many giving birth to U.S.-born children. And these children grow up to have children of their own. Under a constitutional repeal of the birthright citizenship language of the 14th Amendment . . . , these U.S.-born descendants of unauthorized immigrants would be denied legal status in the United States, even though in all likelihood they would be thoroughly American in other respects. Their descendants, the third generation and higher, might have no claim to citizenship in the countries of their immigrant ancestors because they and their parents were not born in those countries. In short, the repeal of the 14th Amendment . . . would lead to the establishment of a permanent class of unauthorized persons.

**How Large Would This Unauthorized Population Be?**

To answer this question, we projected the size of the unauthorized population from 2010 to 2050, using standard demographic techniques and readily available data about immigrants . . . .

According to our projections, if the U.S.-born children of unauthorized immigrants were denied legal status, the unauthorized population would grow much larger. . . . Under current . . . law, the unauthorized population would remain constant at around 11 million. [If citizenship were denied to a child whose mother was unauthorized, the size of the unauthorized population would increase by] 19 million by 2050. This is 72% higher than the number under current law. . . .

The repeal of birthright citizenship would clearly affect immigrants and their children. What is less commonly understood is that the effects of repeal would be suffered by future U.S.-born generations—the descendants of today’s immigrants—many of whom would have little to no connection with their ancestors’ country of birth. . . .

The standard demographic projections presented here bring home several important facts that have been largely absent from emotional debates over the repeal of birthright citizenship. . . . One is that rather than shrink the size of the unauthorized population . . . , repeal would likely expand it—and expand it substantially. A second worrying finding is
that repeal would set in motion a sizeable, self-perpetuating class of unauthorized immigrants for generations to come. This perpetuation of hereditary disadvantage based on the legal status of one’s ancestors would be unprecedented in U.S. immigration law.

SOURCE: Van Hook (2010, pp. 2, 3, 6, 8).

THE BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP DEBATE IS SEXIST AND RACIST AND A THINLY VEILED ATTACK ON IMMIGRANT MOTHERS

GEBE MARTINEZ, ANN GARCIA, AND JESSICA ARONS

This election cycle, conservatives are intoxicated with immigrant bashing, particularly pregnant immigrant women and their children. Their tactic: change the U.S. Constitution to deny citizenship to babies born in this country to undocumented women. This is a cynical strategy that explicitly targets Latino communities—the fastest-growing segment of the electorate. These desperate politicians would rather get rid of these new voters than do the hard work of cultivating them. In their quest for power, they will do or say anything to get elected.

This is also an ugly strategy fueled by sexism and racism. It taps into a long history of population control—government efforts to curb growth among disfavored populations. . . . Conservatives’ rhetoric on this issue is particularly insulting, likening the human birthing process to that of farm animals. “They come here to drop a child. It’s called ‘drop and leave,’” said Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) during an interview on Fox News. . . . And Arizona State Senator Russell Pearce (R-Mesa)—the architect of S.B. 1070, the state’s anti-immigrant law—conceded that his support for changing the Constitution is gender based. He circulated and publicly defended a statement by Al Garza, one of his constituents and a former top official of the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps, a group classified as a nativist extremist group by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The e-mail Pearce defended reads, “If we are going to have an effect on the anchor baby racket, we need to target the mother. Call it sexist, but that’s the way nature made it. Men don’t drop anchor babies, illegal alien mothers do.”

Pearce’s amalgamation of legislative proposals would inexorably lead to ethnic profiling of pregnant women. . . . Ironically, many of the same politicians who have jumped on the citizenship denial bandwagon also claim to be “pro-life” and “pro-family.” Yet they have no hesitation about splitting up families through harsh deportation policies or dehumanizing immigrant women and their children with their hateful rhetoric.

By portraying immigrant women as less than human—that they “drop” babies as animals drop their offspring—immigration opponents stir up fears that foreigners specifically come here to have children in order to derive citizenship from their children, or claim government benefits. Or, as Rep. Louie Gohmert (R-TX) has foolishly maintained, to “raise and coddle” future terrorists.

But the simple fact is that most immigrant women do not come to the United States to give birth. They come to work. A child cannot even petition for the parents to become citizens until the child is 21. What’s more, undocumented immigrants never have been eligible for welfare benefits, and new legal immigrants to the United States became ineligible for services for the poor as a result of the 1996 welfare reform law President Bill Clinton signed.

Those wanting to maintain constitutional rights for citizen children of immigrants argued . . . that if birthright citizenship were removed, the policy would be difficult to carry out and mothers’ health could be endangered. Moreover, health care professionals would be turned into immigration agents, and pregnant women who might not “look” like citizens would face stressful questioning or harassment at the borders. . . .

Hopefully, cooler heads will prevail. . . . Another conservative proposal, however, would deny pregnant foreigners permission to enter the United States. This, too, is wrong-headed and impossible to enforce. What do they suggest? Administering pregnancy tests to all women at the border? . . .

This politically manufactured issue is indeed ludicrous, but it is no laughing matter. It will take time to remind the public that the only “anchors” in this debate are the dead weights that refuse to act responsibly and fix our broken immigration system by enacting comprehensive immigration reform. Targeting women and children instead is a cowardly way out.

SOURCE: Martinez, Garcia, and Arons (2010).
1. This chapter opened with some questions about what it means to be an American. How does the debate over birthright citizenship relate to this larger issue? How would each of the Americans introduced in “Some American Stories” relate to this debate? Can you predict their positions? How?

2. Is there a way of assessing the three arguments presented in this “Current Debate” that would go beyond mere partisanship? All three of the arguments cite facts and evidence. Which are most convincing? Why?

3. Can you relate these articles to some of the concepts introduced in this chapter? For example, where and how are these concepts used: inequality, gender, power, prejudice, and racism?

4. All three of these articles were located by searching the Internet. What are some of the dangers of doing “research” this way? How can you protect yourself against these threats? What would you want to know about these authors and their respective organizations as you assess their ideas? How could you find out?

5. Finally, after reading this chapter and considering these opinions, what are your views on the issue of birthright citizenship? Were you aware of the issue before reading these materials? Had you formed an opinion? If so, has your opinion changed? Why or why not? If the issue is new for you, what are your reactions? Either way, what else would you like to know about the issue? What questions occur to you? How could you answer them?

The United States faces enormous problems in dominant-minority relationships. Although many historic grievances of minority groups remain unresolved, our society is becoming increasingly diverse.

The United States is a nation of immigrants, and many different groups and cultures are represented in its population.

A minority group has five defining characteristics: a pattern of disadvantage, identification by some visible mark, awareness of its disadvantaged status, a membership determined at birth, and a tendency to marry within the group.

A stratification system has three different dimensions (class, prestige, and power), and the nature of inequality in a society varies by its level of development. Minority groups and social class are correlated in numerous and complex ways.

Race is a criterion widely used to identify minority group members. As a biological concept, race has been largely abandoned, but as a social category, race maintains a powerful influence on the way we think about one another.

Minority groups are internally differentiated by social class, age, region of residence, and many other variables. In this book, I focus on gender as a source of variation within minority groups.

Four crucial concepts for analyzing dominant-minority relations are prejudice, discrimination, ideological racism, and institutional discrimination.

The public sociology assignments presented in the introduction to Part I give you several opportunities to apply some of the concepts presented in this chapter. Studying diversity in a local community will bring you face to face with the increasing diversity of U.S. society as well as some of the realities of inequality, discrimination, and racism. Assignments 2 and 3 can bring you into contact with expressions of dominant group stereotypes and other elements of prejudice and ideological racism. These assignments also relate to concepts and ideas introduced in Chapters 2 and 3.

For chapter-specific resources, such as self-quizzes, videos, and flashcards, go to www.sagepub.com/healeyregc6e.
FOR FURTHER READING


*The classic work on individual prejudice*


*A wide-ranging collection of articles examining the intersecting forces of race, class, and gender in the United States*


*An in-depth look at the continuing importance of race in American life conducted by correspondents of The New York Times. Based on the Pulitzer-Prize winning television documentary*


*A passionate analysis of the pervasiveness of racism and antiblack prejudice in America*


*An adept analysis of the social and political uses of race*


*An analysis of the origins of the American view of race*


*A highly readable look at minority groups and cultural diversity in American life*

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND STUDY

1. What kind of society should the United States strive to become? In your view, does the increasing diversity of American society represent a threat or an opportunity? Should we acknowledge and celebrate our differences, or should we strive for more unity and conformity? What possible dangers and opportunities are inherent in increasing diversity? What are the advantages and disadvantages of stressing unity and conformity?

2. What groups should be considered “minorities”? Using each of the five criteria included in the definition presented in this chapter, should gay and lesbian Americans be considered a minority group? How about left-handed people or people who are very overweight? Explain and justify your answers.

3. What is a social construction? How do race and gender differ in this regard? What does it mean to say, “Gender becomes a social construction—like race—when it is treated as an unchanging, fixed difference and then used to deny opportunity and equality to women”?

4. Define and explain each of the terms in Exhibit 1.5. Cite an example of each from your own experiences. How does ideological racism differ from prejudice? Which concept is more sociological? Why? How does institutional discrimination differ from discrimination? Which concept is more sociological? Why?

INTERNET RESEARCH PROJECT

In this chapter, we discussed race—arguably the most consequential concept in the history of this nation (and the globe). To extend the discussion, we can utilize some readily available resources on the Internet. One very useful website ([http://www.pbs.org/race/](http://www.pbs.org/race/)) was created to accompany a 2003 PBS-sponsored
documentary titled “Race: The Power of an Illusion.” The series is well worth viewing on its own, and the website includes a vast array of richly detailed insights on the phenomenon of race.

The single major point of the website (as in this text) is that race is a social construction, a cultural and political perception invented during particular historical eras, largely to justify and rationalize the differential treatment of others. Once established and passed from generation to generation, race becomes hugely consequential in the lives of all U.S. citizens—it becomes its own reality, shaping and controlling peoples’ lives.

The website has six subsections, and you are encouraged to explore them all. As you do, look for answers to each of the questions below. Does this information change the way you think about race? How?

1. How is race a modern idea?
2. Is race biological?
3. How have ideas about race evolved and changed since ancient times?
4. What are some U.S. examples of how public policy has treated people differently based on race? What are some of the consequences?
5. How have definitions of black and white changed over the years? How have Census Bureau definitions of race changed? Why?
6. Try the “Sorting People” exercise and record your number of “correct” classifications here: _____. What does this exercise make you think about race as a concept? Can you accurately tell someone’s race by looking at them? If not, what does this say about the concept of race?
7. Take the quiz under the “Human Diversity” tab, and record your number of correct answers here: _____. Was your information accurate? Where did you get this information?
8. Click on the “Explore Diversity” button under “Human Diversity” and explore the activities. Does this information support the idea that “race isn’t biological”? How?

**OPTIONAL GROUP DISCUSSION**

Select three of the questions above to discuss with classmates. (NOTE: Your instructor may have more specific or different instructions.) Add your own topic if you wish. Bring your information and reactions from the website and the text to class, and be prepared to discuss the issues with your classmates. To aid the discussion, develop a concise statement or summary of what you learned and what you think was most important about the experience.

**NOTES**

1. These states are Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada, and New York.
2. Boldface terms in the text are defined in the Glossary at the end of the book.
3. A partial exception to this generalization, the Burakumin of Japan, is considered in Chapter 9.
4. Canada is the other.