

APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOR: A SOCIOLOGY OF RACE AND ETHNICITY



Salvador Jiménez Murguía
Taft College

Appearance and Behavior: A Sociology of Race and Ethnicity

This text is disseminated via the Open Education Resource (OER) LibreTexts Project (<https://LibreTexts.org>) and like the thousands of other texts available within this powerful platform, it is freely available for reading, printing, and "consuming."

The LibreTexts mission is to bring together students, faculty, and scholars in a collaborative effort to provide an accessible, and comprehensive platform that empowers our community to develop, curate, adapt, and adopt openly licensed resources and technologies; through these efforts we can reduce the financial burden born from traditional educational resource costs, ensuring education is more accessible for students and communities worldwide.

Most, but not all, pages in the library have licenses that may allow individuals to make changes, save, and print this book. Carefully consult the applicable license(s) before pursuing such effects. Instructors can adopt existing LibreTexts texts or Remix them to quickly build course-specific resources to meet the needs of their students. Unlike traditional textbooks, LibreTexts' web based origins allow powerful integration of advanced features and new technologies to support learning.



LibreTexts is the adaptable, user-friendly non-profit open education resource platform that educators trust for creating, customizing, and sharing accessible, interactive textbooks, adaptive homework, and ancillary materials. We collaborate with individuals and organizations to champion open education initiatives, support institutional publishing programs, drive curriculum development projects, and more.

The LibreTexts libraries are Powered by [NICE CXone Expert](#) and was supported by the Department of Education Open Textbook Pilot Project, the California Education Learning Lab, the UC Davis Office of the Provost, the UC Davis Library, the California State University Affordable Learning Solutions Program, and Merlot. This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 1246120, 1525057, and 1413739.

Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation nor the US Department of Education.

Have questions or comments? For information about adoptions or adaptations contact info@LibreTexts.org or visit our main website at <https://LibreTexts.org>.

This text was compiled on 04/16/2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

1: An Introduction to Race and Ethnicity

- 1.1: Of Social Institutions, Race, Ethnicity, Dogs, and Cats
- 1.2: Defining Race and Ethnicity
- 1.3: A Sociological Overview of Race, Ethnicity, and Social Constructions
- 1.4: The Takeaway
- 1.5: References

2: Sociological Theory

- 2.1: Of Theories and Bicycles
- 2.2: Three Sociological Theoretical Perspectives
- 2.3: Structural Functionalism
- 2.4: Conflict Theory
- 2.5: Symbolic Interactionism
- 2.6: The Takeaway
- 2.7: References

3: Research Methods

- 3.1: From Méthodos to Methods
- 3.2: Three General Research Methods
- 3.3: The Takeaway
- 3.4: References

4: A Sociological History of Race and Ethnicity

- 4.1: No History is Linear
- 4.2: The Foundational Era- Scientific Racism and the Du Boisian Challenge (Late 19th - Early 20th Century)
- 4.3: Social Darwinism and Scientific Racism
- 4.4: The Chicago School and Assimilation Theory
- 4.5: The Du Boisian Seminal Challenge
- 4.6: The Mid-Century Shift- Assimilation's Peak and its Critical Challenges (1940s - 1960s)
- 4.7: The Orthodoxy of Assimilation
- 4.8: The Emergence of Power-Conflict Theories
- 4.9: The Paradigm Shift- Structural Racism and the Ethnic Revival (1970s - 1980s)
- 4.10: The Theory of Racial Formation
- 4.11: Critical Race Theory (CRT)
- 4.12: Symbolic Ethnicity and the Primordialist-Instrumentalist Debate
- 4.13: Contemporary Developments- Intersectionality, Color-Blindness, and Global Racism (1990s - Present)
- 4.14: Intersectionality
- 4.15: Systemic Racism
- 4.16: The Study of Color-Blind Racism
- 4.17: Global and Comparative Perspectives
- 4.18: The Takeaway
- 4.19: References

5: Science and Knowledge

- 5.1: The Racialization of Scientific Progress
- 5.2: Science, Race, and Racism- A Sociological Examination
- 5.3: The Historical Construction of Race in Science
- 5.4: Race as a Social Construct
- 5.5: Scientific Racism in the Modern Era
- 5.6: The Actual Science of Race- Skin Pigmentation and Trichromatic Photoreception
- 5.7: The Biochemical and Evolutionary Foundations of Skin Color
- 5.8: The Physiology of Color Vision- Constructing Visual Reality
- 5.9: The Social Alchemy- From Biological Continuum to Social Hierarchy
- 5.10: The Takeaway
- 5.11: References

6: Norms, Traditions, and Culture

- 6.1: The Mosaic Within- Cultural Norms, Traditions, and Identity in Four American Ethno-Racial Communities
- 6.2: Latinx Americans- Familismo, Faith, and Hybridity
- 6.3: Familismo as a Foundational Norm
- 6.4: Religious Syncretism and Popular Religiosity
- 6.5: Linguistic and Cultural Hybridity- Spanglish and Beyond
- 6.6: Asian Americans- The "Model Minority" Myth, Confucian Values, and Panethnicity
- 6.7: Deconstructing the "Model Minority" Myth
- 6.8: Confucian and Other Cultural Foundations
- 6.9: Transnational Ties and the Creation of "Ethnoburbs"
- 6.10: African Americans- Cultural Resilience, Innovation, and the Black Public Sphere
- 6.11: The Black Church and the Ethos of Freedom
- 6.12: Kinship and Community Norms
- 6.13: Aesthetic Innovation- From Blues to Hip-Hop
- 6.14: Language and Communicative Practices
- 6.15: Indigenous Americans- Sovereignty, Land, and Cultural Revitalization
- 6.16: The Primacy of Sovereignty and Land
- 6.17: Cultural Trauma and Historical Legacy
- 6.18: Ceremonial Life and Worldview
- 6.19: Visual and Narrative Sovereignty
- 6.20: Comparative Analysis- Intersectionality and the Evolving American Mosaic
- 6.21: The Takeaway
- 6.22: References

7: Marriage, Family, and Relationships

- 7.1: The Intimate Mosaic- Marriage, Family, and Kinship Across Racial and Ethnic Lines
- 7.2: Theoretical Frameworks- Understanding the Family-Race Nexus
- 7.3: Historical Legacies and Their Contemporary Echoes
- 7.4: African American Families and the Aftermath of Slavery
- 7.5: Indigenous American Families and Cultural Genocide
- 7.6: Latino and Asian American Families and Immigration Law
- 7.7: Marriage Patterns and Mate Selection
- 7.8: Inter marriage and Assimilation
- 7.9: Kinship, Gender, and Family Norms
- 7.10: Parenting and Ethnic-Racial Socialization

- 7.11: Contemporary Challenges and Adaptations
- 7.12: The Impact of Mass Incarceration
- 7.13: The Growth of Multiracial Families
- 7.14: The Takeaway
- 7.15: References

8: Faith, Belief, and Religion

- 8.1: Sacred Ties- The Intersection of Faith, Race, and Ethnicity in America
- 8.2: Religion as a Source of Social Cohesion and Identity
- 8.3: Religion as a Site of Conflict and Domination
- 8.4: Religion as a Tool Kit for Meaning-Making
- 8.5: African American Religion- The Black Church as a Fortress of Community
- 8.6: Religious Expression and Theodicy
- 8.7: Diversity Within Black Religion
- 8.8: Latinx Religiosity- Mestizaje and Lived Faith
- 8.9: Asian American Religions- Diversity, Adaptation, and the "Second-Generation"
- 8.10: The "Second-Generation" Complex
- 8.11: The "Model Minority" and Religious Stereotypes
- 8.12: Indigenous American Spiritualities- Land, Sovereignty, and Decolonization
- 8.13: Comparative Analysis and Emerging Trends
- 8.14: The Takeaway
- 8.15: References

9: Government, Law, and Politics

- 9.1: Race, Ethnicity, and the American Political-Legal System
- 9.2: Theoretical Frameworks- The State as a Racial Project
- 9.3: A Historical Legacy- The Legal Construction of Race
- 9.4: The Civil Rights Movement as a Counter-Project
- 9.5: Contemporary Legal-Political Battlegrounds
- 9.6: Affirmative Action and the Myth of Colorblindness
- 9.7: Resistance and Mobilization- Politics from Below
- 9.8: The Takeaway
- 9.9: References

10: Deviance, Crime, and Disrepute

- 10.1: The Racialization of Crime and Social Control
- 10.2: The Social Construction of Deviance and Crime
- 10.3: Conflict Theory and the Racial Politics of Crime
- 10.4: Interactionism and the Question of Definition
- 10.5: The Racialization of Crime and Deviance- Historical Foundations of Racial Criminalization
- 10.6: Social Ecology and Concentrated Disadvantage
- 10.7: Racial Invariance Hypothesis and Structural Inequality
- 10.8: Policing, Prosecution, and Sentencing- Racial Disparities in Legal Processing
- 10.9: Prosecutorial Discretion and Charging Decisions
- 10.10: Sentencing Disparities and Mandatory Minimums
- 10.11: Collateral Consequences and Community Impacts
- 10.12: Intersectionality- Race, Gender, and Incarceration
- 10.13: Resistance, Reform, and Paths Forward- Social Movements and Advocacy

- 10.14: Evidence-Based Policy Reforms
- 10.15: Restorative and Transformative Justice Approaches
- 10.16: The Takeaway
- 10.17: References

11: Labor, Employment and Economy

- 11.1: The Persistence of Racial Inequality in the American Workplace
- 11.2: Theoretical Foundations- Understanding Race in the Labor Market
- 11.3: Latinx Workers- Between Progress and Precarity
- 11.4: African American Workers- The Persistent Crisis of Black Employment
- 11.5: Asian American Workers- Beyond the Model Minority
- 11.6: Indigenous Workers- Historical Legacies and Contemporary Realities
- 11.7: Systemic Barriers- Discrimination, Segregation, and Wage Gaps Across Groups
- 11.8: Policy, Resistance, and Paths Forward
- 11.9: The Takeaway
- 11.10: References

12: Teaching, Learning, and Education

- 12.1: The Color of Knowledge
- 12.2: The Illusion of Meritocracy
- 12.3: Historical Foundations- Legacies of Exclusion and Control
- 12.4: The Architecture of Inequality- Structures, Funding, and Discipline
- 12.5: Curricula, Tracking, and the Social Dynamics of Achievement
- 12.6: Divergent Pathways- Comparative Analysis of Racialized Groups
- 12.7: Sites of Resistance and Visions for Transformation
- 12.8: The Takeaway
- 12.9: References

13: Popular Culture, Mass Culture, and Media

- 13.1: Racial and Ethnic Formations in the Mediasphere
- 13.2: The Mediasphere as a Racial Project
- 13.3: Theoretical Lenses- Function, Conflict, and Symbolic Meaning
- 13.4: Racialized Representations- Four Case Studies in American Media
- 13.5: African Americans- From Caricature to Contested Visibility
- 13.6: Latinx- Between Invisibility and Stereotype
- 13.7: Asian Americans- The Peril of the "Model Minority" Myth
- 13.8: Indigenous Peoples- Erasure and Cultural Appropriation.
- 13.9: The Digital Turn- Social Media, Algorithms, and AI
- 13.10: Algorithmic Amplification and Digital Redlining
- 13.11: Generative AI and the Future of Racial Representation
- 13.12: The Takeaway
- 13.13: References

[Index](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Detailed Licensing](#)

[Detailed Licensing](#)

Licensing

A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in [Back Matter/Detailed Licensing](#).

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: An Introduction to Race and Ethnicity

- 1.1: Of Social Institutions, Race, Ethnicity, Dogs, and Cats
- 1.2: Defining Race and Ethnicity
- 1.3: A Sociological Overview of Race, Ethnicity, and Social Constructions
- 1.4: The Takeaway
- 1.5: References

This page titled [1: An Introduction to Race and Ethnicity](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

1.1: Of Social Institutions, Race, Ethnicity, Dogs, and Cats

On 9 September 2024, in the lead up to the presidential election, Vice President hopeful, JD Vance, circulated a rumor about Haitian immigrants eating pets in Springfield, Ohio. According to his post on X,

Months ago, I raised the issue of Haitian illegal immigrants draining social services and generally causing chaos all over Springfield, Ohio. Reports now show that people have had their pets abducted and eaten by people who shouldn't be in this country. Where is our border czar? (Vance 2024)

The rumor emerged from a single source: an Ohioan woman that heard the story fourth-hand and posted it on a local Facebook group site. Vance, an Ohio native, framed this woman's allegations as a threat to American values, a veiled statement about perceived practices of foreigners and their threat to American exceptionalism. Vance would later admit in an interview with CNN's Dana Bash, that these allegations were indeed false, yet doubled down by suggesting that news outlets would never report on such incidents if such sensationalism wasn't brought to fore. The ridiculousness of the original claim, its proliferation by a Vance, and his absurd defense of the whole milieu in getting it into the mainstream media, was amplified further during the presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, when Trump echoed the falsehood remarking "in Springfield, their eating the pets" (Thomas and Wendling 2024). In the roughly two-month period between Vance's statement and Trump's remark, the mainstream media attempted to unpack the meaning and implications for the lack of veracity of the Trump-Vance Campaign, the state of civility in the face of such accusations, and of course the image of the Haitian Community, both in Springfield and abroad.

What was interesting about this whole incident was that it unfolded squarely within the intersection of race, ethnicity, and a variety of social institutions—dynamics of real sociological significance. Haitians, most of whom have dark phenotypes, their ethnic community as expatriates in the United States, and the political/economic institutions that dictated their circumstances, all come together in a confluence of sociological contexts.

This textbook is primarily a sociological guide to race and ethnicity. As such, the content herein will provide a cursory overview of how race and ethnicity are studied within the discipline of sociology.

This page titled [1.1: Of Social Institutions, Race, Ethnicity, Dogs, and Cats](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

1.2: Defining Race and Ethnicity

In sociology, both race and ethnicity can have some rather specific definitions. Race is typically thought of as a group's physical appearance and an identity designation related to ancestry that emerges during the Early Modern period (1500-1700) brought about by such historical events as exploration, conquest, and colonialism. During this period, whole perspectives were formed about a given group's physical abilities, tendencies, intelligence, psychology, and overall state of being—most all of which is bound to gross generalizations and misinterpretations about the very people they describe. Race, as an identity, is also tied to a given group's understanding of themselves and their shared history, as well as a defense and empowerment of their defined communities. A race then is similar to a label appended to a group of people that configures certain assumptions about their lives and lifestyles. Examples of racial categories in the United States context would generally be LatinX, Black, Asian, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, and Middle Eastern/North-African populations, as well as the various suppositions associated with these populations—if Latino, then X; if Black, then Y; if Asian, then Z; and so-on and so-forth. Despite the mixed indicators that make up this definition of race—physical appearance, ancestral lineage designation, and an understanding of oneself as a member of a racial group—it is physical appearance that is most often central to the definition and a key referent that informs the perspective of onlookers. For this reason, I have used the term 'Appearance' in the title of this book, as race is frequently thought of as that physical appearance that initiates the discourse on racialization.

Conversely, though certainly related, ethnicity is a socio-cultural status that fosters a way of being. Ethnicity encompasses the actions and symbolic representations that grow out of the long-standing interrelated experiences of being a part of the above-mentioned racial categories. Ethnicity is then the loose operationalization of these categories, as in perhaps a common language; beliefs associated with religion; customary practices of food and foodways; musical traditions; and the like. Along these lines, for example, some groups of LatinX may have a certain appreciation for a particular type of music, dietary preferences, a customary religious tradition, or even a form of colloquial Spanish that is commonly spoken within their ethnic community. Although this example seemingly groups all LatinX together, it's important to note that there is, indeed, a lot of diversity at play, as in some of LatinX may identify as Chicanos—a socio-political identity for some U.S.-born Mexican Americans; while other LatinX may identify as El Salvadorean—a much more geographical identity associated with one's nation of origin. The diversity of these identities is important and allows for a vast assortment of different identity configurations of which to acknowledge, appreciate, and even celebrate.

Similar to my use of 'Appearance' as stand-in for race in the title of this textbook, I have used 'Behavior' to stand-in for ethnicity in the title, as it designates a responsive relationship to the stimuli found in one's community. In this way, it is the behavior of a group in response to the interactions found in a given community that creates the experiential content we call ethnicity.

With these definitions in mind, it may become fairly obvious that both race and ethnicity are not mutually exclusive along very definitive lines, but rather with a reasonable amount of overlap. That is, after racial categories are established, it is the expression of ethnicity that then creates and perhaps informs perspective about how race is enacted. For example, when an onlooker identifies an individual as Asian (the racial category), they may then take the liberty of making assumptions about the lifeways of that individual (ethnicity). Of course, both the process of identification and the liberties taken in making assumptions may or may not be correct, yet that's how race and ethnicity have operated—they literally construct the social reality of race and ethnicity in real time.

This page titled [1.2: Defining Race and Ethnicity](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

1.3: A Sociological Overview of Race, Ethnicity, and Social Constructions

The world of sociology is largely a world of social constructions, or the process of crafting the different operational parts that make-up our social realities. Social constructions are those experiences and subjective perceptions that may appear natural, as they've seemingly been around forever and have given off the impression that they are indispensable to our lives. However, in reality these constructions have been created for some purpose or function in the service of our lived experience. For example, think about events such as holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, funerals, quinceañeras, wedding ceremonies, honeymoons, baptisms, etc. Each of these events generally provide us with a date, time, and venue to honor someone or something. Social constructions such as these form, once again, operational parts for our lived experience. In other words, social constructions like these holidays and events aren't natural, but instead they are constructed in such a way that they create our lived realities.

Of course, social constructions are not just limited to holidays and events but can be much more instrumental in our everyday interactions. Think, for example about language: it is an outgrowth of our need to communicate, and we do so symbolically by stringing together different letters or characters, including, excluding, and combining them differentially in order to make purposeful statements that, in turn, affect our lives. Not only is language diverse, as in French, Chinese, English, Nahuatl, and the like, but there are also various dialects, corruptions, adaptations, and even non-verbal systems like sign language and Braille that are all indicative of how language is socially constructed and reconstructed out of human necessity.

Now, an important note should be made about social constructions: just because something is a social construction, does not mean it's any less significant to our existences. One rather telling example of this would be money; though a social construction, few would be so naïve as to characterize money as insignificant. Indeed, the example of money and its relevance to our lives suggests that some social constructions can go beyond mere importance and can actually become definitive channels through which we organize our lives and maintain our livelihoods.

Race and ethnicity are also two phenomena that are subject to the processes of social construction. In terms of race, it is squarely a social phenomenon that has both emerged and developed over the course of roughly the past 500 years. Although there have been attempts at substantiating the biological foundations of race, they have fallen flat without merit. As is introduced in later chapters, the formation of race is really a series of socially constructing it into reality—a reality bound to the assumptions people append to appearance of different races.

Similarly, ethnicity and its unique feature of cultural expression is not only a social construction but is one in which that is constantly being constructed and reconstructed through social interaction. Ethnicities adapt through the behaviors of the people within their communities, and this means that behaviors become the expressive material that establishes the unique qualities of a given ethnicity.

In addition to the definitions and characteristics presented by race and ethnicity, and the overlap that they share, it's also important to understand that individuals may have multiple races and/or multiple ethnicities. For example, former President Barack Obama was born to an American mother of European descent and a Kenyan father of African descent. Obama's physical features—foremost his skin color and hair texture—situated him within a Black racial category; however, his upbringing fostered a much more Euro-American ethnic category. Yet these categories were not fixed, and as Obama matured, he was able to navigate between and among a variety of racial and ethnic spaces. Nonetheless, what perhaps made President Obama such an effective politician was his ability to relate to so many diverse communities, due in large part to his multi-racial and multi-ethnic background—a not so subtle indication of how the diversity of both race and ethnicity can be celebrated.

This page titled [1.3: A Sociological Overview of Race, Ethnicity, and Social Constructions](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

1.4: The Takeaway

Race and ethnicity are seemingly two different sides of the same coin. The former, race, is largely the label associated with the look of a given individual, while the latter, ethnicity is the expressive cultural material that can be traced back to perspectives or assumptions about race. Thus, race may be understood as *appearance* and ethnicity as *behavior*.

As social constructions, both race and ethnicity are not natural, but instead created in the service of informing our social realities, while noting that just because something is not natural, does not mean it is inconsequential. We will see in the chapters that follow just how consequential race and ethnicity have been in the American context.

Finally, race and ethnicity are not fixed categories. One can certainly be a part of one racial or one ethnic category, yet it is also quite common for an individual to have a multi-racial and/or a multi-ethnic makeup.

This page titled [1.4: The Takeaway](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

1.5: References

Thomas, Merlyn and Mike Wendling. 2024. “Trump Repeats Baseless Claim about Haitian Immigrants Eating Pets.” *BBC News*. Retrieved June 12, 2025 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c77l28myezko>).

Vance, JD. 2024. “Months ago, I raised the issue of Haitian illegal immigrants draining social services and generally causing chaos all over Springfield, Ohio. Reports now show that people have had their pets abducted and eaten by people who shouldn't be in this country. Where is our border czar?” X, September 9. Retrieved May 10, 2025. <https://x.com/JDVance/status/1833148904864465117>

This page titled [1.5: References](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Sociological Theory

- [2.1: Of Theories and Bicycles](#)
- [2.2: Three Sociological Theoretical Perspectives](#)
- [2.3: Structural Functionalism](#)
- [2.4: Conflict Theory](#)
- [2.5: Symbolic Interactionism](#)
- [2.6: The Takeaway](#)
- [2.7: References](#)

This page titled [2: Sociological Theory](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

2.1: Of Theories and Bicycles

Sociology is the study of human social activity in relation to social institutions. To illustrate this activity, if one were to study something as common as your average bicycle, you may think about how the different parts of the bicycle are related. Consider the following statement as a theoretical interpretation of how a bicycle operates:

The different parts of the bicycle are used together to help a person get from point A to point B. The seat is used to sit on. The handlebars steer the direction of the bike. The sprocket is attached to peddles that are to be spun by your legs and feet, and the tires are turned by the motion of the sprocket. If a person uses a bike in this way, that person will, in theory, get from point A to point B.

In this theory, the parts of the bicycle are used together to transport a person from one place to another. However, this is just a theory. This does not take into consideration whether the tires have air or the seat is comfortable to sit on. Additionally, this theory doesn't consider some of the human-related challenges that will affect the objective of getting from point A to point B, like whether a person has two legs, good balance, is impaired, and the like. More, this theory does not consider whether there is pathway that will accommodate bicycle, much less an accessible road to ride on. Rather, the theory only provides an idea of how and perhaps why certain bicycle-specific facts are related, and when in place, how they may facilitate movement between two locations.

Social theory can be thought of in the same way. Theories that are used to study society help to interpret how and why specific facts are related. For example, if we were studying how and why the different parts of marriage are related, we may look at these different parts and try to make sense of their meanings. To do so, we may break these parts up into two categories: (1) material and (2) non-material facts. Material facts might include the wedding ring, marriage certificate, tax statuses, etc. While the non-material facts might include the notions of love, affection, caring for one another, etc. Some social theories would say that marriage works out well, perhaps citing how these social facts work together. While others may say that it's an old system used to control people and distract them from the important realities of social life. While still others would say that marriage is merely a system of symbols and actions that produce a certain kind of culture. Again, these are simply theories, and it would be the task of the sociologist to test these theories as they apply to the intersection of human social interaction and social institutions.

This page titled [2.1: Of Theories and Bicycles](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

2.2: Three Sociological Theoretical Perspectives

A good starting point at which we can learn about theory is an introduction to the classical sociological perspectives of Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), Karl Marx (1818-1883), and Max Weber (1864-1920).

To be sure, there are many others that contributed and continue to contribute to sociological theory beyond these three figures, however, the vast majority of theory can be mapped back to their perspectives or have at least some traces of their perspectives built into the overall logic of these three theorists. In order to manage the distinctions between these perspectives, think of each perspective as a different pair of glasses with distinct lenses through which one can see the world. In other words, one pair of glasses presents a perspective of our social world in a particular way, while another pair presents a different perspective of our social world in yet another way. It is important to note that similar to the discussion on social constructions in the introduction, the use of these glasses and the lenses through which we see the world are not natural, but instead something constructed, as well as something that can be taken on and off; not necessarily something that we need to have on all the time. This suggests that we are not only in control of the perspectives through which we see the social world, but we're also in control of how and when we wish to see it as such, as no glasses are naturally affixed to our faces.

In this analogy, there are three different pairs of glasses that present three different perspectives as follow: (1) Structural Functionalism Theory; (2) Conflict Theory; and (3) Symbolic Interactionism Theory¹. As mentioned above, these three theoretical perspectives were developed by three different individuals that are part of the classical canon of sociological theory. Functionalism is associated with Émile Durkheim, while Conflict is associated with Karl Marx. And although not necessarily considered the founder of Interactionism, Max Weber's work was highly influential on its development. In the next section, we will explore how the view of society, through these different glasses, corresponds with the perspectives of these three different individuals.

1. Although I introduce these perspectives with the term "Theory" appended to the end of each, these perspectives are more commonly known as follows: Structural Functionalism as "Functionalism," Conflict Theory as "Conflict," and Symbolic Interactionism as "Interactionism."

This page titled [2.2: Three Sociological Theoretical Perspectives](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

2.3: Structural Functionalism

Functionalism is considered one of the earliest foundations of sociological theory. Developed by Émile Durkheim, Functionalism asks the question: how do the different parts of society function in order to maintain stability? An answer to this question can be understood through the first pair of glasses—a perspective through which society is viewed as complex sets of social institutions that operate in relation to each other in establishing social realities. These social institutions vary depending on the focus of the perspective, but in general they may include family, marriage, religion, politics, the economy, etc. Functionalism then, provides a view of society wherein different parts work together in some sort of sustainable pattern that fosters various norms, beliefs, practices, and the like.

Early contributors to the Structural Functionalists perspective, like Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), likened these relationships between institutions to the way in which the various parts of the human body work alongside each other in sustaining the human organism throughout the lifecycle. In other words, in the same way the cardiovascular system operates alongside such other functions as the nervous system, muscular system, or respiratory system within our bodies, is analogous to the societal context wherein various social institutions like family, marriage, religion, politics, and the economy all operate in conjunction with one another. That is, the role of the family, its relationship to marriage, guidance of religion, the influence of politics, or how family is subject to different economic fluctuations, all function together to sustain the bonds we create in society.

In this perspective, the view of society can appear rather optimistic, as it largely focuses on the function, consensus, and cooperation that bind various institutions together. If we consider the topics of this textbook—race and ethnicity—for example, structural functionalists may view these social forces as important in forming various socio-cultural traditions, identities, or distinctions that foster diversity. In other words, by focusing on the general functions of these social forces, this perspective appears to embrace a fairly innocent, if not completely benign, view of race and ethnicity.

While this perspective may sound rather admirable, some critics of Functionalism would argue that it fails to consider other less-commendable realities associated with race and ethnicity, namely the inequality and inequity that so often accompanies these social forces. If, for example, we were to use this perspective to view the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, a number of institutions could be identified as functioning together for the sustainability of the society that slavery served. To explain, in terms of the political economy, there was a pursuit of enormous profit through the development of an economic system that would initially serve the colony and later the nation-state. Institutions of law and criminal justice operated in tandem with this political economy to establish the legal parameters through which the enslaved were subjugated. Although certainly odd couples, even religion and science operated alongside these other institutions creating doctrines and debates that would drive the discourse on the inferiority of the enslaved and the superiority of their masters; the ineptitude of their conversion to Christianity or even the lack of potential cognitive capabilities in the ‘civilizing process’; as well as the justification of their enslavement—not to mention the absolution of guilt brought about by remaining complicit in the inhumane treatment of fellow humans. These, of course are just a few examples of social institutions that operated alongside of each other during slavery and would be seen primarily for their *function* within the Functionalist perspective as opposed to their mere problematic implications.

This page titled [2.3: Structural Functionalism](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

2.4: Conflict Theory

Quite different from Functionalism, Conflict is a perspective in which society is viewed as a system characterized by an unequal distribution of goods, resources, and services. Where Structural Functionalism attempts to identify the institutions that function in tandem with each other and highlight a somewhat optimistic view of society, Conflict focuses on how these very institutions create various disparities between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots.’

The work of Karl Marx defines this perspective and introduced through these glasses is a view of the social world that is less just, fair, and equitable than most individuals are led to believe. As such, this view is rather pessimistic—a pessimism that is generated by a critique of Capitalism and its built-in embrace of private property. For Marx, the economic system of Capitalism is the engine behind so much inequality, as, he argues, inequality is such a necessary feature in the pursuit of profit, which in turn is construed as private ownership of otherwise public goods, resources, and services. To explain, Capitalism is designed to ‘capitalize’ on opportunities that will generate profit and wealth. The capitalist is, thus, always seeking to find ways to invest and reinvest capital, which comes at the expense of anyone and anything that can be exploited or taken advantage of in the pursuit of this profit.

To be sure, there is a human cost to these Capitalist pursuits. With such unbridled intentions to seek profitable yields, the ethical treatment of one another is situated in a compromised position, as human relations and the humane treatment of one another is perhaps only second to turning a profit. Rather than identifying ways in which goods, resources, and services can be shared in a more equitable fashion, Capitalism forces us to look out for our best interests first, and maybe only one another secondarily. For this reason, Capitalism as an economic system also permeates other institutions that may not appear to be associated with economics at all. Such institutions as family, marriage, religion, politics, etc., adopt a kind of transactional character that puts profits before people.

According to Marx, as Capitalism is so central to our social world, the type of inequality it generates does not simply operate as an economic system, but it’s actually introduced into all aspects of our lives. To use a technical term from Marx, the “mode of production,” or the way we labor to make items for consumption and purchase, is not just a model for production but also becomes a model for how we live. Along these lines, we encourage competition, winning, exploitation, and success over any experience that nurtures cooperation, accepts the outcome of losing, fosters the fair and just treatment of one another, or even embraces the virtues of failure and the lessons from which something life-enhancing may be learned.

As mentioned above in the explanation of Functionalism, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was a major example of how early Capitalism disregarded the lives, liberties, and freedoms of enslaved Africans, and prioritized their exploitation in order to turn a profit at all costs. In that instance, various institutions also fostered the complicity involved in sustaining this system, allowing for this tragedy to thrive—not simply a case of profits over people, but also greed over guilt, hate over compassion, irrational violence over reason, and the like. Today, the Conflict glasses through which we view the social world of race and ethnicity would provide a scene of vast inequality and inequity.

This page titled [2.4: Conflict Theory](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

2.5: Symbolic Interactionism

While Functionalism and Conflict appear situated more toward different ends of the perspective scale (the former more optimistic and the latter more pessimistic), Interactionism runs in an entirely different direction through a somewhat neutral perspective. Interactionism's glasses are much more focused on close and intimate interactions, framing its view of the social world through the interpretation of symbols, roles, expectations, and the like. By playing close attention to these features, it is through this perspective that human social interaction may be seen as a series of interesting nuances that create and recreate our social realities.

Although not necessarily the originator of Interactionism, much of Max Weber's work is considered instrumentally influential to its development. To explain, Weber introduced the concept of *verstehen*—a Deutsch word for empathic understanding—in such a way that it emphasizes the importance understanding the human interactional experience through the very people that experience it. In other words, it's a way of 'putting oneself in the shoes of others' to understand their experience, as opposed to simply 'explaining' a given phenomenon without this empathetic insight and failing to emphasize the importance of the input from actual subjects the researcher is studying.

For Weber, this shift to understanding others in their terms was also a way of creating what he called a "value-free sociology," or a sociology that limits the imposition of the researcher's biases. In other words, by being true to the perspectives and experiences of the research subjects and situating them as the arbiters of how they see themselves, prevents the sociologist from explaining away, diminishing, or worse dismissing, the subjects' interpretations of themselves. This, of course, is a boon to neutrality as there's less of a subjective angle to be had.

As mentioned above, Weber's work, however so important to the development of Interactionism, is more influential than informative. Yet at least three other sociologists from what has come to be known as the Chicago School of thought were far more defining of the way we understand this perspective today. For this reason, we will also put glasses on these individuals and add them to the view of Interactionism.

The first individual is George Herbert Mead (1863-1931). Mead's seminal contribution to Interactionism was actually a 1937 book pieced together by his students titled *Mind, Self, and Society*—each term of this title is in reference to a concept uniquely characterized by Mead in his lectures to his students. "Mind," for Mead, refers to how individuals engage with symbols and craft meaning about the world around them, mostly with the symbolic nature of language. The term "Self" takes up the concept of the individual in self-reflection, or an internal understanding of how one is understood by others. In many ways, this concept of self becomes very important in subsequent theories of Interactionism, situating the individual and their sense of how they create and recreate reality at the center of interpretation.

In Mead's concept of "Self," there are two parts in constant dialogue with each other: the "I" and the "Me." In the latter, the Me, the social self emerges where the expectations and understandings of others are defining the meaning of the world around us. For example, with race and ethnicity in mind, this Me would constitute the acknowledgement of the various labels and characteristics individuals use to describe what it means to be a Person of Color or even White, as it were. Conversely, in former, the I, is another part of the Self that is, again, in constant dialogue with the Me, interpreting what the meanings from the Me *can* mean in actuality. In this way, this I is the individual self that intervenes in the meanings that the social self of the Me creates. If this is confusing, another way of understanding it is that our Self is made up of what society defines for us—the Me—and what we do to mediate those definitions on a personal level—the I. So, where the Me would create labels and characteristics about race and ethnicity on social level, the I may step in and modify or even personalize these labels and characteristics in ways that make more sense to us, or even square with a more authentic rendering of how we've understood them through experience.

Finally, there is Mead's concept of "Society." Although there are many ways to define this, it may be easiest to understand Society as a field upon which all the social interaction takes place. In other words, the use of Society emphasizes a sociological plane over a psychological one. Within this sociological plane, it is through interaction between individuals that reality is crafted, not merely within the mind itself. For the notions of race and ethnicity this seems rather obvious, as we understand their meanings on a social level through interaction, as opposed to a completely individual level wherein the mind and imagination are considered the arbiters of their realities.

Notwithstanding the importance of Mead, it was actually Herbert Blumer (1900-1987), the second individual, that really introduced Mead's work to the sociological discipline. A former student of Mead, Blumer refined Mead's ideas about Symbolic Interaction,

suggesting that individuals act toward things and others based upon their pre-existing meanings—meanings generated by social interaction and adjusted through subsequent interpretations.

For example, Yale sociologist, Elijah Anderson's 1999 book, *Codes of the Street*, details how inner-city African Americans construct informal codes that insulate individuals from being disrespected, lest they engage in defensive acts of violence and intimidation to regain that respect. For Anderson, such acts of aggression are not inherent in the individuals themselves but instead result from an historical pattern of inequitable treatment toward African Americans that has left them in a situation of economic despair and limited opportunity brought about by systemic racism. In other words, there is a deep-seated sense of desperation that has socially-conditioned these individuals to push back against disrespect due to the historical record of violence and subjugation toward them. Blumer would see this violence, or potential for violence, as interaction that is directly linked to these informal codes, or pre-existing meaning. The way in which meaning is generated through social interaction, and adjusted based upon interpretations of respect or disrespect, would also square with Blumer's channeling of Mead's work.

The third individual associated with this Chicago School of thought, Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929), also contributed to the Symbolic Interactionist perspective, and as a contemporary of Mead, was most certainly influential of his theories. One concept in particular, "the looking glass self," from his 1902 book *Human Nature and the Social Order*, runs parallel with Mead's concept of "Self." According to Cooley, individuals do not independently construct the impressions they give off but instead are influenced and informed by others' impressions of them. In other words, individuals manage the presentation of themselves based not upon how *they* see themselves, but how *others* see them. At least one implication of this is that social interaction is literally creating our social realities, as we are highly impressionable.

A typical view on race through the looking glass self illustrates how individuals construct their own racial categories through the influences of others. In research that explores the factual relevance of this concept to racial construction, Saperstein and Penner (2014) first outline the way in which this framework is commonly understood.

Social science research on race typically takes for granted that racial self-identification is constrained by one's appearance and, by extension how one is perceived by others. That is, one cannot publicly claim to be a member of a racial population if one does not exhibit the physical characteristics stereotypically associated with that group—or, at the very least, one should not expect such a claim to go unchallenged. This follows from the commonsense understanding that race, and racial difference, is determined by reference to visible and heritable traits, such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features. (187)

It then follows that at least some of the racial categorization project and sense of identity within such a racial category are informed by the internalization of the perspectives of others.

Viewing race and ethnicity through the glasses of Interactionism provides a perspective that highlights one's experience with the symbolic construction of race and ethnicity; the roles that society suggests must be assumed when engaging with phenomenon central to race and ethnicity; and the social expectations that emerge when considering what race and ethnicity should introduce.

This page titled [2.5: Symbolic Interactionism](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

2.6: The Takeaway

Theory is an important component of any discipline, and certainly an important one in sociology. Without theory, sociology might look and sound a bit like journalism where stories are captured and broadcast but not necessarily presented through conceptual frameworks that organize sociological perspectives. The perspectives herein—Functionalism, Conflict, and Interactionism—provide these conceptual frameworks and afford sociologists the tools through which arguments about social phenomena can be crafted. While Functionalism place emphasis on how institutions work together to sustain social systems and is presented through an optimistic view of the social world, Conflict, through a rather pessimistic view, focuses on how institutions—namely the economic system of Capitalism—generates vast inequality and inequities. Relatively different from both Functionalism and Conflict, Interactionism, while maintaining a fairly neutral view of the social world, takes up the study of social interaction in a much more close and intimate fashion, highlighting the symbols, roles, expectations that create and recreate social realities.

The takeaway for this chapter is that social theory is an essential part of how sociology is both distinguished from other disciplines, as well as how it creates sociological ideas and research. To *think* sociologically is to use theory to guide one's thought process; however, to *do* sociology is to use methods that gather evidence about sociological phenomena—the focus of which will be the topic of the next chapter.

This page titled [2.6: The Takeaway](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

2.7: References

Cooley, Charles Horton. 1902. *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Saperstein, Aliya and Andrew M. Penner. "Beyond the Looking Glass: Exploring Fluidity in Racial Self Identification and Interview Classification." *Sociological Perspective*. 57 (2): 187-207.

This page titled [2.7: References](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Research Methods

[3.1: From Méthodos to Methods](#)

[3.2: Three General Research Methods](#)

[3.3: The Takeaway](#)

[3.4: References](#)

This page titled [3: Research Methods](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

3.1: From Méthodos to Methods

The term method comes from the Greek word *méthodos*, a combination of two others Greek terms *meta*, meaning ‘pursuit of,’ and *hodos*, or ‘a path.’ We might infer from this etymological lineage that a method is the practice of finding a way to locate something. This would certainly align with how social scientists use the term today, as methods are systematic ways of gathering and analyzing information about a given topic. In the Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, we might think of these methods as ways identifying evidence that is helpful for sociologists to make sense of content associated with the appearance of race and the behaviors we associate with ethnicity. To be sure, there is no single method used to make sense of this content, however there are some general methods that are most commonly used to this end—general methods that will be introduced in this chapter.

This page titled [3.1: From Méthodos to Methods](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

3.2: Three General Research Methods

If sociological theories may be thought of as conceptual frameworks used for interpreting social phenomena, sociological methods would be strategies used for collecting evidence that assist in arriving at conclusions about such phenomena. Sociological methods are generally organized around the three following approaches: (1) qualitative, (2) quantitative, and (3) comparative. Similar to the analogy of glasses through which different theoretical perspectives are viewed, methods also have different approaches to collecting evidence. For the sake of making methods as easy as theory to understand, we may think of methods as different ways of telling stories.

In our first story-telling strategy, qualitative methods are much like telling stories by composing narratives about an experience in doing research. As these stories are often long, they require a lot of detail or aspects that provide an in-depth description of a given social phenomenon and its interpretation. For this reason, it's important to spend some time familiarizing oneself with the resources from which this information is gathered. As these resources are often human subjects (actual people without whom sociologists talk), establishing good rapport may afford the researcher better access to detailed information. Given that this may require asking a lot of questions about many aspects of a topic, it's typically best to do so by limiting the number of resources or cases a researcher identifies—something methodologists refer to as sampling. In effect, qualitative methods tell stories about social phenomena through long narratives that include few cases, but many aspects of these cases.

In 2015, Rosalind S. Chou and Joe Feagin published *The Myth of the Model Minority*, wherein their research was compiled using extensive qualitative methods. In this critical work, Chou and Feagin deconstruct the pervasive “model minority” stereotype applied to Asian Americans. Arguing that this myth masks the enduring reality of systemic and everyday racism, the authors draw on in-depth qualitative research to document the lived experiences of racial oppression. The study's methodological core consists of ethnographic methods which included extensive participant observation within Asian American communities and organizations over a five-year period. This immersive ethnographic approach was supplemented by dozens of semi-structured, long-form interviews with Asian American students and adults. Through this rich qualitative and ethnographic data, the authors provide detailed accounts of the overt and covert racist barriers their respondents face in educational and professional settings, as well as the significant psychological toll of navigating white-dominated spaces. The analysis reveals how the model minority stereotype functions as a form of racist framing that perpetuates their marginalization, pits them against other minority groups, and invalidates their experiences of discrimination. The book concludes that systemic white racism remains a powerful force in the lives of Asian Americans, necessitating a rejection of the model minority myth and its divisive consequences. In this way, qualitative methods afforded Chou and Feagin the in-depth and rich information used in compiling the details of this story.

In the second storytelling strategy, quantitative methods tell a much more abbreviated story of social phenomena. This abbreviated story, however, is no less worthy of sociological inquiry, as it too, like qualitative storytelling, has many methodological virtues. To begin, quantitative storytelling uses numbers to provide information about social phenomena. That is, the details of a given phenomenon's social dynamics are represented by numbers, instead of in-depth qualitative storytelling descriptors. However, in order for these numbers to be meaningful, researchers must capture a larger sample of sources than the limited sample that qualitative storytelling requires. In this way, where qualitative storytelling presents thick descriptive narratives about many aspects of a mere few cases, quantitative storytelling tends to survey a wide range of cases from many sources, but only about a limited number of aspects of such cases.

The very first research study of race and racism in America came from W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), the first African American to earn a Ph.D. in Sociology from Harvard University. In this groundbreaking study, Du Bois presented a comprehensive empirical analysis of the African American community in Philadelphia's Seventh Ward. Du Bois employed a mixed-methods approach that pioneered the use of descriptive statistics, surveys, interviews, and historical and institutional analysis.

It was the methods that substantiated Du Bois' refutation of prevailing notions of Black inferiority by situating the community's social conditions within their broader historical and structural contexts. The study's statistical findings documented stark racial inequalities in income, occupation, health, education, and crime. For instance, Du Bois meticulously catalogs the restricted occupational opportunities for Black men and women, noting their systematic exclusion from skilled trades and their overrepresentation in domestic service and low-wage labor. He statistically links these economic disadvantages to higher rates of poverty, housing overcrowding, and mortality within the Black community. Ultimately, Du Bois argues that these outcomes are not

the result of inherent racial traits but are the products of centuries of enslavement, widespread racial prejudice and discrimination, and the structural barriers preventing socioeconomic advancement.

The Philadelphia Negro is a foundational text in urban sociology, criminology, and the critical study of race, establishing a methodological and theoretical precedent for future scholarship on racial inequality in the United States. For Du Bois, in the quantitative portions of his study where he used statistical data to tell this story of the African Americans in Philadelphia, he was able to effectively utilize the power of numbers to substantiate his findings about the plight of Black men and women.

Finally, in the third storytelling strategy, comparative methods tell a story by highlighting the similarities and differences between social phenomena. Although this comparative storytelling may sound distinct from both qualitative and quantitative storytelling, it may actually use either or even both to render this model. Additionally, this type of storytelling can often lend itself to focusing on research that is already established by literally comparing and contrasting content from either qualitative or quantitative studies. For example, in content analysis, an analytical strategy where a researcher will look at various artifacts associated with a social phenomenon and interpret their social significance, a comparative storyteller can identify sociological patterns among these aspects and provide a meaningful interpretation through analysis.

In a sweeping historical and sociological analysis, Howard Winant's *The World Is a Ghetto*, uses comparative methods to argue that the racial break of the post-World War II period—marked by the collapse of global white supremacy and the emergence of new racial formations—constitutes a central, yet unresolved, problem for modern democracy. The book's primary methodological strength lies in its large-scale comparative approach, which systematically analyzes the distinct yet interconnected trajectories of racial politics across multiple national contexts. Winant conducts a detailed comparative analysis of the United States and Brazil as contrasting hemispheric examples of race and democracy and extends this framework to include South Africa and the European Union. This comparative method allows him to theorize about the global character of race, demonstrating how the Great Transformation of the 20th century was a worldwide phenomenon, even as it manifested through unique national histories, policies, and modes of resistance. Through this work, Winant challenges nation-specific and exceptionalist theories of race, instead positing a global theory of racial formation. He concludes that the contemporary world remains defined by the dictatorship of race, where democracy is perpetually contested and undermined by the enduring power of a racial hierarchy, a condition that requires a continued transnational political project to overcome. For Winant, the comparative model allowed him to identify the similarities and differences of these locations—the output of which provided a better sense of how race and racial formation emerged in the 20th century.

This page titled [3.2: Three General Research Methods](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

3.3: The Takeaway

Methods constitute the way in which sociologists gather information—information that will become evidence for substantiating the thesis of their work. The three general methods most all social scientists use are qualitative, quantitative, and comparative; and for this chapter they were characterized as three different ways of telling the same story. Where qualitative methods tell stories through thick and descriptive narratives, quantitative methods use numerical expressions and statistical analysis to tell that same story. Finally, comparative methods have the option of using qualitative, quantitative, or both, in an effort to draw similarities and differences about that same story, as well.

This page titled [3.3: The Takeaway](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

3.4: References

Chou, Rosalind S. and Joe R. Feagin. 2008. *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Du Bois, W. E. B. 1899. *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Winant, Howard. 2001. *The World Is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy since World War II*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

This page titled [3.4: References](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: A Sociological History of Race and Ethnicity

- 4.1: No History is Linear
- 4.2: The Foundational Era- Scientific Racism and the Du Boisian Challenge (Late 19th - Early 20th Century)
- 4.3: Social Darwinism and Scientific Racism
- 4.4: The Chicago School and Assimilation Theory
- 4.5: The Du Boisian Seminal Challenge
- 4.6: The Mid-Century Shift- Assimilation's Peak and its Critical Challenges (1940s - 1960s)
- 4.7: The Orthodoxy of Assimilation
- 4.8: The Emergence of Power-Conflict Theories
- 4.9: The Paradigm Shift- Structural Racism and the Ethnic Revival (1970s - 1980s)
- 4.10: The Theory of Racial Formation
- 4.11: Critical Race Theory (CRT)
- 4.12: Symbolic Ethnicity and the Primordialist-Instrumentalist Debate
- 4.13: Contemporary Developments- Intersectionality, Color-Blindness, and Global Racism (1990s - Present)
- 4.14: Intersectionality
- 4.15: Systemic Racism
- 4.16: The Study of Color-Blind Racism
- 4.17: Global and Comparative Perspectives
- 4.18: The Takeaway
- 4.19: References

This page titled [4: A Sociological History of Race and Ethnicity](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.1: No History is Linear

There is a tendency to think of history as a linear, progressive, and constantly advancing timeline of human potential. It is not. History is full of setbacks that taint the image of humankind. It loops backward to bring back thinking of the past that may not even be relevant to the present. It establishes hints of progress here and there, but at times, none here nor there, and perhaps nowhere all at once. In other words, history is messy if not simply chaotic.

The history of sociology is no exception. The sociological engagement with race and ethnicity is not a monolithic tradition—certainly not linear—but a contested and evolving state, profoundly shaped by its historical context. Its development can be charted through a chronological progression of paradigms, from early scientific racism to contemporary intersectional and systemic analyses.

This page titled [4.1: No History is Linear](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.2: The Foundational Era- Scientific Racism and the Du Boisian Challenge (Late 19th - Early 20th Century)

The dawn of sociology coincided with the peak of European imperialism and the consolidation of Jim Crow segregation in the United States. Early sociological thought was often complicit in legitimizing the prevailing racial order.

This page titled [4.2: The Foundational Era- Scientific Racism and the Du Boisian Challenge \(Late 19th - Early 20th Century\)](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.3: Social Darwinism and Scientific Racism

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the emerging field of sociology was heavily influenced by the ideas of thinkers like Herbert Spencer (1820 - 1903). Spencer applied Darwinian concepts to societies, promoting the idea that races were biologically distinct and existed on a hierarchy of evolution, with white Europeans at the apex. This ideology provided a “scientific” justification for colonialism, eugenics, and racial exclusion.

Herbert Spencer was also rather famous for coining the phrase “survival of the fittest” in applying Charles Darwin’s theories of natural selection to human societies, a concept known as “Social Darwinism.” Spencer argued that societies evolved from simple ‘primitive’ states to complex ‘civilized’ ones, much like biological organisms. This framework provided a seemingly scientific justification for the vast inequalities of the industrial age, suggesting that wealthy nations and powerful social classes were simply the ‘fittest’ and their success was a natural and inevitable result of evolutionary progress. This thinking made Spencer’s work very popular among industrialists and political elites.

Spencer’s theories, however, were deeply intertwined with what we now call scientific racism. He and his contemporaries incorrectly arranged human races on a hierarchical scale of evolution, with white Europeans at the top as the most ‘advanced’ and other races, particularly Black and Indigenous peoples, positioned as less evolved or ‘savage.’ Sociologists and anthropologists of the era used flawed methods like craniometry (the measurement of skulls) and ethnocentric comparisons of cultural practices to somehow ‘substantiate’ these racial hierarchies. This pseudo-science was used to argue that the technological and military dominance of European colonial powers was not a historical accident but evidence of their inherent biological and intellectual superiority.

The impact of this scientific racism was profound and devastating. It provided an academic veneer for racist policies, including segregation, anti-immigration laws, and most horrifically, the Eugenics Movement, which sought to ‘improve’ the human race by controlling reproduction. By framing social problems as issues of biological inferiority, this approach diverted attention away from the real causes of poverty and inequality, such as exploitation, lack of opportunity, and systemic injustice.

Fortunately, these ideas were eventually rejected within sociology as fundamentally flawed and ethically outrageous. Modern sociologists now understand that race is a social construct, not a biological determinant of ability or character, and they focus on how systems of power and prejudice—not innate traits—create and maintain social inequality.

This page titled [4.3: Social Darwinism and Scientific Racism](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.4: The Chicago School and Assimilation Theory

Amidst the bustling early 20th-century growth of Chicago, a unique group of sociologists at the University of Chicago—known as The Chicago School—turned their attention to the rapid urbanization and immigration reshaping American life. A key figure was Robert E. Park (1864 - 1944), a former journalist who brought a pragmatic desire to understand how modern cities function. Rather than seeing society as a rigid structure, Park and his colleagues viewed the city as a kind of social ecosystem, a living laboratory where different groups constantly interacted, competed, and cooperated. This perspective made them particularly interested in the experiences of new arrivals—both from Europe and from the American South—and how they adapted to life in the big city, leading Park to develop one of his most famous concepts: the race relations cycle.

Park proposed that when different ethnic and racial groups come into contact, they predictably move through a four-stage process called the race relations cycle consisting of the following four stages: (1) contact, (2) conflict, (3) accommodation, and finally (4) assimilation. The cycle begins with contact, often through migration or conquest, which triggers economic competition and conflict over resources and jobs. This tense period eventually gives way to accommodation, an unstable truce where a segregated social order (like Jim Crow laws) is established, and groups work out a *modus vivendi*, or a way of living together without outright violence. Park believed this was a temporary stage that would inevitably lead to the final phase: assimilation. Here, groups would gradually shed their distinct identities, intermarry, and fully absorb into the dominant culture, becoming indistinguishable from it—what was often called the “melting pot” ideal.

While groundbreaking for its time by suggesting that conflict was a temporary step rather than a permanent state, Park’s cycle was heavily criticized by later sociologists. The model’s biggest flaw is its assumption of inevitability; it predicts that assimilation is the universal and final outcome for all groups. However, history has shown that while this may have been the experience for many white ethnic immigrant groups, racialized minorities, particularly African Americans, have faced systemic barriers (like structural racism and residential segregation) that have prevented full assimilation, leading instead to lasting inequality. Despite its limitations, Park’s theory remains important because it launched the formal sociological study of race and immigration, moving away from biological explanations of difference and toward understanding these processes as fundamental parts of social interaction.

This page titled [4.4: The Chicago School and Assimilation Theory](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.5: The Du Boisian Seminal Challenge

As mentioned in the last chapter, in direct opposition to the prevailing theories, W.E.B. Du Bois conducted the first groundbreaking empirical sociological study of a Black community, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899). Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, Du Bois demonstrated that the social conditions of African Americans were the result of historical legacies, economic exclusion, and systemic racism—not innate inferiority associated with merely being Black.

In his later and seminal 1903 work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois rerouted the direction of sociological inquiry about race and ethnicity by identifying the single most important topic in American society, stating “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.” For Du Bois, the “color-line” was not just a phrase; it was the central, defining metaphor for the deep social, political, and economic divide that segregated Black and White America. This wasn’t merely about personal prejudice of any one individual, but about a tangible line that determined where one could live, work, and learn, and whether one could vote or even expect justice. He saw this line as the primary source of conflict and inequality in the modern world, a structural barrier that legally and culturally enforced a racial caste system long after slavery had ended. By naming it the “problem,” Du Bois brilliantly shifted the focus from Black people themselves being a “problem” to the man-made systems of racism as the issue that needed to be addressed.

Du Bois further explores the lived experience of being behind this color-line through his concept of the concept of the ‘Veil.’ To explain, imagine an invisible but utterly real curtain hanging between Black Americans and the rest of the world. From one side, the Veil creates a distorted view, allowing white society to see Black people only as stereotypes, not as full, complex human beings. From the other side, for a Black child growing up in a racist society, the Veil is what they must see through—a lens that taints their entire perception of the world, themselves, and their opportunities. It represents the systemic exclusion from the mainstream and the constant awareness of being labeled as ‘Other.’ The Veil separates, but it also creates a distinct ‘second sight,’ a unique perspective born from being both inside American society and shut out from it.

This dual existence leads directly to what is perhaps Du Bois’s most enduring idea: “double consciousness.” He describes it as “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (1903:38). It is the internal conflict of having two competing identities that never fully reconcile: one’s own sense of self and the diminished, negative identity reflected back by a racist society. A person must navigate being both American and Black, two warring ideals within one body. This isn’t just about feeling conflicted; it’s a sociological insight into the psychological toll of racism, where one is forced to see themselves from the outside, constantly managing how they are perceived. Yet, Du Bois also suggests this double vision can be a source of strength and critical insight, offering a deeper understanding of a society that others take for granted.

This page titled [4.5: The Du Boisian Seminal Challenge](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.6: The Mid-Century Shift- Assimilation's Peak and its Critical Challenges (1940s - 1960s)

The post-World War II era, shaped by the Holocaust's discrediting of biological racism and the rising Civil Rights Movement, forced a re-evaluation of sociological theories. Commissioned in 1938 by the Carnegie Corporation, Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944) was a monumental study that aimed to provide a comprehensive, objective analysis of race relations in the United States. Myrdal and his team of dozens of researchers, including many prominent Black scholars like Ralph Bunche and Kenneth Clark, spent years compiling data on every aspect of Black life, from economics and education to law, politics, and social customs, particularly in the segregated South. The project's scope was unprecedented, and its core argument was that racial inequality was not a minor issue but the nation's most pressing moral and social problem. Myrdal, an outsider, provided a fresh lens, framing "the Negro problem" not as an issue inherent to Black Americans, but as a white American-created problem rooted in a history of oppression and prejudice.

The central and most compelling concept of Myrdal's work is what he termed the "American Dilemma." This dilemma was the glaring contradiction between the nation's foundational creed—the "American Creed" of ideals like liberty, equality, justice, and fair opportunity for all—and the harsh, everyday reality of racial segregation, discrimination, and violence faced by Black citizens. Myrdal argued that this wasn't just a minor hypocrisy; it was a deep-seated psychological conflict within the conscience of White Americans. He believed that most Americans, at their core, did believe in these noble ideals and that the existence of systemic racism created a moral tension that, once exposed, would eventually force the nation to live up to its own stated principles. In this way, he saw the solution to racism lying within the value system of white America itself.

The impact of *An American Dilemma* was profound and directly shaped the course of American history. It provided the intellectual and moral foundation for the burgeoning civil rights movement, arming activists with an encyclopedic arsenal of data on the effects of segregation. Most famously, the Supreme Court cited Myrdal's work in its footnote 11 of the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which declared state-sponsored school segregation unconstitutional. While later critics, especially Black sociologists, argued that Myrdal placed too much faith in the goodwill of white Americans and downplayed the role of economic exploitation and Black agency in the fight for freedom, the book remains a landmark. It successfully pushed a national conversation by holding a mirror up to America, forcing it to confront the jarring gap between its high ideals and its unjust practices.

4.6: The Mid-Century Shift- Assimilation's Peak and its Critical Challenges (1940s - 1960s) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

4.7: The Orthodoxy of Assimilation

Milton Gordon's book *Assimilation in American Life* (1964) refined assimilation theory, parsing it into stages and dimensions (e.g., cultural, structural, identificational). The theory reached its apogee as the dominant paradigm, exemplified by the notion of a straight-line assimilation path for White ethnic immigrants.

Gordon's book was a groundbreaking work that moved beyond the simple "melting pot" idea to offer a much more nuanced and multi-layered theory of how immigrant groups become part of American society. Gordon argued that assimilation wasn't a single, monolithic process but a series of distinct stages that could happen at different speeds. Although he identified seven specific sub-processes, the most crucial distinction he made was between cultural assimilation (or acculturation) and structural assimilation. Cultural assimilation occurs when a minority group adopts the language, values, dress, and cultural practices of the dominant host society—essentially learning how to fit in publicly. Gordon noted that this type of assimilation often happens first and can be relatively quick, especially for White ethnic groups.

Gordon's real insight was that cultural assimilation does not automatically lead to full social integration. This is where structural assimilation comes in. This refers to the large-scale entrance of minority group members into the primary, informal social networks of the dominant society—meaning their clubs, cliques, neighborhoods, and, most importantly, their families through intermarriage. Gordon proposed a powerful and controversial thesis: once structural assimilation occurs, all other types of assimilation (like identification assimilation or attitude receptional assimilation) will follow naturally. In other words, once people form close, personal friendships and family ties across ethnic lines, other barriers like prejudice and discrimination tend to melt away.

Gordon's theory had major implications for understanding the American experience. It explained why some groups, particularly White European immigrants, seemed to assimilate more completely over generations—they eventually achieved both cultural and structural assimilation. Conversely, it helped explain the persistent inequality faced by People of Color, particularly African Americans, for whom harsh social and legal barriers (like segregation and systemic racism) prevented structural assimilation from occurring, even after cultural assimilation had taken place. By breaking assimilation down into stages, Gordon provided a sophisticated framework that acknowledged the complexity of American life, showing that fitting in culturally was one thing, but being truly welcomed into the inner circles of social power was another matter entirely.

This page titled [4.7: The Orthodoxy of Assimilation](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.8: The Emergence of Power-Conflict Theories

The social upheavals of the 1960s exposed the limitations of assimilationist models. Scholars began to argue that racism was intrinsically linked to the development and maintenance of capitalist class systems. Such models drew upon parallels between domestic racial oppression and international colonial systems as an explanation for the persistent subordination of Communities of Color.

While many of his contemporaries explored the social psychology of prejudice, the Trinidadian-American sociologist Oliver Cox, in works like *Caste, Class, and Race* (1948), presented a radically different argument: that modern racism is not a universal human tendency or a simple product of ignorance, but a deliberate ideology created to justify and maintain the capitalist economic system. Cox fiercely challenged the idea that racial antagonism was similar to ancient caste systems in India, arguing instead that it was a uniquely modern tool of exploitation. He contended that racism emerged alongside European colonialism and capitalism because it provided a convenient and powerful justification for the brutal exploitation of non-white labor. By classifying certain groups as inherently inferior, the capitalist class could rationalize paying them lower wages, denying them rights, and treating them as expendable tools for production, all while maximizing profit.

Cox argued that racism was intrinsically functional for capitalism. It created a divided working class, preventing poor whites and enslaved or low-wage Black laborers from recognizing their shared economic interests and uniting against the capitalist elite. This strategy, often called ‘divide and conquer,’ ensured a stable, cheap labor supply and weakened the potential for worker solidarity and uprising. For example, the ideology of white supremacy offered even the poorest White laborers a privilege that W.E.B Du Bois (1935) referred to as a “public and psychological wage”—a sense of social status and superiority based on their skin color—which made them more likely to identify with the wealthy White capitalist class above them than with the Black workers beside them. In this way, racism wasn’t just an attitude; it was a central pillar supporting the entire economic structure, deliberately fostered by the ruling class to protect their power and wealth.

Cox’s perspective was a direct challenge to the mainstream sociological thought of his time, which often viewed racism as an irrational prejudice or a cultural holdover. By rooting racism in the material needs of capitalism, he provided a powerful Conflict theory explanation that highlighted power and economics over individual psychology. His work was a precursor to later Marxist and critical race theories, and it forces us to ask a provocative question: does ending racism require merely changing individual hearts and minds, or does it demand a fundamental restructuring of the economic system that has historically benefited from racial hierarchy? For Cox, the answer was clear: racism and capitalism were two sides of the same coin, and you could not truly dismantle one without confronting the other.

This page titled [4.8: The Emergence of Power-Conflict Theories](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.9: The Paradigm Shift- Structural Racism and the Ethnic Revival (1970s - 1980s)

The decade or so between the 1970s and 1980s witnessed a decisive rejection of assimilationist orthodoxy and the rise of theories focused on power, structure, and identity.

4.9: The Paradigm Shift- Structural Racism and the Ethnic Revival (1970s - 1980s) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

4.10: The Theory of Racial Formation

Michael Omi and Howard Winant initiated new work in the 1980s that would have the social sciences rethinking just about everything. They argued that race is not a fixed biological or cultural category but an ‘unstable’ and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle” (Omi and Winant 1986:66). This framework focused on the processes by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed.

In their 1986 book, *Racial Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant presented a powerful new framework for understanding race, moving beyond older ideas that saw it as either a biological essence or a simple illusion. They argued that race is not a thing a person is, but rather an unstable and “decentered” complex of social meanings that are constantly being created, transformed, and destroyed through political struggle. This means that what race means—which groups are considered races, how they are categorized, and the attributes assigned to them—has changed dramatically throughout history. For example, the ‘Irish race’ was once considered a separate and inferior biological group in the U.S., but today, Irishness is an ethnicity within the White racial category. This shift wasn’t natural; it was the result of social and political conflict, demonstrating that race is a product of history and power, not biology.

Omi and Winant coined the term racial projects to describe the mechanism of this ongoing change. A racial project is any attempt to define, organize, or distribute resources along racial lines. It can be as vast as a government policy like slavery or segregation, as concrete as a Hollywood stereotype, or as personal as an individual’s act of discrimination or resistance. Crucially, racial projects work by simultaneously creating racial meanings (representations) and organizing social structures (institutions). For instance, the “War on Drugs” was a racial project that created a meaning linking Blackness with criminality, while its policies—like harsher sentencing for crack cocaine—structured a reality of mass incarceration that disproportionately impacted Black communities.

The overarching process by which these countless racial projects clash and combine over time is what Omi and Winant call racial formation. They see race not as a fixed element of the social structure but as a master category of American society that is perpetually being “formed” through political and cultural struggle. From the Civil Rights Movement to debates over immigration policy and affirmative action, society is engaged in a continuous battle over the definition and significance of race. This theory empowers us to see that because race is socially constructed through struggle, it is also something that can be deconstructed and challenged. There is nothing inevitable about racial hierarchies; they are the temporary outcomes of ongoing conflicts, meaning they can be changed through new movements, new ideas, and new racial projects that fight for a more just and equal society.

This page titled [4.10: The Theory of Racial Formation](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.11: Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Emerging from legal scholarship, CRT began to influence sociology by the late 1980s. Scholars like Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado argued that racism is not an aberration but a normal, embedded feature of society that advances the interests of both white elites and working-class White communities. CRT prioritized storytelling and counter-narratives to challenge dominant racial ideologies.

Emerging from the legal academy in the 1970s and 80s, Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado directly challenged the slow pace of racial reform following the Civil Rights Movement. They argued that traditional approaches to civil rights law, which focused on incremental progress and colorblind policies, were insufficient to dismantle deep-seated racial hierarchies. Instead, CRT insisted that racism is not a series of isolated, individual acts of prejudice but is ordinary and embedded within the very fabric of American society—its legal systems, institutions, and everyday practices. This means racism is not an aberration; it is the default, everyday experience for people of color, making it difficult to address because it seems normal and natural to those who benefit from it. For thinkers like Bell, this explained why hard-won legal victories could be easily undermined or why progress was often followed by periods of intense backlash.

Two of the most influential and accessible concepts from these foundational thinkers are Derrick Bell's theory of interest convergence and the CRT method of storytelling/counter storytelling. Bell's interest convergence principle provocatively argues that racial progress for Black people in the U.S. only occurs when their interests converge with the self-interests of powerful White elites. For example, he analyzed the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision not simply as a moral victory, but as a move that served America's Cold War interests by improving its international image against Soviet propaganda about U.S. racism. Meanwhile, Richard Delgado advocated for the use of "counterstories"—narratives, parables, and personal experiences from marginalized communities—as a crucial tool to challenge the dominant, majoritarian narratives about race that are embedded in law and culture. These stories make the lived reality of racism visible in a way that dry statistics and legal precedents often cannot.

Ultimately, the work of Bell, Delgado, and other early CRT scholars is characterized by a commitment to racial realism and a focus on material outcomes rather than just intentions. Derrick Bell's racial realism pushed people to be pragmatic and acknowledge that racism is a permanent, enduring feature of American society. This wasn't a call for despair, but a demand for a more clear-eyed and relentless struggle for justice that didn't rely on naive hopes of some final "solution." Their work shifts the focus away from what people intend in their hearts to the actual, material consequences of laws and policies. A policy isn't neutral, they argue, if it consistently produces racially unequal outcomes—even if it's written in colorblind language. This foundational branch of CRT provides a powerful lens for undergraduates to critically analyze why racial inequality persists and to question simplistic narratives of uninterrupted progress.

This page titled [4.11: Critical Race Theory \(CRT\)](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.12: Symbolic Ethnicity and the Primordialist-Instrumentalist Debate

In response to the White ethnic revival movement, sociologist Herbert Gans coined the term “symbolic ethnicity” to describe the costless, voluntary ethnic identity available to White Americans. This period also featured debates over the nature of ethnic identity: was it deeply primordial and ancient, or was it a strategic, instrumental tool mobilized for political and economic gain?

In the 1970s, Gans observed a fascinating shift in how later-generation White ethnic Americans, like Italian-Americans or Irish-Americans, were connecting to their heritage. He coined the term ‘symbolic ethnicity’ to describe a new, watered-down way of expressing ethnic identity that was becoming prevalent. Unlike the intense, all-encompassing ethnicity of immigrants, which was tied to survival, neighborhood enclaves, and overcoming discrimination, this new form was largely voluntary and episodic. Gans argued that for these Americans, their ethnic identity had ceased to be a major factor in their daily lives—it didn’t dictate where they lived, who they married, or their economic opportunities. Instead, it became a personal choice, a symbolic nod to their ancestry that could be turned on or off with little social cost.

This symbolic ethnicity is expressed through nostalgic and often enjoyable practices that celebrate a romanticized past. It involves consuming ethnic foods on holidays, wearing green on St. Patrick’s Day, celebrating a festival, or displaying a family crest. These acts are “symbolic” because they don’t require deep cultural knowledge, language fluency, or sustained commitment; they are individual expressions of feeling connected to a heritage without it imposing any real constraints on one’s life. The key point Gans made is that this type of identity is fundamentally costless. It allows individuals to feel special, unique, and connected to a community or history, but it doesn’t come with the burdens of discrimination, exclusion, or systemic disadvantage that are often attached to the ethnic identities of non-White or newer immigrant groups.

Gans’s concept helps explain a central paradox of American identity: why ethnicity persists even as assimilation occurs. It doesn’t disappear but transforms into a kind of leisure-time activity, a source of pride without pain. However, this theory also highlights a critical inequality. The option to have a ‘costless,’ symbolic ethnicity is a privilege largely available to White Europeans whose ancestors faced discrimination that has since faded. For racialized People of Color, ethnicity and race are often not a choice but an imposed identity that continues to shape their life chances, leading to experiences with profiling, inequality, and prejudice. Therefore, symbolic ethnicity reminds us that how we experience our heritage is not just a personal choice but is profoundly shaped by our position in the broader racial and social hierarchy.

This page titled [4.12: Symbolic Ethnicity and the Primordialist-Instrumentalist Debate](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.13: Contemporary Developments- Intersectionality, Color-Blindness, and Global Racism (1990s - Present)

Contemporary sociological thought has become increasingly complex, reflexive, and global in its scope. No longer is sociology focused solely on the socio-historical emergence of race, ethnicity, ethnicity in the American context, but instead it has now moved toward a more broad and complex analyses of the world around it—making connections to everything and anything that impacted notions of race and ethnicity.

This page titled [4.13: Contemporary Developments- Intersectionality, Color-Blindness, and Global Racism \(1990s - Present\)](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.14: Intersectionality

Coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw and advanced by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, intersectionality may be seen as a framework for arguments about how systems of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, classism) are interconnected and cannot be examined in isolation. An individual's experiences and identity are shaped by the intersection of these multiple axes of power.

Imagine a single-issue lens on inequality: it can focus on race or gender or class. But what happens to people whose lives exist at the crossroads of these identities? This is the central question addressed by intersectionality—a concept coined by Crenshaw in the late 1980s. Crenshaw used a powerful metaphor to illustrate her point: think of discrimination as traffic flowing through an intersection. If a Black woman is hit by a car, which driver is at fault? Is it the one driving down 'racism street' or the one driving down 'sexism street'? Her point was that the law, like much of social theory at the time, often only recognized claims based on a single axis of identity. A Black woman's unique experience of being both Black and a woman was rendered invisible; her injury couldn't be understood by looking at racial discrimination alone or gendered discrimination alone. She would, in effect, be standing in the intersection where the two forms of traffic collided.

While Crenshaw named the legal problem, Collins provided a broader sociological framework for understanding how these intersecting power relations work. Collins introduced the concept of a 'matrix of domination,' which describes how systems of power—like racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism—are interconnected. Instead of seeing these systems as separate layers of oppression, she argued they interlock to create a unique social position for each individual. Collins also emphasized the importance of standpoint theory, which suggests that those who are marginalized within these intersecting systems have a unique, and often more critical understanding of how power operates. The perspectives and knowledge gained from living at these intersections are not just valid; they are crucial for developing a more complete picture of social reality.

Today, intersectionality is a foundational concept across the social sciences, humanities, and social justice movements. It pushes us to move beyond a simple 'add and stir' approach to identity (e.g., race + gender + class = total oppression) and instead allows one to analyze how these categories mutually shape each other to create unique experiences of both privilege and disadvantage. For example, the experience of a wealthy Black man is different from that of a poor Black woman, just as the experience of a white working-class woman is different from that of an Asian transgender immigrant. Intersectionality is not about ranking oppressions but about fostering a more nuanced and accurate analysis of power. It teaches us that we cannot fully understand any social issue, from healthcare access to workplace dynamics, without considering the complex interplay of multiple identities and the systems that structure them.

This page titled [4.14: Intersectionality](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.15: Systemic Racism

Joe Feagin (introduced in the last chapter) and colleagues developed a comprehensive theory of “systemic racism” (Feagin 2006), tracing how a centuries-old framework of racial oppression is perpetuated through everyday practices, ideologies, and institutions—from housing and education to law enforcement and the economy.

In his 2006 book *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression*, Feagin argues that racism in the United States is not merely a matter of individual prejudice or occasional discrimination. Instead, he presents a powerful framework showing that racism is systemic—deeply embedded in the very foundations of our society’s major institutions, laws, policies, and culture. Feagin traces this system back to the colonial era, highlighting how the enslavement of Africans was not an unfortunate aberration but a central, profitable engine of the American economy. This foundation, he argues, established a durable racial hierarchy—a centuries-old structure designed to maintain White privilege and power—that was later reinforced through Jim Crow segregation and continues today in more subtle but equally powerful forms. For Feagin, racism is like the operating system of a computer; it’s the underlying code that shapes how all the programs (like housing, education, or criminal justice) function, often without any single individual needing to be overtly racist.

To understand how this system perpetuates itself, Feagin uses the concept of discriminatory practices. These are the routine, often standardized actions within institutions that reproduce racial inequality, whether intentional or not. Examples include banks denying mortgages for homes in predominantly Black neighborhoods (a practice known as redlining), schools funding themselves through local property taxes (which ensures wealthier, Whiter districts have better resources), or corporations using algorithms that inadvertently discriminate based on zip code. The key point is that these outcomes aren’t random; they are predictable results of a system built on a racialized foundation. This means that significant racial disparities in wealth, health, and incarceration can persist even if the individuals within these institutions hold no personal racist animus. The system is structured to generate unequal outcomes.

Feagin’s theory is crucial because it shifts the focus from blaming individuals to analyzing structures. It explains why racial inequality is so stubbornly persistent: it’s not about ‘a few bad apples’ but about the historical and contemporary design of the ‘orchard’ itself. This perspective challenges the popular idea of a ‘colorblind society’ by showing that neutrality is impossible when the system itself was built on racialized inequality. By identifying racism as systemic, Feagin provides a lens for understanding that achieving genuine racial justice requires more than just changing hearts and minds; it demands a fundamental restructuring of our core institutions to dismantle the racial hierarchy that has defined America since its beginning.

This page titled [4.15: Systemic Racism](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.16: The Study of Color-Blind Racism

With the decline of overt Jim Crow racism, sociologists like Eduardo Bonilla-Silva analyzed the new, more insidious ideology of “color-blind racism,” which uses abstract liberalism, naturalization, and cultural (rather than biological) arguments to explain and justify racial inequality without appearing racist. In his influential 2003 book *Racism without Racists*, Bonilla-Silva investigates a puzzling modern paradox: how can significant racial inequality persist in an era when most people claim not to be racist? His answer is the concept of color-blind racism. Unlike the overt, Jim Crow-era racism based on biological superiority, color-blind racism is a more subtle and flexible ideology that maintains racial hierarchies by insisting that race shouldn’t matter. People who subscribe to this framework claim not to ‘see color,’ arguing that society is now fair and meritocratic. However, Bonilla-Silva argues that this ideology actually serves ‘to explain away’ racial inequalities as the result of non-racial causes—like Black culture being ‘dysfunctional’ or individuals ‘not working hard enough’—thereby blaming BIPOC for their own marginalization while absolving the broader social system of any responsibility.

Bonilla-Silva identifies four central frames, or patterns of thinking, that structure color-blind rhetoric. The first frame, “Abstract Liberalism,” involves using idealized concepts like ‘choice’ or ‘equal opportunity’ to oppose concrete measures like affirmative action, without acknowledging how past and present discrimination makes a truly level playing field impossible. The second, “Naturalization,” is the tendency to explain away racial phenomena, like neighborhood segregation, as ‘natural’ (i.e., ‘people just prefer to be with their own kind’). The third frame, “Cultural Racism” shifts explanations for inequality from biology to culture, stereotyping BIPOC communities as lazy or pathological. Finally, in the fourth frame, “Minimization of Racism” is the frame that dismisses the ongoing significance of discrimination, claiming that racism is largely a thing of the past and that people who complain about it are just playing the “race card.” Together, these frames provide a toolkit for explaining racial inequality in a way that sounds reasonable but effectively preserves the status quo.

The power of color-blind racism, according to Bonilla-Silva, is that it allows well-intentioned people to uphold a racially unequal system without feeling like they are bigots. It’s a “racism without racists.” This makes it particularly insidious and difficult to challenge, as any discussion of race or racial remedies can be framed as itself being racist for “bringing race into it.” This ideology prevents an honest accounting of how historical injustices like slavery and segregation have created enduring advantages for whites and disadvantages for people of color. By focusing on individual attitudes and ignoring systemic structures, color-blind racism acts as a powerful defensive barrier against meaningful racial reform, ensuring that inequality persists under the guise of fairness and neutrality.

This page titled [4.16: The Study of Color-Blind Racism](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.17: Global and Comparative Perspectives

As introduced in the last chapter, scholars like Howard Winant (2001) have expanded the analysis beyond the nation-state, examining the “global racial formation” and comparing racial dynamics across different societies (e.g., the United States, Brazil, South Africa) to build more robust theoretical models.

In his 2003 book *The World Is a Ghetto*, Winant encourages audiences to look beyond the borders of the United States to understand race in the 21st century. He argues that we are living through an era of profound global racial formations, where race is being redefined on a worldwide scale. This process isn’t about every country simply copying the American model of race relations. Instead, Winant suggests that while the legacy of European colonialism created a ‘global racial hierarchy’ with Whiteness at the top, the end of formal colonialism and the rise of globalization have thrown this system into crisis and transformation. New patterns of migration, the global reach of media, and international human rights movements mean that racial identities, conflicts, and politics are now interconnected in a way they never were before, creating a complex and often contradictory global landscape.

Winant identifies several key dynamics driving these global transformations. One is the rise of neoracism or differentialist racism in many parts of the world. Unlike old-fashioned biological racism, this new form doesn’t claim one group is biologically inferior to another. Instead, it argues that cultural differences are so profound and insurmountable that different racial and ethnic groups cannot peacefully coexist within the same society. This can be seen in anti-immigrant politics in Europe that frame Muslim immigrants as culturally incompatible, or in ethnic nationalisms that promote a pure national identity. At the very same time, however, Winant notes the powerful growth of a global anti-racist opposition, from the Black Lives Matter movement inspiring protests worldwide to indigenous rights movements and international NGOs fighting discrimination. This creates a constant global struggle between forces reinforcing racial boundaries and forces challenging them.

Ultimately, Winant’s framework helps us make sense of our interconnected world. It explains why a police killing in Minnesota can trigger protests in London and Paris, or why debates about immigration in Germany might echo political rhetoric in the United States. He suggests that there is no single, unified “global racism,” but rather a series of interconnected racial projects playing out on a world stage. For students, this means that to fully understand race today, one can’t just study one country in isolation. Instead, one must see how national racial dramas are shaped by international flows of people, ideas, and capital. Winant leaves us with a crucial insight: the future of race relations will not be decided by any single nation, but through this ongoing, turbulent, and global political struggle.

This page titled [4.17: Global and Comparative Perspectives](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.18: The Takeaway

The history of sociological thought on race is a history of the discipline grappling with its own biases and blind spots. It is a trajectory from justifying hierarchy to explaining it, from focusing on the “other” to analyzing the systems of power that create the very category of otherness. The field has moved from biological determinism through cultural assimilation to a contemporary understanding of race and ethnicity as social constructions upheld by deeply embedded structural, systemic, and intersecting forces of power and inequality.

This page titled [4.18: The Takeaway](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

4.19: References

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2003. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman.

Du Bois, W. E. B. 1899. *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Du Bois, W. E. B. 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chicago, IL: A. C. McClurg & Co.

Du Bois, W.E.B. 1998 [1935]. *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Feagin, Joe R. 2006. *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Gans, Herbert J. 1979. "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2(1):1–20.

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. 1986. *Racial Formation in the United States*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Park, Robert E. 1950. *Race and Culture*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.

Winant, Howard. 2001. *The World Is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy since World War II*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

This page titled [4.19: References](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Science and Knowledge

- 5.1: The Racialization of Scientific Progress
- 5.2: Science, Race, and Racism- A Sociological Examination
- 5.3: The Historical Construction of Race in Science
- 5.4: Race as a Social Construct
- 5.5: Scientific Racism in the Modern Era
- 5.6: The Actual Science of Race- Skin Pigmentation and Trichromatic Photoreception
- 5.7: The Biochemical and Evolutionary Foundations of Skin Color
- 5.8: The Physiology of Color Vision- Constructing Visual Reality
- 5.9: The Social Alchemy- From Biological Continuum to Social Hierarchy
- 5.10: The Takeaway
- 5.11: References

This page titled [5: Science and Knowledge](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

5.1: The Racialization of Scientific Progress

The word science comes from the Latin term *scientia*—a reference to the creation and acquisition of knowledge. Science, as a social institution within sociology is thus a systematic approach to exploring social phenomena and interpreting it through research. Science is often thought of as an institution that we look to for safe and reliable information, and although this is often the case, we are not always aware of what happens behind the scenes *where* and *when* science is *becoming* science. Indeed, at times, how we arrive at this scientific information is not always the most humane and just approach to producing the science we’ve come to understand as such.

In the mid-to-latter half of the nineteenth century, an American physician named James Marion Sims (1813-1883) administered perhaps some of the most inhumane procedures pursuant to treating the female vaginal condition of vesicovaginal fistula—an abnormal opening between the vagina and the bladder. Although his primary goal was to treat this condition effectively, how he went about it violated so many ethical standards that his work would be as unacceptable as it was appalling.

Indifferent to the plight of the BIPOC community in the era of slavery, Sims believed that the enslaved were part of an inferior race and could be used as expendable test subjects in his experiments. With this superiority complex in mind, Sims took in several enslaved women upon whom he would administer various experimental procedures and given the time period wherein slavery was still very much an accepted institution, these women were not given the option of opting out. Instead, these women were effectively just another part of his laboratory instruments, and he treated them as he wished—treatment that came with total impunity. Sims poked and prodded these women, doing so without administering any anesthesia. Suffering from incredible pain, Sims remained unsympathetic to their agony, as he had full credence in the racist belief that Black people had a higher tolerance for pain. Although these women were a major part of these procedures, suffering great indignity and violence, little was ever publicly known of their story until nearly a century later.

Additionally, according to journalist Brynn Holland, Sims found other ways to advance the progress of science, all while maintaining his racist beliefs. As she noted,

Sims also believed that African Americans were less intelligent than white people, and thought it was because their skull grew too quickly around their brain. He would operate on African American children using a shoemaker’s tool to pry their bones apart and loosen their skulls. (Holland 2025)

Examples such as these and many others reveal a troubling pattern of how Science and the pursuit of medical progress can actually be built upon the most vulnerable among us—in this instance Black women and children during a period where civil rights only applied to those considered White. It is important to note that race is very much a part of such disparities, as well a further note that Science has, in many cases, advanced due to the exploitation, violence, and other unethical treatment of subjects of color.

Up until the first quarter of the twenty-first century, the story of Sims was effectively ‘swept under the rug,’ as most people lauded Sims as a pioneer in the field of Gynecology, even dubbing him “The Father of Modern Gynecology.” In fact, his introduction, use, and development of the speculum—the instrument used to dilate the vaginal cavity—was seen early on as one of the greatest achievements in the field. Of this fame, several statues of Sims were erected in his honor, one of which stood on a plinth in New York’s Central Park until 2018 when New York City’s Public Design Commission voted to have it removed, after so many of these tragic stories or abuse, violence, and racism were revealed.

Today, much more is known about at least three female subjects that Sims experimented on: Anarcha, Lucy, and Betsey—all women working on different plantations in Montgomery, Alabama, prior to Sims taking custody of them for experiments. In paying some tribute to these women for what they endured, artist and activist Michelle Browder erected a monument in their honor titled “The Mothers of Gynecology Monument” near the former office of Sims in Montgomery.

In the end, the impact on BIPOC by instances like this often leave individuals of color leery of the scientific community and the research it conducts—a telling example of how social institutions and human interactions intersect at sociological realities.

This page titled [5.1: The Racialization of Scientific Progress](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

5.2: Science, Race, and Racism- A Sociological Examination

The intersection of science, ethnicity, race, and racism has been a contentious and deeply influential domain in sociological research. Historically, scientific discourses have been weaponized to justify racial hierarchies, biological determinism, and systemic oppression (Smedley and Smedley 2012). While modern genetics and social sciences have largely debunked the notion of race as a biological reality, racial categories persist as social constructs with profound material consequences (Morning 2011). This chapter explores the historical role of science in shaping racial ideologies, the shift toward understanding race as a social construct, and the enduring manifestations of scientific racism in contemporary social institutions.

This page titled [5.2: Science, Race, and Racism- A Sociological Examination](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

5.3: The Historical Construction of Race in Science

Race, as a scientific concept, emerged during the period of Enlightenment and was heavily influenced by colonial expansion and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Early taxonomists such as Carl Linnaeus (1707 - 1778) and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752 - 1840) classified humans into hierarchical racial groups, often situating Europeans in positions of superiority (Gould 1996). These classifications were not neutral but served to legitimize European dominance and the subjugation of non-White populations (Fredrickson 2002).

The nineteenth century saw the rise of ‘scientific racism,’ where pseudoscientific theories like Phrenology and Craniometry purported to prove the intellectual and moral inferiority of Black, Indigenous, and most any other peoples that were not European (Graves 2001). These ideas were institutionalized in academia and policy formation, influencing broad and discredited beliefs and practices about perfecting the human species known as the Eugenics movement in the United States and Europe (Black 2003). The legacy of these theories persists in modern racial disparities among various social institutions including healthcare, criminal justice, and education (Roberts 2011).

These ideas, however, were not without their critics. Stephen Jay Gould’s *The Mismeasure of Man* (1996) stands as a seminal critique of the historical attempts to quantify human intelligence and establish a biological determinist hierarchy of human worth. In his book, Gould meticulously deconstructs the methodologies of craniometry and psychological testing, arguing that these practices were not objective science but rather deeply embedded in the prevailing social and racial prejudices of their times. His central thesis exposes the fallacy of reification—the error of converting abstract concepts like intelligence into single, measurable entities—and highlights the pervasive influence of a priori conclusions shaping scientific inquiry to justify social inequality.

Although Gould was a paleontologist, from a sociological perspective, his work is a foundational text in the sociology of scientific knowledge, demonstrating how science operates as a social institution capable of reinforcing and legitimizing stratification. By tracing the lineage of biological determinism from Samuel George Morton’s skull measurements to Cyril Burt’s twin studies on heritability of IQ, Gould illustrates how scientific authority can be marshaled to naturalize the status quo. Gould’s research serves as a powerful reminder that the production of scientific “facts” is never entirely separate from the ideological context in which it occurs, making it an enduring resource for scholars examining the intersection of race, class, gender, and scientific authority.

This page titled [5.3: The Historical Construction of Race in Science](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

5.4: Race as a Social Construct

Contemporary sociology rejects biological definitions of race, emphasizing instead its socially constructed nature. As mentioned in previous chapters, sociologists such as Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2015) argue that race is produced and reinforced through historical, political, and cultural processes. Genetic research has further demonstrated that there is more variation within so-called racial groups than between them, undermining the biological basis of race (Yudell et al. 2016).

Despite this, racial categories remain salient due to their institutionalization in laws, censuses, and medical practices (Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch 2012). For example, the U.S. Census continues to classify individuals by race, reinforcing the perception of race as a fixed identity (Nobles 2000). This institutionalization sustains racialized inequalities, even as science discredits race as a biological fact.

This page titled [5.4: Race as a Social Construct](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

5.5: Scientific Racism in the Modern Era

While overt biological racism has declined, subtler forms persist in scientific and medical research. Racial essentialism—the assumption that racial groups have inherent differences—shapes disparities in medical treatment, such as the under-prescription of pain medication to Black patients. Hoffman et al. (2016) provide a critical empirical investigation into how racial bias, rooted in historically constructed ideologies, manifests within a contemporary medical context to produce stark health disparities. This research documents how false beliefs about biological differences between Black and White people (e.g., Black people have thicker skin or less sensitive nerve endings) are not merely historical artifacts but are held by a substantial portion of laypeople and a sample of White medical students and residents. These false beliefs, the study finds, are directly correlated with racial bias in pain perception; individuals who endorsed more of these inaccurate biological concepts were also more likely to rate a Black patient's pain as lower than that of a White patient exhibiting identical injuries.

This research makes a significant sociological contribution by linking implicit bias and cultural mythologies to tangible outcomes in a core social institution. The study demonstrates that racial inequality is not only perpetuated through overt discrimination but also through the subconscious internalization of false, yet persistent, beliefs that shape professional judgment. By quantifying this process in the high-stakes realm of pain assessment and treatment recommendations, Hoffman and colleagues reveal a fundamental mechanism through which racialized social systems are sustained, even in the absence of malicious intent, ultimately leading to the unequal distribution of a critical resource: adequate medical care.

Similarly, forensic anthropology's use of racial classifications in identifying skeletal remains perpetuates the myth of biological race. Norman Sauer (1992) addressed the apparent paradox between the social scientific consensus that race is not a valid biological category and the practical ability of forensic anthropologists to assign skeletal remains to socially recognized racial groups. He argues that this proficiency does not validate biological race concepts but instead demonstrates a correlation between human skeletal morphology and socially constructed racial classifications. Forensic anthropologists are effective precisely because they are matching skeletal traits to population-level patterns that have been shaped by ancestry, geography, and historical gene flow, and which have been socially labeled as “racial” groups. Sauer concludes that the “races” forensic anthropologists identify are socially designated geographic populations, not discrete biological taxa—the hierarchical groupings that define life on earth—thereby reconciling the field's methodological practice with the prevailing understanding of race as a social construct.

Advancements in genetics have also reintroduced debates about race and science. While some researchers argue for using racial categories in genetic studies to address health disparities (Burchard et al. 2003), others warn that this risks reifying race—or making race a real a biological reality (Braun 2006). That is, to utilize racial categories can actually add to the legitimacy of difference, wherein anyone naïve to the complexities of race may, by its prevalence, assume it is a real biological fact. The commercialization of DNA ancestry testing further complicates this issue by marketing race as a discoverable genetic trait (Bolnick et al. 2007). Although this testing appears to be about tracing one's family lineage and history, it has the latent consequence of giving people some sort of validation in establishing their difference, and by extension making suggestions about superiority or inferiority tied to race.

This page titled [5.5: Scientific Racism in the Modern Era](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

5.6: The Actual Science of Race- Skin Pigmentation and Trichromatic Photoreception

The color of human skin is one of the most visible and socially charged physical characteristics. While often reduced to simplistic racial categories, the formation of skin color is a masterclass in evolutionary biology and genetic complexity. Simultaneously, the human capacity to perceive this color—and attach social meaning to it—is a function of a sophisticated neurological system. This science of skin pigmentation and the physiology of color vision together provide an essential framework for understanding the social construction of race. The biological reality—a spectrum of adaptive traits shaped by ultraviolet (UV) radiation—stands in stark contrast to the rigid social hierarchies and inequalities built upon perceived color differences. By examining the biochemical pathways of melanin, the evolutionary pressures shaping global pigmentation, and the mechanics of human vision, we can critically deconstruct how a continuous biological trait becomes a discrete social marker with profound real-world consequences.

This page titled [5.6: The Actual Science of Race- Skin Pigmentation and Trichromatic Photoreception](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

5.7: The Biochemical and Evolutionary Foundations of Skin Color

At its core, human skin color is determined by melanin, a natural pigment produced by specialized cells called melanocytes located in the epidermis. The synthesis of melanin, or melanogenesis, begins with the amino acid tyrosine. The key enzyme tyrosinase converts tyrosine to dopaquinone, after which the pathway diverges to produce two main types of melanin: (1) eumelanin: brown-to-black pigment that is highly effective at absorbing and dissipating harmful UV radiation, providing photoprotection; and (2), pheomelanin: a red-to-yellow pigment that is less protective and may even generate free radicals upon UV exposure.

The relative amount and combination of these pigments, along with the size, number, and distribution of the melanosome packages that carry them to skin cells, create the vast diversity of human skin tones. It is a critical adaptation: near the equator, where UV radiation is most intense, natural selection strongly favored populations with darker, eumelanin-rich skin to protect against DNA damage. At higher latitudes with lower UV levels, selection pressure favored lighter skin, which allows sufficient UVB penetration for the essential synthesis of vitamin D.

Recent genomic research underscores that pigmentation genetics are far from simple, especially within highly diverse populations. A landmark study of KhoeSan populations in southern Africa revealed that near the equator, skin color is influenced by a vast, complex array of genes—a “stabilizing selection” that maintains variation. This finding challenges the older narrative that a handful of genes control pigmentation and highlights how underrepresented populations in genetics research have obscured a fuller understanding of human diversity.

This page titled [5.7: The Biochemical and Evolutionary Foundations of Skin Color](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

5.8: The Physiology of Color Vision- Constructing Visual Reality

To understand how skin color is perceived, we must examine the human visual system. Color vision begins when light enters the eye and is focused onto the retina, which contains photoreceptor cells: rods for low-light vision and cones for color. Humans are typically trichromatic, possessing three types of cone cells sensitive to short (S), medium (M), and long (L) wavelengths of light, light that loosely corresponds to blue, green, and red.

The process of color perception is not a simple translation of wavelength to color. In this trichromatic process, color is derived from comparing the relative stimulation levels of the S, M, and L cones. These cone photoreceptors react differently to different types of wavelengths: S cones will react to the darkest colors (blue-based), M cones will react to somewhat darker colors (green-based), and L cones will react to the lightest colors (red-based). Color then, is the perception of light when light from any given object enters the view of our eyes. Upon entrance, the light triggers a reaction from our cones that is then transmitted via the optic nerve to the visual cortex in the brain, forming the sensation of color. This neurological process is highly interpretive and subject to context, lighting, and cognitive biases. The brain does not simply record wavelength data; it constructs a stable perceptual reality from it. This constructed nature of visual perception is the biological precursor to the social construction of racial categories based on skin tone.

This page titled [5.8: The Physiology of Color Vision- Constructing Visual Reality](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

5.9: The Social Alchemy- From Biological Continuum to Social Hierarchy

The seamless biological continuum of skin pigmentation and the constructed nature of visual perception collide in the social sphere to produce “race” and its attendant phenomenon, colorism. Colorism is defined as prejudicial or preferential treatment of individuals belonging to the same racial or ethnic group based solely on skin color.

Sociological research demonstrates that skin tone operates as a potent stratifying force with measurable life outcomes. This is distinct from racism (between-group bias) and functions as a within-group hierarchy. Studies consistently show that among African Americans, darker skin tone is correlated with significant socioeconomic and health disadvantages, including lower income and educational attainment; greater exposure to discrimination and unfair treatment; harsher sentencing in the criminal justice system; and increased psychological distress.

A 2022 study of older African Americans found that the association between everyday discrimination and serious psychological distress was significantly stronger for darker-skinned individuals (Cunningham, et al. 2022). This points to a “double jeopardy,” where the stressors of racial discrimination are compounded by the within-group biases of colorism. Furthermore, research on young African American women indicates that frequent experiences of racism can distort self-perception, leading individuals to perceive their own skin tone as darker than it is objectively measured (Stamps, et al. 2021). This internalization of bias illustrates the profound psychological impact of colorism.

The social preference for lighter skin, a global legacy of colonialism and white supremacy, manifests in multi-billion-dollar skin-lightening industries and pervasive media biases. This creates a cruel paradox: the very eumelanin that evolved as a protective advantage in high-sun environments is often socially devalued, while the phenotypic results of adaptation to low-UV environments are falsely elevated as a social ideal.

The journey from tyrosine to tan, and from photon to perception, reveals that skin color is a magnificent example of human adaptation to environment, governed by polygenic complexity and devoid of any inherent social meaning. The human eye and brain, while remarkable in their ability to discern color, engage in a constructive process that can be readily shaped by social learning to see not just hue, but hierarchy.

The scientific evidence dismantles any rationale for using skin color as a proxy for value, intelligence, or capability. The social reality of colorism, however, shows how a biological trait is weaponized to create and maintain inequality. A true understanding of the science, therefore, is not an academic exercise but a necessary tool for social critique. It allows us to clearly see that the social divisions and disparities attributed to “race” are not derived from biology but are imposed upon it. Moving toward a more equitable society requires recognizing that the color line is drawn not by nature, but by human hands, and can be erased by them as well.

This page titled [5.9: The Social Alchemy- From Biological Continuum to Social Hierarchy](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

5.10: The Takeaway

Science has played a dual role in both constructing and dismantling racial ideologies. While early scientific racism provided a veneer of legitimacy to white supremacy, modern sociology and genetics have largely rejected biological conceptions of race. However, the institutionalization of racial categories ensures that race remains a powerful social force. To combat scientific racism, researchers must critically examine how racial classifications are employed in science and medicine, ensuring that studies do not inadvertently reinforce racial hierarchies. The actual science behind skin color is bound to a confluence of pigmentation and trichromatic photoreception, wherein social biases somehow intervene and reveal ironies about just how unscientific human reasoning can be when considering race.

This page titled [5.10: The Takeaway](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

5.11: References

- Black, Edwin. 2003. *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows.
- Bolnick, Deborah A., Duana Fullwiley, Troy Duster, Richard S. Cooper, Joan H. Fujimura, Jonathan Kahn, Jay S. Kaufman, et al. 2007. "The Science and Business of Genetic Ancestry Testing." *Science* 318(5849):399–400.
- Braun, Lundy. 2006. "Reifying Human Difference: The Debate on Genetics, Race, and Health." *International Journal of Health Services* 36(3):557–73.
- Burchard, Esteban González, Elad Ziv, Natasha Coyle, Scarlett Lin Gomez, Hua Tang, Andrew J. Karter, Joanna L. Mountain, Eliseo J. Pérez-Stable, Dean Sheppard, and Neil Risch. 2003. "The Importance of Race and Ethnic Background in Biomedical Research and Clinical Practice." *New England Journal of Medicine* 348(12):1170–75.
- Cunningham, Timothy J., et al. 2022. "How Skin Tone Influences Relationships Between Discrimination, Self-Rated Mental Health, and Serious Psychological Distress." *The Journals of Gerontology* 77(11):2026–2037.
- Fredrickson, George M. 2002. *Racism: A Short History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gould, Stephen Jay. 1996. *The Mismeasure of Man*. Rev. ed. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Graves, Joseph L. 2001. *The Emperor's New Clothes: Biological Theories of Race at the Millennium*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Hochschild, Jennifer L., Vesla M. Weaver, and Traci R. Burch. 2012. *Creating a New Racial Order: How Immigration, Multiracialism, Genomics, and the Young Can Remake Race in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hoffman, Kelly M., Sophie Trawalter, Jordan R. Axt, and M. Norman Oliver. 2016. "Racial Bias in Pain Assessment and Treatment Recommendations, and False Beliefs about Biological Differences between Blacks and Whites." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113(16):4296–301.
- Morning, Ann. 2011. *The Nature of Race: How Scientists Think and Teach about Human Difference*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Nobles, Melissa. 2000. *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. 2015. *Racial Formation in the United States*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Roberts, Dorothy. 2011. *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-create Race in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: New Press.
- Sauer, Norman J. 1992. "Forensic Anthropology and the Concept of Race: If Races Don't Exist, Why Are Forensic Anthropologists So Good at Identifying Them?" *Social Science & Medicine* 34(2):107–11.
- Smedley, Audrey, and Brian D. Smedley. 2012. *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*. 4th ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Stamps, Danielle, Elena V. Stepanova, and Jinhao Chi. 2021. "The Effects of Skin Tone on the Perception of Discrimination in Young African American Women." *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*. 9(1):161-184.
- Yudell, Michael, Dorothy Roberts, Rob DeSalle, and Sarah Tishkoff. 2016. "Taking Race Out of Human Genetics." *Science* 351(6273):564–65.

This page titled [5.11: References](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: Norms, Traditions, and Culture

- 6.1: The Mosaic Within- Cultural Norms, Traditions, and Identity in Four American Ethno-Racial Communities
- 6.2: Latinx Americans- Familismo, Faith, and Hybridity
- 6.3: Familismo as a Foundational Norm
- 6.4: Religious Syncretism and Popular Religiosity
- 6.5: Linguistic and Cultural Hybridity- Spanglish and Beyond
- 6.6: Asian Americans- The “Model Minority” Myth, Confucian Values, and Panethnicity
- 6.7: Deconstructing the “Model Minority” Myth
- 6.8: Confucian and Other Cultural Foundations
- 6.9: Transnational Ties and the Creation of “Ethnoburbs”
- 6.10: African Americans- Cultural Resilience, Innovation, and the Black Public Sphere
- 6.11: The Black Church and the Ethos of Freedom
- 6.12: Kinship and Community Norms
- 6.13: Aesthetic Innovation- From Blues to Hip-Hop
- 6.14: Language and Communicative Practices
- 6.15: Indigenous Americans- Sovereignty, Land, and Cultural Revitalization
- 6.16: The Primacy of Sovereignty and Land
- 6.17: Cultural Trauma and Historical Legacy
- 6.18: Ceremonial Life and Worldview
- 6.19: Visual and Narrative Sovereignty
- 6.20: Comparative Analysis- Intersectionality and the Evolving American Mosaic
- 6.21: The Takeaway
- 6.22: References

This page titled 6: Norms, Traditions, and Culture is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Salvador Jiménez Murguía.

6.1: The Mosaic Within- Cultural Norms, Traditions, and Identity in Four American Ethno-Racial Communities

The United States has often been conceptualized as a “melting pot,” a metaphor suggesting the assimilation of diverse cultural elements into a homogeneous whole. However, a more apt and sociologically accurate description is that of a “mosaic” (Parrillo 2008) or a “kaleidoscope” (Fuchs 1990), where distinct ethnic and racial groups maintain their unique cultural patterns while contributing to the broader national fabric. This chapter delves into the complex cultural worlds of four major American ethno-racial communities: Latinx Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, and Indigenous Americans. It moves beyond monolithic stereotypes to explore the dynamic norms, traditions, and cultural practices that constitute lived experiences within these groups.

Culture, as loosely defined by sociologists, is a “tool kit” of symbols, stories, rituals, and worldviews which people use to solve problems and make sense of their lives (Swidler 1986). For communities shaped by histories of colonization, migration, and systemic racism, culture is not static; it is a resilient and adaptive force. It serves as a source of strength, a site of resistance, and a mechanism for navigating a society where their identity is often marginalized. This chapter will analyze how each group’s unique historical trajectory—from forced migration and enslavement to voluntary and involuntary immigration to original inhabitance—has fundamentally shaped its contemporary cultural expressions.

We will examine the central role of Familismo and religious syncretism in Latinx communities, the influence of Confucian values and the “model minority” myth on Asian American identity, the creation of vibrant cultural forms from the crucible of anti-Blackness within African American communities, and the profound connection to land and ongoing processes of cultural revitalization among Indigenous peoples. Through this comparative analysis, we aim to illuminate not only the distinctiveness of each group’s cultural heritage but also the common threads of resilience, adaptation, and the enduring human quest for meaning and belonging in the face of social and political challenges.

6.1: The Mosaic Within- Cultural Norms, Traditions, and Identity in Four American Ethno-Racial Communities is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.2: Latinx Americans- Familismo, Faith, and Hybridity

The term “Latinx” encompasses a remarkably diverse population with origins in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Central and South America, and other Latin-influenced cultures. However, this pan-ethnic label, and other like it (“Hispanic” in particular) masks if not reduces significant national, racial, and cultural heterogeneity that is so central to differential autonomies (Oboler 1995). Yet, to be sure, despite the perceived diversity involved in these terms, certain cultural themes recur across many Latinx subgroups, shaped largely by shared histories of Spanish colonialism, Catholic influence, and migration to the United States.

6.2: Latinx Americans- Familismo, Faith, and Hybridity is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.3: Familismo as a Foundational Norm

A cornerstone of Latinx culture is familismo, a cultural value that prioritizes the nuclear and extended family, emphasizing loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity (Sabogal et al. 1987). Unlike the dominant American emphasis on individualism, familismo places the family unit at the center of social and emotional support. This norm manifests in multigenerational households, strong obligations to provide financial and emotional support to kin, and the involvement of extended family in major life decisions (Valenzuela and Dornbusch 1994). The concept of *la familia*—Spanish for the family—often extends beyond blood relations to include *compadres* (godparents), who play a significant role in a child's upbringing, further strengthening the social safety net.

Sociological research has linked familismo to positive outcomes, such as lower rates of adolescent delinquency and stronger mental health buffers among youth (Germán, Gonzales, and Dumka 2009). However, it can also create tension for second- and third-generation Latinxs navigating the competing expectations of their familial culture and the individualistic demands of American schools and workplaces (Rumbaut 1997).

6.3: Familismo as a Foundational Norm is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.4: Religious Syncretism and Popular Religiosity

Religion, particularly Roman Catholicism, is a profound influence on the Latinx community. However, Latinx religious practice is often characterized by syncretism—the blending of different religious traditions. This is evident in the widespread devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, who is not only a Catholic Marian apparition but also a powerful symbol of mestizo identity, fusing Indigenous and Spanish Catholic beliefs (Elizondo 1997).

Beyond institutional Catholicism, popular religiosity—folk religious practices existing alongside formal doctrine—flourishes. These include home altars, celebrations for *quinceañeras* (a young woman's fifteenth birthday), *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead), and various traditional pilgrimages. *Día de los Muertos*, for instance, has roots in Indigenous Mesoamerican rituals and has been transformed in the U.S. context into a public celebration of memory and cultural pride, even influencing mainstream American culture (Marchi 2009). Furthermore, the rapid growth of Protestantism, particularly Pentecostalism, among Latinxs represents another dynamic shift, often tied to community-building and social mobility (Espinosa, Elizondo, and Miranda 2003).

6.4: Religious Syncretism and Popular Religiosity is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.5: Linguistic and Cultural Hybridity- Spanglish and Beyond

Language is a key site of cultural negotiation. The use of Spanglish—the fluid code-switching between Spanish and English—is not merely a linguistic synchronization but also a creative, strategic adaptation. It is a marker of a distinct, bicultural identity that operates comfortably in two worlds (Zentella 1997). This linguistic hybridity is mirrored in other cultural forms, from music (e.g., Reggaeton, which blends Jamaican, Panamanian, and Puerto Rican influences) to art and literature, where artists like Gloria Anzaldúa theorize the “borderlands”—in-between locations—as a spiritual and cultural space where two worlds collide and create something new (Anzaldúa 1987). In this way, Latinx culture is not a merely an ethnic development pieced together by circumstance, but instead a dynamic, evolving formation where core values like familismo and faith are constantly renegotiated through the processes of migration, settlement, and the pressures of assimilation, resulting in a uniquely U.S.-Latinx hybrid identity.

6.5: Linguistic and Cultural Hybridity- Spanglish and Beyond is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.6: Asian Americans- The “Model Minority” Myth, Confucian Values, and Panethnicity

Language is a key site of cultural negotiation. The use of Spanglish—the fluid code-switching between Spanish and English—is not merely a linguistic synchronization but also a creative, strategic adaptation. It is a marker of a distinct, bicultural identity that operates comfortably in two worlds (Zentella 1997). This linguistic hybridity is mirrored in other cultural forms, from music (e.g., Reggaeton, which blends Jamaican, Panamanian, and Puerto Rican influences) to art and literature, where artists like Gloria Anzaldúa theorize the “borderlands”—in-between locations—as a spiritual and cultural space where two worlds collide and create something new (Anzaldúa 1987). In this way, Latinx culture is not a merely an ethnic development pieced together by circumstance, but instead a dynamic, evolving formation where core values like familismo and faith are constantly renegotiated through the processes of migration, settlement, and the pressures of assimilation, resulting in a uniquely U.S.-Latinx hybrid identity.

6.6: Asian Americans- The “Model Minority” Myth, Confucian Values, and Panethnicity is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.7: Deconstructing the “Model Minority” Myth

“Asian American” is a political identity coined in the 1960s that consolidates over 20 distinct origin groups with vastly different histories, languages, and religions. This panethnic category includes descendants of 19th-century Chinese laborers, refugees from Southeast Asia, and highly educated professionals from India and East Asia (Espiritu 1992). The cultural landscape is therefore incredibly diverse, yet it is often flattened by the pervasive “model minority” myth.

6.7: Deconstructing the “Model Minority” Myth is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.8: Confucian and Other Cultural Foundations

Despite the myth's harm, it draws upon a distorted version of real cultural values present in many (but not all) East Asian-origin communities. These can be traced to philosophical traditions like Confucianism, which emphasizes filial piety (xiao), educational achievement, hard work (努力), and humility (Tu 1998). The high value placed on education is not merely instrumental but is deeply tied to family honor and obligation (Louie 2004). Similarly, concepts of interpersonal harmony and collective well-being often influence communication styles, favoring indirectness and saving “face” over direct confrontation.

It is critical, however, to avoid cultural essentialism—the belief that some groups of people share fixed, inherent and unchanging characteristics, or essences, based upon race, ethnicity, or nationality. Instead, these values interact with class resources and modes of incorporation that can produce an array of diverse outcomes (Portes and Rumbaut 2014). For example, the high educational outcomes of the children of Indian tech migrants are as much a product of their parents’ pre-existing high human capital and favorable U.S. immigration policy as they are of any “cultural” predisposition to education.

6.8: Confucian and Other Cultural Foundations is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.9: Transnational Ties and the Creation of “Ethnoburbs”

Many Asian American communities maintain strong transnational connections, facilitated by modern technology and travel. They often engage in “flexible citizenship,” navigating social, political, and economic spheres in both the U.S. and their country of origin (Ong 1999). This sustains cultural practices, including language retention, culinary traditions, and religious observances from Buddhism and Hinduism to Christianity and Islam.

Spatially, this has led to the rise of “ethnoburbs”—suburban ethnic clusters of businesses and residences (Li 1998). Places like the San Gabriel Valley in California or parts of Queens, New York, are not traditional ethnic enclaves for the poor but thriving, middle-class hubs that serve as cultural centers, allowing for the preservation and evolution of distinct Asian American identities outside of the inner city.

The “Asian American” identity itself is a cultural and political achievement. It was forged from a recognition that diverse groups faced shared experiences of exclusion, stereotyping, and marginalization (Espiritu 1992). This panethnicity is situational; an individual may identify as “Chinese” at home, “Asian American” in a multicultural campus setting, and simply “American” in other contexts (Okamoto 2014). The ongoing challenge is to build solidarity across profound internal diversity while resisting the homogenizing force of the model minority stereotype.

6.9: Transnational Ties and the Creation of “Ethnoburbs” is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.10: African Americans- Cultural Resilience, Innovation, and the Black Public Sphere

The African American experience is unique among American ethno-racial groups, founded not in voluntary immigration but in the brutal, centuries-long system of chattel slavery. This historical trauma, followed by Jim Crow segregation and ongoing structural racism, has profoundly shaped Black culture. Rather than being a mere repository of survival, African American culture is a vibrant, innovative, and resilient force that has profoundly shaped American culture as a whole (Lemons 2009).

6.10: African Americans- Cultural Resilience, Innovation, and the Black Public Sphere is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.11: The Black Church and the Ethos of Freedom

The Black Church (encompassing Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, and other denominations) is arguably the most foundational institution in African American life. It has never been solely a site of worship; it has historically functioned as a political base, a social service agency, a center for economic cooperation, and a repository for cultural expression (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). From the spirituals of the slavery era, which contained coded messages of resistance, to the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during the Civil Rights Movement, the church has been central to the fight for freedom and justice. Its worship style, characterized by call-and-response, emotional fervor, and communal participation, is a direct link to African religious retentions Raboteau 1978).

6.11: The Black Church and the Ethos of Freedom is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.12: Kinship and Community Norms

In response to the systemic dismantling of the Black family under slavery and through policies like mass incarceration, extended and fictive kin networks have been a crucial adaptive strategy (Stack 1974). Community norms of ‘othermothering’—where women in the community share child-rearing responsibilities—and a strong sense of collective responsibility for children have been vital for community survival and resilience (Collins 2000). These practices challenge narrow, Eurocentric definitions of family and highlight the creative ways African Americans have built kinship in the face of adversity.

6.12: Kinship and Community Norms is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.13: Aesthetic Innovation- From Blues to Hip-Hop

African American cultural production is a testament to the ability to create “something from nothing.” Faced with limited resources, Black artists have consistently innovated, creating uniquely American art forms. The blues, born from the field hollers and spirituals of the Mississippi Delta, articulated the pain and poetry of the Black experience (Baraka 1963). It gave birth to jazz, a quintessentially American form embodying improvisation, syncopation, and democratic dialogue. Rhythm and Blues (R&B), soul, funk, and finally hip-hop represent an unbroken lineage of aesthetic innovation.

Hip-hop culture, in particular, emerged in the 1970s from the South Bronx as a creative response to deindustrialization, poverty, and social neglect. Its four elements—MCing (rapping), DJing, breakdancing, and graffiti art—constitute a complex cultural system through which Black and Latinx youth articulate their realities, critique power structures, and assert their humanity (Rose 1994). Hip-hop has since become a global lingua franca for youth, demonstrating the immense cultural power that originates from the margins of American society.

6.13: Aesthetic Innovation- From Blues to Hip-Hop is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.14: Language and Communicative Practices

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a systematic and rule-governed linguistic dialect, not “broken” English. It possesses its own distinct grammar, phonology, and vocabulary, with roots in Southern English and West African language patterns (Smitherman 1977). Beyond its linguistic structure, Black communication styles are rich with cultural significance, featuring signifying (a form of indirect insult or wordplay), call-and-response, and narrative toasting. These practices emphasize verbal agility, community participation, and the preservation of oral history (Gates 1988). The constant appropriation of AAVE slang by mainstream culture, often without acknowledgment, underscores its enduring cultural influence.

6.14: Language and Communicative Practices is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.15: Indigenous Americans- Sovereignty, Land, and Cultural Revitalization

Indigenous Americans, or American Indians and Alaska Natives, are the original inhabitants of the Americas. Their contemporary cultural realities are inextricably linked to the history of European colonization, genocide, land dispossession, and forced assimilation. There are 574 federally recognized tribes and hundreds more state-recognized and non-recognized tribes in the U.S., each with its own distinct language, governance, and cultural traditions (NCAI 2023). Despite centuries of attack, Indigenous cultures have demonstrated remarkable endurance and are today experiencing a powerful resurgence.

6.15: Indigenous Americans- Sovereignty, Land, and Cultural Revitalization is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.16: The Primacy of Sovereignty and Land

A concept central to understanding Indigenous American cultures is tribal sovereignty. This refers to the inherent right of tribes to self-govern, define their own membership, and manage their resources and lands. Sovereignty is not a gift from the U.S. government but a pre-existing right that has been legally recognized, though often violated (Wilkins and Stark 2017). The fight for sovereignty is a cultural and political struggle to protect a distinct way of life.

Intertwined with sovereignty is a profound relationship to land. For most Indigenous cultures, land is not a commodity to be owned but a relative and a source of identity, history, and sustenance. As Lakota scholar Vine Deloria Jr. argued, place-based creation stories and ceremonies tie Indigenous peoples to specific geographies in a way that is fundamentally different from Western conceptions of property (Deloria 1973). The ongoing political battles over resource extraction, pipeline construction, and sacred site protection are, at their core, conflicts over this foundational cultural value.

6.16: The Primacy of Sovereignty and Land is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.17: Cultural Trauma and Historical Legacy

The contemporary social issues facing many Native communities—including poverty, health disparities, and substance abuse—cannot be understood outside the context of historical trauma. This concept describes the cumulative, intergenerational psychological and emotional wounding that results from a history of mass cataclysms like genocide, forced relocation (e.g., the Trail of Tears), and the boarding school era, where children were forcibly removed from their families to be culturally “assimilated” (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998).

These policies aimed explicitly at the destruction of Indigenous cultures by banning languages, ceremonies, and traditional governance structures. The trauma from this cultural genocide is passed down through generations, manifesting in contemporary social pathologies (Evans-Campbell 2008). Understanding this historical context is essential for any meaningful sociological analysis of present-day Indigenous life.

6.17: Cultural Trauma and Historical Legacy is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.18: Ceremonial Life and Worldview

Indigenous cultural practices are deeply diverse, but many share a worldview that is holistic, cyclical, and relational. Reality is often understood as a web of reciprocal relationships not only between humans but also with animals, plants, the land, and the spirit world. Ceremonies are practical ways of maintaining balance and harmony within this web. Practices like the Potlatch of the Northwest Coast, the Sun Dance of the Plains tribes, or the Green Corn Ceremony of Southeastern tribes are complex social and religious events that renew the world, redistribute wealth, and reinforce community bonds.

The U.S. government banned many of these ceremonies until the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978. The fact that these traditions were preserved in secret and are now publicly practiced again is a powerful testament to cultural resilience.

6.18: Ceremonial Life and Worldview is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.19: Visual and Narrative Sovereignty

A key dimension of the contemporary cultural revitalization movement is the assertion of narrative sovereignty—the right of Native peoples to control their own stories and representations (Simpson 2011). This is a direct challenge to centuries of distortion and romanticization in Hollywood and popular culture. A new generation of Indigenous artists, filmmakers, writers, and musicians is actively reclaiming their narrative space. Films like *Smoke Signals* (1998) and shows like *Reservation Dogs* (2021) use humor and authentic storytelling to depict the complexities of modern Native life. Writers like Tommy Orange and Joy Harjo explore urban Indian identity and the intersections of tradition and modernity. This cultural production is not just art; it is a decolonizing practice that asserts the continuing presence and vitality of Indigenous peoples.

6.19: Visual and Narrative Sovereignty is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.20: Comparative Analysis- Intersectionality and the Evolving American Mosaic

While this chapter has treated these four ethno-racial communities separately for analytical clarity, it is crucial to recognize the points of convergence, divergence, and intersection. All four groups have cultures that have been formed in relation to, and often in resistance against, a dominant white Anglo-Saxon Protestant cultural framework and structures of power. Each has used culture as a “tool kit” (Swidler 1986) for survival, community-building, and identity formation in a society that has historically excluded them.

A key point of divergence lies in their foundational relationships with the U.S. state. Indigenous Americans’ struggle is centered on sovereignty and land rights, a unique political status. African Americans’ history is defined by the foundational contradiction of enslavement within a nation founded on liberty. In contrast, the experiences of Latinx and Asian Americans are more varied, shaped by conquest (e.g., Mexicans in the Southwest, Puerto Ricans on the island of Puerto Rico), refugee status, and immigration.

An intersectional analysis (Crenshaw 1989) further complicates the picture. The cultural experiences of a poor, undocumented Maya woman from Guatemala, a third-generation, middle-class Chinese American man, a queer Black woman in Atlanta, and a Two-Spirit Navajo person are shaped not only by their race and ethnicity but also by their class, gender, sexual orientation, and immigration status. These intersecting identities create unique cultural positions and negotiations.

Finally, the forces of globalization, intermarriage, and internal diversity ensure that these cultural systems are not sealed units. The rise of a multiracial population and the complex identities of the children of intergroup marriages represent the next chapter in the evolving story of American culture (Root 1996). The mosaic is becoming ever more intricate, challenging old categories and demanding new sociological frameworks for understanding culture, identity, and belonging in 21st-century America.

6.20: Comparative Analysis- Intersectionality and the Evolving American Mosaic is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.21: The Takeaway

This chapter has taken us through the rich and complex cultural landscapes of Latinx, Asian, African, and Indigenous Americans. We have seen that culture is not a museum relic but a living, breathing, and dynamic process. It is forged in the crucible of history and is constantly adapted to meet contemporary challenges. From the familismo of Latinx households and the artistic innovations of the Black community, to the transnational networks of Asian ethnoburbs and the land-based sovereignty movements of Indigenous nations, these cultural formations are powerful testaments to human resilience and creativity.

Understanding these cultures in their full sociological context requires moving beyond stereotypes and superficial celebrations of “diversity.” It demands a critical engagement with the historical and structural forces—colonialism, slavery, immigration policy, racism—that have shaped them. It also requires recognizing that these communities are not passive victims but active agents in the creation of their own worlds and, indeed, in the continual remaking of American society itself. The norms, traditions, and cultural practices detailed here are more than just ethnic traits; they are strategic adaptations, sites of resistance, and wellsprings of meaning that allow these communities to endure, thrive, and profoundly enrich the national mosaic.

6.21: The Takeaway is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

6.22: References

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books.
- Baraka, Amiri (LeRoi Jones). 1963. *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*. New York: William Morrow.
- Brave Heart, Maria Yellow Horse and Lyman M. DeBruyn. 1998. "The American Indian Holocaust: Healing Historical Unresolved Grief." *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 8(2):56–78.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989(1):139–67.
- Deloria, Vine, Jr. 1973. *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap.
- Elizondo, Virgilio. 1997. *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Espinosa, Gastón, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda. 2003. *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Espiritu, Yen Le. 1992. *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Evans-Campbell, Teresa. 2008. "Historical Trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska Communities: A Multilevel Framework for Exploring Impacts on Individuals, Families, and Communities." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 23(3):316–38.
- Fuches, Lawrence. 1990. *The American Kaleidoscope: Race Ethnicity and Civic Culture*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. 1988. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Germán, Miguel, Nancy A. Gonzales, and Larry Dumka. 2009. "Familism Values as a Protective Factor for Mexican-Origin Adolescents Exposed to Deviant Peers." *The Journal of Early Adolescence* 29(1):16–42.
- Lee, Stacey J., Nga-Wing Anjela Wong, and Alvin N. Alvarez. 2009. "The Model Minority and the Perpetual Foreigner: Stereotypes of Asian Americans." Pp. 69–84 in *Asian American Psychology: Current Perspectives*, edited by N. Tewari and A. N. Alvarez. New York: Routledge.
- Lemons, Gary L. 2009. *Black Male Outsider: A Memoir*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Li, Wei. 1998. "Anatomy of a New Ethnic Settlement: The Chinese Ethnoburb in Los Angeles." *Urban Studies* 35(3):479–501.
- Lincoln, C. Eric, and Lawrence H. Mamiya. 1990. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Louie, Vivian. 2004. *Compelled to Excel: Immigration, Education, and Opportunity among Chinese Americans*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Marchi, Regina M. 2009. *Day of the Dead in the USA: The Migration and Transformation of a Cultural Phenomenon*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- National Congress of American Indians (NCAI). 2023. "Tribal Nations." Retrieved October 26, 2023 (<https://www.ncai.org/tribalnations>).
- Oboler, Suzanne. 1995. *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Okamoto, Dina G. 2014. *Redefining Race: Asian American Panethnicity and Shifting Ethnic Boundaries*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Ong, Aihwa. 1999. *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Parrillo, Vincent N. 2008. *Understanding Race and Ethnic Relations*. 3rd ed. Boston, MA: Pearson.

- Poon, OiYan, Dian Squire, Corinne Kodama, Ajani Byrd, Jason Chan, Lester Manzano, Sara Furr, and Devita Bishundat. 2016. "A Critical Review of the Model Minority Myth in Selected Literature on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Higher Education." *Review of Educational Research* 86(2):469–502.
- Portes, Alejandro, and Rubén G. Rumbaut. 2014. *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. 4th ed. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Raboteau, Albert J. 1978. *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Root, Maria P. P., ed. 1996. *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Rose, Tricia. 1994. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press.
- Rumbaut, Rubén G. 1997. "Assimilation and Its Discontents: Between Rhetoric and Reality." *International Migration Review* 31(4):923–60.
- Sabogal, Fabio, Gerardo Marín, Regina Otero-Sabogal, Barbara Vanoss Marín, and Eliseo J. Pérez-Stable. 1987. "Hispanic Familism and Acculturation: What Changes and What Doesn't?" *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 9(4):397–412.
- Simpson, Audra. 2011. "Settlement's Secret." *Cultural Anthropology* 26(2):205–17.
- Smitherman, Geneva. 1977. *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Stack, Carol B. 1974. *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51(2):273–86.
- Tu, Weiming. 1998. "Probing the 'Three Bonds' and 'Five Relationships' in Confucian Humanism." Pp. 121–36 in *Confucianism and the Family*, edited by W. H. Slote and G. A. De Vos. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Valenzuela, Angela and Sanford M. Dornbusch. 1994. "Familism and Social Capital in the Academic Achievement of Mexican Origin and Anglo Adolescents." *Social Science Quarterly* 75(1):18–36.
- Wilkins, David E. and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesik Stark. 2017. *American Indian Politics and the American Political System*. 4th ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Wu, Ellen D. 2014. *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Zentella, Ana Celia. 1997. *Growing Up Bilingual: Puerto Rican Children in New York*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Zhou, Min. 2004. "Revisiting Ethnic Entrepreneurship: Convergencies, Controversies, and Conceptual Advancements." *International Migration Review* 38(3):1040–74.
- Zhou, Min and Jennifer Lee. 2017. "Hyper-Selectivity, Racial Mobility, and the Remaking of Race." *Contexts* 16(4):68–71.

6.22: References is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

7: Marriage, Family, and Relationships

- 7.1: The Intimate Mosaic- Marriage, Family, and Kinship Across Racial and Ethnic Lines
- 7.2: Theoretical Frameworks- Understanding the Family-Race Nexus
- 7.3: Historical Legacies and Their Contemporary Echoes
- 7.4: African American Families and the Aftermath of Slavery
- 7.5: Indigenous American Families and Cultural Genocide
- 7.6: Latino and Asian American Families and Immigration Law
- 7.7: Marriage Patterns and Mate Selection
- 7.8: Intermarriage and Assimilation
- 7.9: Kinship, Gender, and Family Norms
- 7.10: Parenting and Ethnic-Racial Socialization
- 7.11: Contemporary Challenges and Adaptations
- 7.12: The Impact of Mass Incarceration
- 7.13: The Growth of Multiracial Families
- 7.14: The Takeaway
- 7.15: References

This page titled [7: Marriage, Family, and Relationships](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

7.1: The Intimate Mosaic- Marriage, Family, and Kinship Across Racial and Ethnic Lines

The family is often popularly imagined as a private haven, a universal institution governed by natural, biological impulses. Sociology, in contrast, reveals the family as a primary social institution shaped by the public forces of history, economics, and politics. Nowhere is this more evident than in the examination of how family life, marriage patterns, and intimate relationships are structured by race and ethnicity in the United States. The “standard” family model—a nuclear, monogamous, male-breadwinner unit—is not a neutral benchmark but a specific ideal that has often been inaccessible or imposed upon vulnerable racial and ethnic communities (Coontz 1992).

This chapter introduces how family formations among Latino, Black, Asian, and Indigenous Americans are not cultural deficits or deviations, but strategic adaptations to historical and structural conditions. Using core sociological frameworks—structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism—we will analyze how racialized experiences have created distinct familial landscapes. We will explore the interplay between cultural heritage and structural constraints, investigating topics such as marriage markets, gendered roles within families, and the resilience of extended kinship networks. By moving beyond pathologizing stereotypes, we can understand how families of color have served as crucial buffers against racism and as key sites for preserving cultural identity and ensuring survival.

7.1: The Intimate Mosaic- Marriage, Family, and Kinship Across Racial and Ethnic Lines is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

7.2: Theoretical Frameworks- Understanding the Family-Race Nexus

The three primary sociological theories provide lenses for analyzing the intersection of family and race. As, Functionalism posits that social institutions exist to fulfill necessary functions for societal stability, from this perspective, the family serves to socialize children, regulate sexual activity, and provide emotional and material security (Parsons and Bales 1955). When applied to race, a Functionalist might focus on how immigrant families act as engines of assimilation, teaching norms and values to the next generation. However, this perspective has been criticized for its conservative bias, often mistaking the White, middle-class family form for the most “functional” and labeling other family structures as “dysfunctional” (Moynihan 1965).

As Conflict theory is geared toward revealing how social institutions perpetuate inequality, from this view, the family is a site where power relations of race, class, and gender are played out. The state, for instance, has historically regulated the family lives of people of color—from laws forbidding marriages between the enslaved to policies forcibly removing Indigenous children from their homes. Conflict theorists argue that such interventions serve to maintain a racial hierarchy by disrupting the social and economic stability of minority communities (Glenn 2002).

With a focus on micro-level interactions, Interactionism would examine how meaning and identity are constructed through everyday interaction within families. This perspective explores how racial and ethnic identities are taught and negotiated at the dinner table, through family stories, and via rituals (Hughes et al. 2006). For example, parents of color engage in ethnic-racial socialization, teaching their children both cultural pride and strategies for coping with discrimination (Umaña-Taylor and Hill 2020).

7.2: Theoretical Frameworks- Understanding the Family-Race Nexus is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

7.3: Historical Legacies and Their Contemporary Echoes

The family structures of racial and ethnic minorities today cannot be divorced from a history of systemic intervention and disruption. Encounters with colonialism, displacement, enslavement, genocide, the establishment of legal policies, and the like, have all figured into the formative processes that construct marriage, families, and relationships associated with race and ethnicity. To ignore any one of these social forces would not provide a complete and comprehensive interpretation of how BIPOC have established their most intimate connections among marital, familial, and relational spaces.

7.3: Historical Legacies and Their Contemporary Echoes is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

7.4: African American Families and the Aftermath of Slavery

The foundational trauma for Black families was chattel slavery, which legally denied marriage, forcibly separated kin, and exploited Black women's reproductive capacities. The infamous 1965 Moynihan Report, while well-intentioned, pathologized the resulting female-headed household structure as a “tangle of pathology,” blaming Black culture for inequalities rooted in centuries of oppression (Moynihan 1965). A conflict theory analysis corrects this view, highlighting how Black families demonstrated remarkable resilience by creating extensive fictive kin networks—where close friends are considered “play aunts” or “godmothers”—and flexible family roles (Stack 1974). The high rate of female-headed households among Blacks today is better explained by structural factors like mass incarceration, economic marginalization, and a skewed sex ratio than by cultural pathology (Western 2006).

7.4: African American Families and the Aftermath of Slavery is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

7.5: Indigenous American Families and Cultural Genocide

U.S. policy explicitly targeted Indigenous families to destroy tribal cultures. The boarding school era, which lasted into the late 20th century, forcibly removed children from their homes to be assimilated, a practice that inflicted massive historical trauma (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998). The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 was a hard-won conflict theory victory, giving tribes sovereignty over child placement to protect the integrity of Indigenous families and communities.

7.5: Indigenous American Families and Cultural Genocide is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

7.6: Latino and Asian American Families and Immigration Law

U.S. immigration policy has directly shaped family formation. The 1924 National Origins Act and the subsequent Bracero Program (1942-1964) created patterns of male-led migration and family separation for Mexicans. The 1965 Hart-Cellar Act, while ending racist national-origins quotas, prioritized family reunification for some groups while creating long backlogs for others, influencing the timing and composition of Asian American families (Espiritu 1997).

7.6: Latino and Asian American Families and Immigration Law is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

7.7: Marriage Patterns and Mate Selection

Marriage rates and patterns vary significantly by race and ethnicity, reflecting both cultural values and structural opportunities. African Americans have the lowest marriage rates and the highest rates of marital dissolution in the U.S. (Raley, Sweeney, and Wondra 2015). Symbolic Interactionists might explore the changing meanings of marriage in communities where it is less common. However, structural factors are paramount. The marriage squeeze describes a shortage of “marriageable” men, driven by high mortality, incarceration, and unemployment rates among Black men (Wilson 1987). When economic stability is precarious, couples may postpone or forgo marriage, a pattern seen across class lines but concentrated in disadvantaged groups.

7.7: Marriage Patterns and Mate Selection is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

7.8: Intermarriage and Assimilation

The rate of interracial marriage is often seen as a key indicator of assimilation (Gordon 1964). These rates have risen dramatically since *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), with over one-in-ten married people having a spouse of a different race or ethnicity (Livingston and Brown 2017). However, patterns are not random. Asian Americans and Latinos have the highest rates of out-marriage, particularly for the U.S.-born, while Black out-marriage rates remain the lowest. This reflects a racial hierarchy in the marriage market, where proximity to Whiteness influences desirability (Fryer 2007). Furthermore, the gender pattern in Asian intermarriage—where Asian women marry out far more frequently than Asian men—reveals the persistence of gendered racial stereotypes (Nemoto 2006).

7.8: Intermarriage and Assimilation is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

7.9: Kinship, Gender, and Family Norms

Within families, cultural norms and structural pressures shape gender roles and kinship obligations. As mentioned in previous chapters, a core cultural value in many Latino communities is *familismo*, which emphasizes strong attachment to nuclear and extended family, reciprocity, and solidarity (Sabogal et al. 1987). This often translates into multigenerational households and a deep sense of obligation to provide support. From a functionalist view, *familismo* is a source of social capital that buffers stress. However, it can also create conflict for second-generation youth navigating more individualistic American norms (Rumbaut 1997). Gender roles are often guided by *marianismo* (the ideal of female virtue and self-sacrifice) and *machismo* (male responsibility and authority), though these are frequently misunderstood; *machismo*, for instance, can positively embody honor and providing for one's family (Torres et al. 2002).

Similar to the “model minority” stereotype found in education, the same stereotype pervades the institution of family, imposing an image of Asian American families as uniformly successful, harmonious, and pressure-cookers for high-achieving children. This masks immense diversity. However, many East Asian-origin families are influenced by Confucian values that stress filial piety, educational achievement, and respect for elders (Zhou 2009). This creates a strong intergenerational contract where children's success is a reflection on the entire family. The resulting pressure can lead to significant mental health challenges, complicating the functionalist narrative of seamless success (Lee and Zhou 2015).

In both African American and Indigenous communities, the practice of kinship care—where grandparents or other relatives raise children—is prevalent. While often triggered by crises like parental substance abuse or incarceration, this practice is also a deep-seated cultural tradition. It represents a functional adaptation that prioritizes community responsibility for children over state-run foster care, preserving cultural identity and family bonds (Gibson 2002).

7.9: Kinship, Gender, and Family Norms is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

7.10: Parenting and Ethnic-Racial Socialization

A critical function of families of color is to prepare children for a racialized world, a process known as ethnic-racial socialization (Umaña-Taylor and Hill 2020). This involves ‘cultural socialization,’ or teaching children about their cultural heritage, history, and traditions. This also involves ‘preparation for bias,’ a practice of teaching children about potential discrimination and how to cope with it. Additionally, this involves ‘promotion of mistrust’ that warns children to be cautious in interracial interactions. And finally, this involves ‘egalitarianism’ wherein the similarity of all people and downplaying race are emphasized.

The strategies parents employ are shaped by their own experiences and the specific challenges their children are likely to face. For example, middle-class Black parents, aware that their children may still be profiled by police, often engage in intense preparation for bias, a phenomenon dubbed “The Talk” (Hughes et al. 2006). This micro-level interactionist process is a direct response to macro-level structural racism.

7.10: Parenting and Ethnic-Racial Socialization is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

7.11: Contemporary Challenges and Adaptations

Families of color continue to navigate evolving social landscapes. Globalization has enabled many Latino and Asian immigrant families to maintain active transnational ties. They form “flexible families” stretched across borders, with parents in the U.S. and children in the home country, or with continuous flows of remittances and communication (Schmalzbauer 2004). This challenges the traditional functionalist view of the family as a geographically bounded unit.

7.11: Contemporary Challenges and Adaptations is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

7.12: The Impact of Mass Incarceration

The U.S. prison system has become a powerful force disrupting families, disproportionately affecting Black and Latino communities. It creates “missing men,” leaving many children to grow up with an incarcerated father, which carries stigma, financial hardship, and emotional trauma (Western 2006). This is a clear example of conflict theory, where a state institution directly damages the family structures of specific racial groups.

7.12: The Impact of Mass Incarceration is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

7.13: The Growth of Multiracial Families

The rise in interracial marriage has led to a growing population of multiracial children. These families navigate unique challenges, from dealing with intrusive questions about their family's legitimacy to developing a complex and fluid racial identity for their children (Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002). They often create new family cultures that consciously blend traditions from multiple heritages.

7.13: The Growth of Multiracial Families is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

7.14: The Takeaway

The intimate realms of marriage, family, and relationships are far from colorblind. As this chapter has demonstrated, they are deeply inscribed with the legacies of historical oppression and the ongoing realities of structural inequality. The African American extended kin network, the Latino practice of familismo, the Asian American emphasis on educational attainment, and the Indigenous struggle for familial sovereignty are not merely cultural artifacts. They are dynamic, resilient adaptations—“tool kits” for survival and flourishing (Swidler 1986).

A comprehensive sociological understanding requires moving beyond a simplistic cultural-deficit model. It necessitates integrating theoretical perspectives: recognizing the functions families serve (functionalism), analyzing the power imbalances they confront (conflict theory), and appreciating the meanings they construct in everyday life (symbolic interactionism). The future of the American family is inextricably linked to the future of American race relations. As the nation’s demographics continue to shift, the family patterns and kinship innovations pioneered by communities of color will become increasingly central to the national story, challenging old norms and forging new, more inclusive definitions of family itself.

7.14: The Takeaway is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

7.15: References

- Brave Heart, Maria Yellow Horse and Lyman M. DeBruyn. 1998. "The American Indian Holocaust: Healing Historical Unresolved Grief." *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 8(2):56–78.
- Coontz, Stephanie. 1992. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Basic Books.
- Espiritu, Yen Le. 1997. *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws, and Love*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Fryer, Roland G., Jr. 2007. "Guess Who's Been Coming to Dinner? Trends in Interracial Marriage over the 20th Century." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 21(2):71–90.
- Gibson, Priscilla A. 2002. "Caregiving Role Affects Family Relationships of African American Grandmothers as New Mothers Again: A Phenomenological Perspective." *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 28(3):341–53.
- Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. 2002. *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gordon, Milton M. 1964. *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hughes, Diane, James Rodriguez, Emilie P. Smith, Deborah J. Johnson, Howard C. Stevenson, and Paul Spicer. 2006. "Parents' Ethnic-Racial Socialization Practices: A Review of Research and Directions for Future Study." *Developmental Psychology* 42(5):747–70.
- Lee, Jennifer and Min Zhou. 2015. *The Asian American Achievement Paradox*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Livingston, Gretchen and Anna Brown. 2017. *Intermarriage in the U.S. 50 Years After Loving v. Virginia*. Pew Research Center.
- Moynihan, Daniel Patrick. 1965. *The Negro Family: The Case For National Action*. Washington, DC: Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor.
- Nemoto, Kumiko. 2006. "Intimacy, Desire, and the Construction of Self in Relationships between Asian American Women and White American Men." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 9(1):27–54.
- Parsons, Talcott and Robert F. Bales. 1955. *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Raley, R. Kelly, Megan M. Sweeney, and Danielle Wondra. 2015. "The Growing Racial and Ethnic Divide in U.S. Marriage Patterns." *The Future of Children* 25(2):89–109.
- Rockquemore, Kerry Ann and David L. Brunsma. 2002. *Beyond Black: Biracial Identity in America*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Rumbaut, Rubén G. 1997. "Assimilation and Its Discontents: Between Rhetoric and Reality." *International Migration Review* 31(4):923–60.
- Sabogal, Fabio, Gerardo Marín, Regina Otero-Sabogal, Barbara Vanoss Marín, and Eliseo J. Pérez-Stable. 1987. "Hispanic Familism and Acculturation: What Changes and What Doesn't?" *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 9(4):397–412.
- Schmalzbauer, Leah. 2004. "Searching for Wages and Mothering from Afar: The Case of Honduran Transnational Families." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66(5):1317–31.
- Stack, Carol B. 1974. *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51(2):273–86.
- Torres, Jose B., V. Scott, Solberg, and Herbert, Carlstrom. 2002. "The Myth of Sameness Among Latino Men and Their Machismo." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 72(2):163–81.
- Umaña-Taylor, Adriana J. and Nancy E. Hill. 2020. "Ethnic-Racial Socialization in the Family: A Decade's Advance on Precursors and Outcomes." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 82(1):244–71.
- Western, Bruce. 2006. *Punishment and Inequality in America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Zhou, Min. 2009. "Conflict, Coping, and Reconciliation: Intergenerational Relations in Chinese Immigrant Families." Pp. 21-46 in *Across Generations: Immigrant Families in America*, edited by N. Foner. New York: New York University Press.

7.15: References is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

8: Faith, Belief, and Religion

- 8.1: Sacred Ties- The Intersection of Faith, Race, and Ethnicity in America
- 8.2: Religion as a Source of Social Cohesion and Identity
- 8.3: Religion as a Site of Conflict and Domination
- 8.4: Religion as a Tool Kit for Meaning-Making
- 8.5: African American Religion- The Black Church as a Fortress of Community
- 8.6: Religious Expression and Theodicy
- 8.7: Diversity Within Black Religion
- 8.8: Latinx Religiosity- Mestizaje and Lived Faith
- 8.9: Asian American Religions- Diversity, Adaptation, and the “Second-Generation”
- 8.10: The “Second-Generation” Complex
- 8.11: The “Model Minority” and Religious Stereotypes
- 8.12: Indigenous American Spiritualities- Land, Sovereignty, and Decolonization
- 8.13: Comparative Analysis and Emerging Trends
- 8.14: The Takeaway
- 8.15: References

This page titled [8: Faith, Belief, and Religion](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

8.1: Sacred Ties- The Intersection of Faith, Race, and Ethnicity in America

In the United States, the sacred and the social are inextricably linked. Sunday morning has been famously described as “the most segregated hour in American life,” a phrase attributed to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that underscores the profound connection between religious affiliation and racial-ethnic identity. This chapter introduces how, for racial and ethnic minorities, religion is far more than a set of theological beliefs; it is a dynamic social institution that has functioned as a tool for survival, a site of resistance, a source of cultural preservation, and a vehicle for political mobilization. While often reinforcing racial boundaries, religious communities also provide the resources to challenge them.

This complex terrain is examined through the distinct religious histories and sociological functions of faith within four major American ethno-racial groups: African Americans, Latino Americans, Asian Americans, and Indigenous Peoples. Drawing on sociological theories and data, we will analyze how the Black Church served as a “counterpublic sphere” during and after slavery; how Latinx Catholicism reflects a lived religion of mestizaje; how the incredible diversity of Asian American religions challenges simplistic narratives; and how Indigenous spiritualities are intrinsically tied to sovereignty and land. Through this analysis, we will see that belief is not merely a private matter but a public force, deeply woven into the American story of race, power, and identity.

8.1: Sacred Ties- The Intersection of Faith, Race, and Ethnicity in America is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

8.2: Religion as a Source of Social Cohesion and Identity

The Functionalist Émile Durkheim ([1912] 1995) argued that religion reinforces social solidarity by creating a “moral community” of believers. For immigrant and minority groups, religious institutions often serve as primary sites for ethnic identity formation and preservation. They provide social services, foster in-group marriage, and help transmit cultural traditions, language, and values to the next generation (Warner and Wittner 1998). A Korean Presbyterian church or a Hindu temple, for instance, functions as a central hub for community life, far exceeding its narrowly religious role.

8.2: Religion as a Source of Social Cohesion and Identity is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

8.3: Religion as a Site of Conflict and Domination

From a Conflict perspective, rooted in Marx's view of religion as an "opiate of the masses," faith can be a tool of domination. Historically, Christianity was used to justify slavery and colonialism, teaching subservience to oppressed peoples. However, this same tradition can be radically reinterpreted. Conflict theory also helps us understand how religious groups compete for resources and legitimacy within a pluralistic society, often along racial and ethnic lines (Emerson and Smith 2000).

8.3: Religion as a Site of Conflict and Domination is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

8.4: Religion as a Tool Kit for Meaning-Making

The Interactionist perspective, as influenced by Max Weber, views religion as a source of symbols and narratives that individuals use to make sense of their world (Swidler 1986). For communities facing oppression, religious beliefs provide a theodicy of liberation—an explanation for suffering that promises divine justice and empowerment. The Biblical story of the Exodus, for example, became a powerful narrative frame for the African American struggle for freedom, transforming a story of ancient Israelites into a potent symbol of their own plight.

8.4: Religion as a Tool Kit for Meaning-Making is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

8.5: African American Religion- The Black Church as a Fortress of Community

The religious life of African Americans is fundamentally shaped by the historical trauma of slavery and the ongoing struggle against anti-Black racism. Forced conversion to Christianity was initially a tool of control, but enslaved Africans radically reinterpreted the faith, blending it with West African religious retentions to create a distinctive religious culture.

Today, the Institutional Black Church: The Black Church (an umbrella term for historically Black denominations like the National Baptist Convention, AME, and COGIC) is arguably a cornerstone of African American civil society. It has never been solely a place of worship. As Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) argue, the Black Church embodies a “dialectical” model, constantly balancing otherworldly salvation with this-worldly activism. It functions as a “counterpublic sphere” where a subaltern community can develop its own leadership, rhetoric, and political strategies safe from White surveillance (Harris-Lacewell 2007). From Nat Turner to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to the Black Lives Matter movement (which, while secular, often organizes in religious spaces), the Black Church has been a primary engine for social justice.

8.5: African American Religion- The Black Church as a Fortress of Community is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

8.6: Religious Expression and Theodicy

The content of Black religious expression—from the “invisible institution” of slave religion to the charismatic worship of Pentecostalism—is characterized by emotional fervor, call-and-response, and an emphasis on God’s identification with the oppressed. This created a theodicy of liberation that framed suffering not as deserved punishment but as a trial before divine deliverance (Cone 2010). This worldview provided the moral and spiritual foundation for resilience and resistance.

8.6: Religious Expression and Theodicy is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

8.7: Diversity Within Black Religion

While Protestant Christianity dominates, the landscape is diverse. The Nation of Islam emerged as a powerful alternative, offering a theology of Black empowerment and self-sufficiency explicitly opposed to White supremacy. Furthermore, a growing number of African Americans are converting to Islam, Catholicism, and Eastern religions, or identifying as religiously unaffiliated, reflecting a gradual diversification of the spiritual marketplace (Pew Research Center 2021).

8.7: Diversity Within Black Religion is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

8.8: Latinx Religiosity- Mestizaje and Lived Faith

Latinx religious life is characterized by religious syncretism—the blending of different religious traditions—and a deep commitment to lived religion, which focuses on practice and experience over formal doctrine. This is a direct product of the historical mestizaje (racial and cultural mixing) of Spanish Catholicism and Indigenous American worldviews.

While a majority of Latinx identify as Catholic (55% as of 2022), their practice is often centered on *religiosidad popular* (popular religiosity) rather than institutional authority (Pew Research Center 2022). This includes home altars, devotion to saints, and community celebrations like quinceañeras and Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead). The veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe is a quintessential example of syncretism; she is said to have appeared to an Indigenous man, depicted in this telling with mestiza features, becoming a powerful national and religious symbol of Mexico and for Latinx broadly (Elizondo 1997). She represents a faith that emerges from the borderlands, sanctifying the mixed identity of her people.

In addition to a Catholic devotion among Latinx, a major trend is the rapid growth of Protestantism, particularly within Pentecostal and evangelical traditions. Nearly one-in-four Latinx are now Protestant (Pew Research Center 2022). Scholars argue this shift is not just theological but sociological. These churches often offer a more intimate, emotionally expressive worship style that some would argue, resonates with cultural values of familismo and personalismo (value of personal relationships). They also provide strong community support networks and pathways to leadership, particularly for women, in contexts where immigrants may feel marginalized (Espinosa, Elizondo, and Miranda 2003).

Finally, Latinx communities also have traditions of hybrid beliefs and practices that are incorporated into more established religious traditions. Some practices derived from Espiritismo (Spiritism), Santería, and Curanderismo are woven into the fabric of Latinx spiritual life, often coexisting with Catholic or Protestant identities. This reflects a pragmatic and holistic approach to faith, where religion is called upon to address everyday problems of health, relationships, and fortune.

8.8: Latinx Religiosity- Mestizaje and Lived Faith is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

8.9: Asian American Religions- Diversity, Adaptation, and the “Second-Generation”

The category “Asian American” encompasses a staggering religious diversity that mirrors its ethnic heterogeneity. This may include such variation as Buddhists from Vietnam, Catholics from the Philippines, Hindus from India, Muslims from Pakistan and Bangladesh, and Korean Presbyterians, among many others.

For many Asian American groups, religious institutions are paramount for preserving ethnic identity. As Warner and Wittner (1998) note in their study of immigrant congregations, the temple, mosque, or church becomes a “de facto community center.” It is where language schools are held, cultural festivals are organized, and social networks are forged. A Sikh Gurdwara, for instance, is not only a place of prayer but also a site for sharing a langar (communal meal) and sustaining Punjabi culture in a new land.

8.9: Asian American Religions- Diversity, Adaptation, and the “Second-Generation” is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

8.10: The “Second-Generation” Complex

A central sociological issue is the transmission of faith to the U.S.-born and raised generation. The children of immigrants often seek a faith that is more “Americanized”—less tied to ethnic language and old-world customs, and more focused on personal spirituality and social justice (Chen 2008). This creates tension within religious communities, leading to the creation of separate, English-language worship services or the rise of pan-Asian parachurch organizations that transcend specific ethnic ties.

8.10: The “Second-Generation” Complex is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

8.11: The “Model Minority” and Religious Stereotypes

As aforementioned in several other contexts, the “model minority” stereotype often extends to religion, portraying Asian Americans as spiritually exotic yet non-threatening (e.g., the peaceful Buddhist, the philosophical Hindu). This obscures the internal diversity and the very real struggles within these communities, such as the Islamophobia faced by South Asian Muslims post-9/11 or the challenges of building religious institutions in the face of zoning laws and local opposition (“NIMBYism”).

8.11: The “Model Minority” and Religious Stereotypes is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

8.12: Indigenous American Spiritualities- Land, Sovereignty, and Decolonization

For Indigenous peoples, spirituality is fundamentally inseparable from land, community, and identity. It is typically not a separate “religion” but a way of being in the world, a set of relationships with the natural and spiritual world. Political and social entities have often sought to control Indigenous populations by implementing policy and legislation that subverts their spirituality.

U.S. federal policy explicitly targeted Indigenous spiritual practices as an obstacle to assimilation. The 1883 “Court of Indian Offenses” banned ceremonies like the Sun Dance and the Potlatch. The boarding school system forcibly converted children to Christianity and punished them for speaking their languages or practicing their traditions. This was a deliberate project of cultural and spiritual genocide, inflicting a historical trauma that continues to resonate (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998).

Additionally, the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) in 1978 was a critical victory, finally extending First Amendment protections to the religious practices of Native Americans. This has enabled a powerful cultural and spiritual revitalization movement. Traditional practices are being reclaimed and renewed, often in dialogue with modern contexts (Garrouette 2003). This is not a return to a static past but a dynamic process of decolonizing spirituality.

Some of this decolonizing spirituality actually runs counter to Western models of religion. Many Indigenous people draw a distinction between “Western religion,” which they see as institutional and doctrinal, and “Indigenous spirituality,” which is holistic, place-based, and experiential. Core principles often include a cyclical view of time, a kinship-based relationship with all living things (animism), and the importance of oral tradition and ceremonial life for maintaining balance and harmony. The ongoing legal and political battles over sacred sites (such as the Black Hills or Oak Flat) are, at their core, conflicts over the ability to practice a spirituality that is intrinsically tied to specific geographies.

8.12: Indigenous American Spiritualities- Land, Sovereignty, and Decolonization is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

8.13: Comparative Analysis and Emerging Trends

When situating these four traditions in conversation, key sociological patterns emerge.

The U.S. operates as what some sociologists refer to as a competitive religious marketplace. However, this marketplace is not a level playing field; it is structured by race. The historical dominance of White, mainline Protestantism set the normative standard against which other groups were measured (Emerson and Smith 2000). BIPOC religious groups often face the “triple penalty” of being non-white, non-Christian (in some cases), and immigrant.

While some engage in that competitive marketplace, others are now less interested. Sometimes referred to as the “Rise of the Nones,” all racial and ethnic groups are seeing a rise in the religiously unaffiliated, or “nones.” However, the rates and meanings differ. While 29% of all U.S. adults are “nones,” the figure is 30% for Asians, 27% for Latinos, 21% for Blacks, and 20% for Indigenous Americans (Pew Research Center 2021). For some, disaffiliation represents a rejection of organized religion’s perceived hypocrisy on social justice issues; for others, it is part of a broader assimilation into a secular American mainstream.

Finally, a counter-trend to the “Sunday morning segregation” is the growth of multiracial and immigrant churches. These congregations, often but not exclusively evangelical, consciously work to build bridges across racial lines. However, sociological research shows that true integration is difficult to achieve, and these churches often develop a culture that minimizes racial conflict and promotes a colorblind ideology, which can itself silence discussions of systemic racism (Edwards 2008).

8.13: Comparative Analysis and Emerging Trends is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

8.14: The Takeaway

The intricate relationship between faith, race, and ethnicity in America reveals that religion is a profoundly social phenomenon. It is not a static set of beliefs but a living, breathing institution that is shaped by, and in turn shapes, the racial and ethnic landscape. For African Americans, religion has been a fortress and a freedom song; for Latinos, it is a syncretic, lived faith; for Asian Americans, it is a diverse and adaptive anchor for ethnic identity; and for Indigenous peoples, it is a decolonial spirituality of place and sovereignty.

The sociological data and theories presented in this chapter demonstrate that to understand American religion, one must understand race. And conversely, to fully grasp the enduring power of racial and ethnic identity in the United States, one must appreciate the sacred ties that bind communities together, providing meaning, resilience, and a powerful language for both contesting and navigating the world. The story of faith in America remains, at its heart, a story of its people—in all their complex, diverse, and spiritually vibrant communities.

8.14: The Takeaway is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

8.15: References

- Brave Heart, Maria Yellow Horse and Lyman M. DeBruyn. 1998. "The American Indian Holocaust: Healing Historical Unresolved Grief." *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 8(2):56–78.
- Chen, Carolyn. 2008. *Getting Saved in America: Taiwanese Immigration and Religious Experience*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cone, James H. 2010. *A Black Theology of Liberation*. 40th Anniversary Ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Durkheim, Émile. (1912) 1995. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Translated by K. E. Fields. New York: Free Press.
- Edwards, Korie L. 2008. *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Elizondo, Virgilio. 1997. *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Emerson, Michael O. and Christian Smith. 2000. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Espinosa, Gastón, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda. 2003. *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Garrouette, Eva Marie. 2003. *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Harris-Lacewell, Melissa. 2007. "Righteous Politics: The Role of the Black Church in Contemporary Politics." Pp. 145-63 in *From Pews to Polling Places: Faith and Politics in the American Religious Mosaic*, edited by J. Matthew Wilson. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Lincoln, C. Eric and Lawrence H. Mamiya. 1990. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Pew Research Center. 2021. "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace." Retrieved October 26, 2023 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/>).
- Pew Research Center. 2022. "Religious Landscape of U.S. Hispanics." Retrieved October 26, 2023 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/12/13/the-religious-landscape-of-u-s-hispanics/>).
- Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51(2):273–86.
- Warner, R. Stephen and Judith G. Wittner, eds. 1998. *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

8.15: References is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

9: Government, Law, and Politics

- 9.1: Race, Ethnicity, and the American Political-Legal System
- 9.2: Theoretical Frameworks- The State as a Racial Project
- 9.3: A Historical Legacy- The Legal Construction of Race
- 9.4: The Civil Rights Movement as a Counter-Project
- 9.5: Contemporary Legal-Political Battlegrounds
- 9.6: Affirmative Action and the Myth of Colorblindness
- 9.7: Resistance and Mobilization- Politics from Below
- 9.8: The Takeaway
- 9.9: References

This page titled [9: Government, Law, and Politics](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

9.1: Race, Ethnicity, and the American Political-Legal System

The foundational declaration that “all men are created equal” has existed in persistent tension with the American realities of slavery, genocide, and legalized inequality. This chapter takes a closer look at how the American political and legal systems are not neutral arbiters of a colorblind society but have historically been, and continue to be, primary sites for the construction and maintenance of racial hierarchy. Simultaneously, these systems have also been the central arena for challenging and dismantling that hierarchy. The state, through its laws, policies, and institutional practices, actively produces racial categories, distributes resources along racial lines, and shapes the very meaning of race itself (Omi and Winant 2014).

This chapter traverses this contested terrain by examining key sociological theories of the state and race, followed by a historical analysis of how law has codified racial difference. We will also take a closer look at contemporary political behavior, analyzing the racialization of party affiliation and the persistent significance of racially charged issues like voting rights, criminal justice, and immigration. We should get a clearer view of how politics and law are not merely reflective of societal racial attitudes but are constitutive forces that structure life chances and group identities in the United States.

9.1: Race, Ethnicity, and the American Political-Legal System is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

9.2: Theoretical Frameworks- The State as a Racial Project

Sociologists utilize several key frameworks to understand the relationship between race and the political-legal system. As mentioned in several previous chapters, Racial Formation Theory is the predominant framework for analyzing race as a socially constructed category. To reiterate, Omi and Winant argue that race is a “master category”—a fundamental organizing principle of social life that is continuously shaped and reshaped through racial projects. A racial project is “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (Omi and Winant, 1994:56). Every law or policy with a disparate racial impact—from the Naturalization Act of 1790 to the War on Drugs—constitutes a racial project.

Another notable and aforementioned theoretical framework is Critical Race Theory (CRT). Originating in legal studies, CRT posits that racism is not an aberration but a normal, embedded feature of the American legal system (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). CRT scholars argue that the law’s purported neutrality and colorblindness often mask and perpetuate systemic racism. Key tenets include the social construction thesis, interest convergence (the idea that advances for BIPOC communities only occur when they also serve White interests), and the centrality of experiential knowledge through storytelling (Crenshaw 1989).

Additionally aforementioned, often embedded in the CRT literature is the notion of Intersectionality. Coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality critiques single-axis analyses of discrimination. It argues that systems of race, gender, class, and other identities overlap to create unique modes of discrimination and disadvantage. For example, the political experiences and legal vulnerabilities of a poor, undocumented Latina are distinct from those of a wealthy Black man or a White working-class woman, requiring a multifaceted analysis of power.

9.2: Theoretical Frameworks- The State as a Racial Project is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

9.3: A Historical Legacy- The Legal Construction of Race

American law has historically served to define racial categories and allocate rights and privileges accordingly. The U.S. Constitution itself was a foundational racial project, enshrining slavery through the Three-Fifths Compromise and the Fugitive Slave Clause. The Naturalization Act of 1790 explicitly limited citizenship to “free White persons,” legally constructing Whiteness as a prerequisite for national belonging (Haney López 2006). This framework was upheld in pivotal Supreme Court cases. In *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), the Court ruled that Black people could not be citizens. In *Ozawa v. United States* (1922) and *United States v. Thind* (1923), the Court grappled with the citizenship eligibility of Asian immigrants, revealing the shifting and unscientific nature of the “White” category.

The post-Reconstruction era saw the rise of Jim Crow laws, a comprehensive system of legalized racial apartheid in the South. The Supreme Court’s 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which upheld the doctrine of “separate but equal,” provided the constitutional foundation for this system. This was a clear racial project that reorganized social space and redistributed public resources overwhelmingly to the advantage of Whites.

9.3: A Historical Legacy- The Legal Construction of Race is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

9.4: The Civil Rights Movement as a Counter-Project

The mid-20th century Civil Rights Movement represented a massive, organized challenge to the state's White-supremacist racial projects. Landmark legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 were transformative victories that redefined the state's relationship to race, moving from an enforcer of segregation to a (theoretical) guarantor of formal equality. However, this shift was neither complete nor permanent.

As political behavior in the United States is deeply racialized, a phenomenon rooted in the political realignment following the Civil Rights Movement, actual strategies based on race emerged. The Democratic Party's embrace of civil rights under President Lyndon B. Johnson, culminating in the VRA of 1965, triggered a dramatic partisan shift. Johnson himself reportedly remarked, "We have lost the South for a generation." This "Great Alignment" saw White southern conservatives, who had reliably voted Democratic since the Civil War, gradually migrate to the Republican Party, which adopted a "Southern Strategy" that used coded racial appeals to win their votes (Edsall and Edsall 1991). Conversely, Black voters, who had historically supported the Party of Lincoln, shifted their allegiance almost unanimously to the Democratic Party, where they remain its most loyal voting bloc. BIPOC communities, having historically been excluded from opportunity and targeted by state violence, are more likely to support an activist government that provides a social safety net and protects civil rights (Dawson 1994).

9.4: The Civil Rights Movement as a Counter-Project is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

9.5: Contemporary Legal-Political Battlegrounds

The struggle over the state's role in racial ordering continues in several key policy domains.

Voting Rights: The VRA of 1965 was a monumental achievement that dramatically increased Black voter registration. However, the Supreme Court's 2013 decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* invalidated a key provision (Section 4) that determined which jurisdictions with a history of discrimination needed federal preclearance before changing their voting laws. In the wake of this decision, many states have passed a wave of laws that restrict voting access—through strict voter ID requirements, purges of voter rolls, and reduced early voting—which disproportionately affect racial minorities (Bentele and O'Brien 2013). This represents a contemporary racial project that, while race-neutral on its face, functions to reorganize political power along racial lines.

The U.S. criminal justice system is also a paramount example of systemic racism as through the contemporary use of the carceral proxy. The “War on Drugs,” launched in the 1970s and 1980s, targeted Black and Brown communities despite similar rates of drug use across races. Michelle Alexander (2010) argues that this system functions as a “New Jim Crow,” creating a permanent undercaste through mass incarceration, felon disenfranchisement, and legal discrimination in housing and employment. Black Americans are incarcerated at nearly five times the rate of White Americans (Nellis 2021). This system is sustained by a feedback loop between law enforcement practices, punitive legislation, and media portrayals that link crime to people of color.

U.S. immigration policy has also always been a racial project, determining who is worthy of becoming American. The 1965 Hart-Cellar Act abolished national-origins quotas but also established new restrictions that criminalized migration, particularly from the Western Hemisphere (Massey and Pren 2012). Contemporary debates over immigration are saturated with racialized narratives that paint Latino and other non-White immigrants as criminal threats (Chavez 2013). Policies like “Remain in Mexico” and the repealing of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) create a legally precarious population, reinforcing a racialized boundary between “true” Americans and perpetual foreigners.

In even more recent instances, the Trump Administration has imposed massive Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) sweeps, seemingly targeting a whole host of individuals that do not meet the proximate the White ideal. Many immigration advocates have noted that these ICE agents used racial profiling as their main indicator in distinguishing who should be apprehended. These sweeps have been particularly difficult on the Latinx community, not necessarily identifying individuals due to criminal arrest warrants or status, but more commonly by darker phenotypes and even the sound of spoken Spanish.

9.5: Contemporary Legal-Political Battlegrounds is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

9.6: Affirmative Action and the Myth of Colorblindness

Affirmative action policies represent a racial project designed to remediate past discrimination and promote diversity. They have been fiercely contested, with opponents successfully framing them as “reverse discrimination” that violates the principle of colorblindness. The recent Supreme Court decision in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* (2023) effectively ended race-conscious admissions, embracing a “colorblind” ideology that CRT scholars argue will perpetuate inequality by ignoring the enduring effects of systemic racism (Bonilla-Silva 2018). This legal shift demonstrates the ongoing power of the state to define the permissible terms of racial discourse and intervention.

9.6: Affirmative Action and the Myth of Colorblindness is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

9.7: Resistance and Mobilization- Politics from Below

In the face of state-sponsored racial projects, communities of color have consistently engaged in political resistance and mobilization. Political participation extends beyond voting. It includes social movements (Black Lives Matter, the DREAMers), legal advocacy (NAACP Legal Defense Fund), and community organizing. These efforts often employ an intersectional approach, as seen in the Movement for Black Lives, which connects police violence to economic justice, LGBTQ+ rights, and disability justice.

The browning of America, where the U.S. is projected to become “majority-minority” around 2045, is a powerful demographic force shaping the political landscape (Frey 2018). This change has triggered both mobilization among communities of color seeking greater political representation and a potent backlash among some White voters, a phenomenon known as racial threat (Blalock 1967), which has been linked to support for restrictive policies and the rise of nativist politics.

Situated in the background of history was the election of Barack Obama in 2008, and arguably the engine of irony that generated so much of the pushback and hateful rhetoric found among this browning of America and other movements that divide along racial lines. Although Obama’s election was a milestone of change, it didn’t actually usher in the dawn of a “post-racial” America. Instead, sociological research indicates that his presidency, rather than ending racism, often exacerbated racial anxieties and spurred a more virulent and explicit White backlash (Tesler and Sears 2010). This underscores the complexity of racial politics and the limitations of symbolic representation in addressing deep-seated structural inequities.

9.7: Resistance and Mobilization- Politics from Below is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

9.8: The Takeaway

The American political and legal systems are, and have always been, central to the story of race. From the constitutional enshrinement of slavery to the colorblind rhetoric of the contemporary Supreme Court, the state has never been a passive observer of racial dynamics. It is an active participant, constructing racial categories, enforcing racial boundaries, and allocating societal resources along racial lines through a continuous series of racial projects.

The sociological frameworks of Racial Formation and Critical Race Theory provide the necessary tools to pierce the veil of neutrality and colorblindness, revealing the law as a site of ongoing racial contestation. The deep racial cleavages in partisan identity, the devastating impact of the carceral state, and the fierce battles over voting and immigration rights all testify to the enduring power of race in American public life. Understanding this is not an academic exercise; it is essential for comprehending the fundamental structures of power, privilege, and inequality in the United States and for envisioning a path toward a more genuinely just and inclusive polity.

9.8: The Takeaway is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

9.9: References

- Alexander, Michelle. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.
- Bentele, Keith G. and Erin E. O'Brien. 2013. "Jim Crow 2.0? Why States Consider and Adopt Restrictive Voter Access Policies." *Perspectives on Politics* 11(4):1088–1116.
- Blalock, Hubert M. 1967. *Toward a Theory of Minority-Group Relations*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2018. *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. 5th ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Chavez, Leo R. 2013. *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*. 2nd ed. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989(1):139–67.
- Dawson, Michael C. 1994. *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic. 2017. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. 3rd ed. New York: New York University Press.
- Edsall, Thomas Byrne and Mary D. Edsall. 1991. *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Frey, William H. 2018. *Diversity Explosion: How New Racial Demographics are Remaking America*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Haney López, Ian. 2006. *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*. 10th Anniversary Ed. New York: New York University Press.
- Massey, Douglas S. and Karen A. Pren. 2012. "Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy: Explaining the Post-1965 Surge from Latin America." *Population and Development Review* 38(1):1–29.
- Nellis, Ashley. 2021. *The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons*. The Sentencing Project.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. 1994. *Racial Formation in the United States*. New York: Routledge.
- Tesler, Michael and David O. Sears. 2010. *Obama's Race: The 2008 Election and the Dream of a Post-Racial America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
-

9.9: References is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

10: Deviance, Crime, and Disrepute

- [10.1: The Racialization of Crime and Social Control](#)
- [10.2: The Social Construction of Deviance and Crime](#)
- [10.3: Conflict Theory and the Racial Politics of Crime](#)
- [10.4: Interactionism and the Question of Definition](#)
- [10.5: The Racialization of Crime and Deviance- Historical Foundations of Racial Criminalization](#)
- [10.6: Social Ecology and Concentrated Disadvantage](#)
- [10.7: Racial Invariance Hypothesis and Structural Inequality](#)
- [10.8: Policing, Prosecution, and Sentencing- Racial Disparities in Legal Processing](#)
- [10.9: Prosecutorial Discretion and Charging Decisions](#)
- [10.10: Sentencing Disparities and Mandatory Minimums](#)
- [10.11: Collateral Consequences and Community Impacts](#)
- [10.12: Intersectionality- Race, Gender, and Incarceration](#)
- [10.13: Resistance, Reform, and Paths Forward- Social Movements and Advocacy](#)
- [10.14: Evidence-Based Policy Reforms](#)
- [10.15: Restorative and Transformative Justice Approaches](#)
- [10.16: The Takeaway](#)
- [10.17: References](#)

This page titled [10: Deviance, Crime, and Disrepute](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Salvador Jiménez Murguía](#).

10.1: The Racialization of Crime and Social Control

The criminal legal system in the United States exists within a broader landscape of racial stratification, where definitions of deviance and criminality have historically served to maintain social hierarchies and control marginalized populations. This chapter introduces the sociological intersections of race, deviance, and mass incarceration, wherein the American criminal legal system functions not as a neutral arbiter of justice but as a racialized institution that produces and reproduces social inequalities. Through the lens of foundational sociological theories—Functionalism, Conflict, and Interactionism—we explore how behaviors become criminalized, why racial disparities persist at every stage of the legal process, and how mass incarceration has become a defining feature of contemporary racial inequality.

The staggering statistical reality illustrates the profound racial dimensions of this system: Black Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at nearly five times the rate of White Americans, and they are admitted to local jails at more than four times the rate of White individuals (Pew Research Center 2023). These disparities cannot be explained by differential offending rates alone but rather reflect deeply embedded structural inequalities within law enforcement, judicial processes, and legislative policies. From the selective enforcement of drug laws to racial biases in sentencing and parole decisions, the system operates in ways that systematically disadvantage communities of color while often exempting more powerful groups from similar scrutiny.

This chapter features three central arguments. First, definitions of deviance and crime are socially constructed phenomena that reflect the interests and values of those in positions of power, rather than representing objective moral truths. Second, racial disparities in the criminal legal system represent the culmination of historical and contemporary forms of structural racism that extend beyond individual prejudice to encompass institutional practices and policies. Third, mass incarceration functions as a contemporary system of racial control that produces collateral consequences affecting not only incarcerated individuals but also their families and communities, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage across generations. Through this analysis, race and criminalization intersect to shape life chances and social outcomes in 21st-century America.

10.1: The Racialization of Crime and Social Control is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.2: The Social Construction of Deviance and Crime

Sociological inquiry into deviance and crime begins with the fundamental insight that these categories are not inherent properties of behaviors but are instead socially constructed designations that vary across historical periods and cultural contexts. Émile Durkheim, one of sociology's foundational theorists, posited that deviance serves important functions for society by clarifying moral boundaries and reinforcing social solidarity. According to this Functionalist perspective, the identification and punishment of deviant behavior strengthen community norms and values, though Durkheim noted that excessive rates of deviance could indicate underlying social dysfunction.

Some extensions of Durkheim's Functionalist model include Robert K. Merton's Structural Strain Theory (1938) and the framework of Differential Opportunity introduced by Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (1960). In Merton's Structural Strain Theory structural inequalities translate into disparate rates of deviant behavior across racial groups. Merton argued that when there is a disconnect between culturally prescribed goals (such as material success) and the legitimate means available to achieve them, individuals experience strain that may lead them to adopt deviant adaptations. In other words, deviance can be viewed as a break between commonly understood expectations conceived by the larger society, and one's varying ability (adaptations) to meet those expectations. These adaptations include innovation (using illegitimate means to achieve accepted goals), ritualism (abandoning goals while continuing to follow means), retreatism (rejecting both goals and means), and rebellion (seeking to replace existing goals and means with new ones). When applied to racialized contexts, Structural Strain Theory helps explain how systemic barriers to educational and economic opportunity in communities of color—resulting from historical discrimination, ongoing residential segregation, and labor market inequalities—create conditions conducive to higher rates of certain types of crime.

Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin extended this perspective through differential opportunity theory, which emphasizes that access to illegitimate means for achieving success is also unevenly distributed across communities. In neighborhoods where legitimate economic opportunities are scarce but illicit markets are well-established; individuals may be more likely to pursue criminal adaptations to strain. In this view, misrepresentations of BIPOC communities as backward, degenerative, or even uncivilized are undermined by the realization that various illegitimate economic opportunities and illicit markets are well grounded in these spaces due to systemic disparities—individuals are simply thrust into such environments, as opposed to creating them out of some inherent racial or ethnic flaw.

10.2: The Social Construction of Deviance and Crime is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.3: Conflict Theory and the Racial Politics of Crime

Conflict theory offers perhaps the most directly relevant framework for understanding the racial dimensions of crime and punishment. Building on Marxist foundations, conflict theorists argue that laws and their enforcement reflect and reinforce existing power imbalances within society, serving the interests of dominant groups while controlling subordinate populations. In contemporary American society, this manifests through criminal justice policies that disproportionately target communities of color while often overlooking or leniently addressing harmful behaviors committed by more powerful social actors.

Sociologist C. Wright Mills' concept of the power elite illuminates how those in positions of authority shape legal definitions and enforcement priorities to protect their interests. The historical criminalization of crack cocaine versus powder cocaine provides a compelling illustration of how class and racial biases become embedded in law. During the 1980s and 1990s, federal sentencing guidelines established a 100:1 disparity between crack and powder cocaine offenses, meaning possession of just 5 grams of crack (more common in poor urban communities of color) triggered the same mandatory minimum sentence as 500 grams of powder cocaine (more common among affluent White users). Although this disparity was reduced to 18:1 through the 2010 Fair Sentencing Act, the legacy of these racially discriminatory policies continues to affect incarcerated populations today.

10.3: Conflict Theory and the Racial Politics of Crime is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.4: Interactionism and the Question of Definition

From an Interactionist perspective, sociologist Howard Becker advanced the influential concept of labeling theory, arguing that “deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an ‘offender’” (1963:9). This theoretical approach emphasizes how individuals and behaviors become categorized as deviant through social processes, and how these labels can become internalized, potentially leading to secondary deviance as individuals adapt to their stigmatized identities. The application of deviant labels is neither random nor uniform; research consistently demonstrates that racial minorities, particularly African Americans, are disproportionately labeled as criminal or deviant across various social institutions, including schools, workplaces, and encounters with law enforcement.

10.4: Interactionism and the Question of Definition is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.5: The Racialization of Crime and Deviance- Historical Foundations of Racial Criminalization

The contemporary racial disparities within the criminal legal system have deep historical roots in America's legacy of slavery, segregation, and racial subordination. Following Reconstruction, southern states implemented Black Codes—laws that specifically targeted African Americans for behaviors that were either not criminalized or received lighter punishment when committed by Whites. These laws effectively criminalized Black existence and provided a legal mechanism to re-enslave African Americans through the convict leasing system; a system that allowed for convicted prisoners to be leased to private companies and other individuals as laborers. The association between Blackness and criminality became further entrenched through racial terror lynching, which was often justified through allegations of criminal behavior (particularly sexual violence against White women), regardless of evidence or due process.

The early 20th century witnessed the emergence of explicitly racially biased drug laws, such as anti-opium legislation targeting Chinese immigrants and early marijuana prohibitions associated with Mexican migrants. These laws established a pattern of using drug policy as a mechanism for racial control—a pattern that would reach its apex in the latter decades of the century with the War on Drugs. As legal scholar Michelle Alexander has compellingly argued, these historical practices evolved into the contemporary system of mass incarceration, which functions as a “New Jim Crow” (2010) by disproportionately targeting African Americans through ostensibly race-neutral laws and policies.

10.5: The Racialization of Crime and Deviance- Historical Foundations of Racial Criminalization is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.6: Social Ecology and Concentrated Disadvantage

The social ecology approach to crime emphasizes how neighborhood characteristics influence crime rates and encounters with the criminal legal system. Research in this tradition has consistently demonstrated that communities with high levels of concentrated disadvantage—marked by poverty, unemployment, single-parent households, and population turnover—experience higher rates of violence and other street crimes (Ulmer et al. 2012) Due to historical and ongoing residential segregation, communities of color, particularly African American neighborhoods, are disproportionately likely to exhibit these characteristics.

Sociologists Robert Sampson and Byron Groves found that poverty, ethnic heterogeneity, and family disruption strongly correlate with social disorganization—the weakened social bonds and institutional resources that ordinarily facilitate informal social control. Their research indicates that racial disparities in crime are largely explained by differential exposure to these ecological conditions rather than by race itself. However, this structural explanation must be balanced with recognition of how law enforcement practices intensify surveillance in disadvantaged communities of color, creating a feedback loop where higher policing leads to more arrests, reinforcing perceptions of criminality.

10.6: Social Ecology and Concentrated Disadvantage is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.7: Racial Invariance Hypothesis and Structural Inequality

The racial invariance hypothesis posits that the structural factors influencing crime rates operate similarly across racial groups—that is, the same social forces that predict crime in White communities also predict crime in Black and Latino communities (Ulmer et al. 2012). Empirical tests of this hypothesis have produced mixed results, with some studies finding that indicators of structural disadvantage explain a substantial portion of racial disparities in violence, while others identify residual racial differences even after accounting for these factors. (Ulmer et al. 2012).

Research examining racial and ethnic disparities in structural disadvantage and violence in California and New York found that White-Black and White-Latino gaps in poverty and female-headed households were positively associated with corresponding gaps in homicide and index violence rates (Ulmer et al. 2012). This research supports the view that differential exposure to adverse social conditions—rather than cultural or biological differences—explains a substantial portion of racial disparities in violent crime. However, the same research noted the “Latino paradox,” whereby Latino communities often exhibit lower crime rates than would be predicted based on their socioeconomic disadvantage alone, suggesting the potential protective influence of certain cultural factors such as strong family networks (Ulmer et al. 2012).

10.7: Racial Invariance Hypothesis and Structural Inequality is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.8: Policing, Prosecution, and Sentencing- Racial Disparities in Legal Processing

Racial disparities in the criminal legal system begin with policing practices that disproportionately target communities of color. Racial profiling—the use of race or ethnicity as grounds for suspicion in law enforcement—represents a persistent form of discrimination that affects everything from routine traffic stops to counterterrorism initiatives. Research consistently demonstrates that African American and Latino drivers are more likely to be stopped, searched, and subjected to force during police encounters, despite being less likely to be found with contraband than White drivers.

A 2020 analysis found that while White and Black people reported using illicit drugs at similar rates (approximately 22.5% for both groups), Black people accounted for 25% of drug possession arrests despite comprising only about 14% of the population (Pew Research Center 2023). This discrepancy between drug use and drug enforcement highlights how policing priorities and practices, rather than differential behavior, drive racial disparities in drug arrests. Furthermore, research indicates that Black and Latino individuals are more likely to be arrested for offenses that are subject to greater police discretion, such as disorderly conduct and loitering, while White individuals are more likely to be arrested for less discretionary offenses like driving under the influence (Prison Policy Initiative. n.d.).

10.8: Policing, Prosecution, and Sentencing- Racial Disparities in Legal Processing is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.9: Prosecutorial Discretion and Charging Decisions

Prosecutors wield enormous power in determining who enters the criminal legal system and under what charges, making their decisions a critical site for examining racial disparities. Research reveals substantial racial inequities in prosecutorial decision-making, with African American defendants more likely to be charged with offenses carrying mandatory minimum sentences and less likely to benefit from diversion programs or plea agreements that reduce charges (Prison Policy Initiative. n.d.). These disparities persist even when controlling for offense severity and criminal history.

A study of felony cases in a large urban jurisdiction found that prosecutors were more likely to file charges against Black defendants than similarly situated White defendants, and once charged, Black defendants faced more severe charges (Prison Policy Initiative. n.d.). This racial gap in charging decisions has cumulative effects throughout the legal process, as more serious charges typically lead to higher bail amounts, greater pressure to accept plea deals, and longer sentences upon conviction. The racialized exercise of prosecutorial discretion represents a largely invisible but profoundly consequential mechanism through which racial disparities are produced and amplified within the criminal legal system.

10.9: Prosecutorial Discretion and Charging Decisions is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.10: Sentencing Disparities and Mandatory Minimums

Racial disparities in sentencing have been extensively documented across federal and state court systems. Research controlling for legally relevant factors such as offense severity and criminal history consistently finds that Black and Latino defendants receive longer sentences than White defendants convicted of similar crimes (Prison Policy Initiative. n.d.). A comprehensive analysis of federal sentencing data found that Black male defendants received sentences on average 19.1% longer than similarly situated White male defendants between 2012 and 2016, even after accounting for violence in an offender's past, age, education, and other factors.

Mandatory minimum sentencing laws, which remove judicial discretion in sentencing for certain offenses, have disproportionately impacted communities of color. While these laws were promoted as race-neutral mechanisms to ensure uniformity and severity in punishment, their application has produced starkly racialized outcomes. The aforementioned crack versus powder cocaine sentencing disparity represents perhaps the most egregious example, but similar patterns exist across various offense categories. Research indicates that prosecutors are more likely to charge defendants of color with offenses triggering mandatory minimums, while offering White defendants more opportunities to plead to lesser charges that avoid these sentencing requirements.

10.10: Sentencing Disparities and Mandatory Minimums is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.11: Collateral Consequences and Community Impacts

The United States maintains the highest incarceration rate in the world, with approximately 2.3 million people confined in prisons and jails. This system of mass incarceration exhibits profound racial inequities at every level. Although Black Americans constitute approximately 13% of the U.S. population, they represent 38% of the incarcerated population in prisons and jails (Pew Research Center 2023). This disparity is even more pronounced in certain jurisdictions and for specific age groups. Among young African American men who have not completed high school, incarceration has become a disturbingly common experience, with studies suggesting that approximately one-third were imprisoned by their mid-30s.

The growth of these racial disparities corresponds closely with policy shifts beginning in the 1970s, particularly the declaration of the “War on Drugs.” Between 1980 and 2000, the number of incarcerated individuals for drug offenses increased from 41,000 to nearly 500,000, with African Americans disproportionately represented among those arrested, convicted, and imprisoned for drug crimes (Prison Policy Initiative. n.d.). Although Black and White Americans use drugs at similar rates, African Americans are nearly six times more likely to be incarcerated for drug offenses. These disparities cannot be attributed to differential offending but rather reflect policy choices regarding enforcement priorities, sentencing structures, and resource allocation within the criminal legal system.

10.11: Collateral Consequences and Community Impacts is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.12: Intersectionality- Race, Gender, and Incarceration

The consequences of mass incarceration extend far beyond prison walls, creating what sociologists term “collateral consequences” that affect individuals, families, and entire communities. Formerly incarcerated individuals face formidable barriers to employment, housing, education, and political participation—restrictions that are disproportionately borne by communities of color due to their overrepresentation in the incarcerated population. These collateral consequences create vicious cycles of disadvantage that contribute to intergenerational poverty and inequality.

Research documents how neighborhood incarceration rates in predominantly African American communities have reached levels so high that they destabilize social networks, remove potential earners and caregivers from households, and diminish collective efficacy—the capacity of communities to exercise informal social control (Prison Policy Initiative. n.d., Pew Research Center 2023). Children with incarcerated parents experience elevated risks of behavioral problems, academic difficulties, and later justice system involvement themselves, creating what some scholars term “the afterlife of incarceration” that extends across generations. These community-level effects represent a critical dimension of mass incarceration’s racial impact that is often overlooked in discussions focused solely on individual experiences.

10.12: Intersectionality- Race, Gender, and Incarceration is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.13: Resistance, Reform, and Paths Forward- Social Movements and Advocacy

Contemporary movements for criminal legal reform have brought renewed attention to the racial dimensions of mass incarceration and police violence. The Black Lives Matter movement, emerging in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's killer and further catalyzed by police killings of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and others, has centered the experiences of communities most impacted by punitive policing and incarceration. Through street protests, social media campaigns, and policy advocacy, this movement has elevated public awareness of systemic racism within law enforcement and the broader legal system.

Parallel movements led by formerly incarcerated individuals have advocated for “ban the box” policies limiting employment discrimination against people with criminal records, restoration of voting rights, and improved reentry services. These movements emphasize the expertise of directly impacted communities in designing solutions to the problems of mass incarceration. Their advocacy has contributed to significant policy changes at local, state, and federal levels, including sentencing reforms, decarceration initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic, and increased scrutiny of prosecutorial practices (Prison Policy Initiative. n.d.).

10.13: Resistance, Reform, and Paths Forward- Social Movements and Advocacy is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.14: Evidence-Based Policy Reforms

Research on racial disparities has informed several promising policy reforms aimed at creating a more equitable criminal legal system. Sentencing reforms, including the reduction or elimination of mandatory minimums and the expansion of judicial discretion, have shown potential to mitigate racial disparities while maintaining public safety. Several states have reclassified certain drug and property offenses from felonies to misdemeanors, reducing both the scale of incarceration and its disproportionate impact on communities of color.

Pretrial reforms addressing cash bail have gained traction as research reveals how pretrial detention pressures defendants to accept plea deals and disproportionately affects low-income defendants of color. Jurisdictions implementing risk assessment tools (with appropriate safeguards against algorithmic bias) and alternative release programs have reduced pretrial detention rates without increasing crime. Similarly, diversion programs that route individuals with substance use or mental health challenges away from incarceration and toward treatment have demonstrated potential to address underlying needs while reducing racial disparities in case outcomes (Pew Research Center 2023).

10.14: Evidence-Based Policy Reforms is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.15: Restorative and Transformative Justice Approaches

Beyond reforms to the existing criminal legal system, some advocates and scholars propose more fundamental shifts toward restorative justice models that emphasize healing, accountability, and community engagement rather than punitive exclusion. Restorative practices—including victim-offender mediation, family group conferencing, and peacemaking circles—originated in Indigenous traditions and have been adapted in various communities as alternatives to conventional criminal processing. Research suggests these approaches can reduce recidivism while providing greater satisfaction for victims, though questions remain about their scalability and potential for net-widening.

Transformative justice frameworks go further by seeking to address the root causes of harm through community-based responses that do not involve the state criminal legal system at all. These approaches, often developed within communities of color and LGBTQ communities, aim to build capacity for preventing and addressing violence without relying on policing or incarceration. While still experimental in many respects, transformative justice initiatives represent growing recognition that meaningful responses to racial injustice in the criminal legal system may require looking beyond that system entirely.

10.15: Restorative and Transformative Justice Approaches is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.16: The Takeaway

The sociological examination of race, deviance, and mass incarceration reveals a system characterized by profound and persistent racial inequities that reflect and reinforce broader patterns of social stratification. From the social construction of criminality to the racial disparities in policing, prosecution, and punishment, the American criminal legal system functions as a racialized institution that disproportionately targets and punishes communities of color. These disparities cannot be adequately explained by differential offending rates but instead stem from historical legacies of racial control, contemporary policies that appear race-neutral but produce racially disparate outcomes, and the routine exercise of discretion by legal actors in ways that disadvantage minority defendants.

The consequences of this system extend far beyond prison walls, creating collateral damage that affects families, communities, and generations. Mass incarceration has become a key mechanism through which racial inequality is produced and maintained in contemporary America, limiting economic mobility, disrupting social networks, and diminishing political power in communities of color. These effects compound other forms of structural disadvantage, including residential segregation, educational inequality, and employment discrimination, creating overlapping systems of racial subordination.

Moving forward requires confronting the uncomfortable reality that racial equity cannot be achieved through incremental reforms alone but necessitates more fundamental reimagining of public safety and justice. This includes reducing reliance on incarceration as a response to social problems, investing in communities rather than policing and prisons, and developing alternative approaches to harm and conflict that do not reproduce existing hierarchies. The sociological perspectives outlined in this chapter—from conflict theory’s emphasis on power to labeling theory’s focus on social reactions—provide essential tools for this work, helping to illuminate the mechanisms through which racial disparities are produced and sustained.

As public awareness of these issues grows and advocacy movements gain momentum, opportunities for meaningful change continue to emerge. However, progress requires sustained attention to the racial dimensions of crime and punishment, willingness to question long-held assumptions about safety and justice, and commitment to building systems that affirm human dignity rather than perpetuate historical patterns of exclusion and control. The path toward a more just future begins with clear-eyed assessment of the present—an assessment that sociology is uniquely positioned to provide.

10.16: The Takeaway is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

10.17: References

Alexander, Michelle, 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.

Becker, Howard S. 1963. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: Free Press.

Cloward, Richard A. and Lloyd E. Ohlin. 1960. *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs*. New York: Free Press.

Durkheim, Émile. (1895) 1962. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Translated by Sarah A. Solovay and John H. Mueller. New York: Free Press.

Merton, Robert K. 1938. "Social Structure and Anomie." *American Sociological Review* 3(5):672d–682.

Mills, C. Wright. 1956. *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Pew Research Center. 2023. "Racial Disparities Exist in Many U.S. Jails." Retrieved July 10, 2025. (<https://www.PewResearchCenter.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2023/05/racial-disparities-persist-in-many-us-jails>.)

Prison Policy Initiative. n.d. "Racial and Ethnic Disparities: Research and Statistics on Racial Ethnic Disparities in the Criminal Legal System." Retrieved June 12, 2025. (https://www.prisonpolicy.org/research...c_disparities/).

Sampson, Robert J., and Byron W. Groves. 1989. "Community Structure and Crime: Testing Social-Disorganization Theory." *American Journal of Sociology* 94(4):774–802.

Ulmer, Jeffery T., Casey T. Harris, Darryl Steffensmeier. 2012. "Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Structural Disadvantage and Crime: White, Black, and Hispanic Comparisons. 93(3): 799-819.

10.17: References is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

11: Labor, Employment and Economy

- 11.1: The Persistence of Racial Inequality in the American Workplace
- 11.2: Theoretical Foundations- Understanding Race in the Labor Market
- 11.3: Latinx Workers- Between Progress and Precarity
- 11.4: African American Workers- The Persistent Crisis of Black Employment
- 11.5: Asian American Workers- Beyond the Model Minority
- 11.6: Indigenous Workers- Historical Legacies and Contemporary Realities
- 11.7: Systemic Barriers- Discrimination, Segregation, and Wage Gaps Across Groups
- 11.8: Policy, Resistance, and Paths Forward
- 11.9: The Takeaway
- 11.10: References

11: Labor, Employment and Economy is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

11.1: The Persistence of Racial Inequality in the American Workplace

The American labor market has never been a level playing field. While equal opportunity has been enshrined in law and celebrated in national mythology, stark racial disparities in employment, wages, and economic security persist with remarkable tenacity. In a nation built simultaneously on ideals of freedom and systems of racial subordination, work has always been racially coded, with distinct forms of labor assigned to different racial groups and rewarded accordingly. Today, as the United States approaches a projected “majority-minority” demographic within decades, understanding how race continues to structure economic opportunity is not merely an academic exercise but a critical imperative for social justice and economic stability. This chapter examines the complex relationship between race, ethnicity, and the American economy through four key racialized groups: Latinx, African American, Asian American, and Indigenous workers. We argue that the labor market does not simply reflect pre-existing racial inequalities but actively produces and reproduces them through discriminatory mechanisms that are both overt and subtle, intentional and institutional.

Despite significant gains since the Civil Rights era, structural barriers continue to produce profound economic disparities. At the time of writing, the Black unemployment rate sits at 7.5%—significantly higher than other groups and rising, while Black women in particular have experienced a sharp decline in employment (Economic Policy Institute 2025, National Community Reinvestment Coalition 2025). Latinx workers, despite some recent income gains, report widespread financial precarity, with 63% rating their financial situation as only fair or poor (Pew Research Center 2025). Indigenous peoples have the lowest employment-to-population ratio and highest unemployment rate among all racial groups (Button and Walker 2020). Even Asian Americans, often stereotyped as a uniformly successful “model minority,” report significant discrimination in employment, with 27% experiencing discrimination in job applications and 25% in equal pay and promotions (McMurtry et al. 2019). These disparities cannot be explained by individual choices or human capital deficiencies alone; they reflect enduring structures of racial hierarchy embedded within American economic institutions.

This chapter employs three complementary sociological frameworks to analyze these patterns: structural racism theory, which examines how institutions systematically disadvantage certain racial groups; segmented labor market theory, which explores how different racial groups are funneled into distinct economic sectors with varying rewards; and intersectionality, which illuminates how race intersects with gender, immigration status, and class to produce unique forms of advantage and disadvantage. Through these lenses, we will explore historical contexts, contemporary trends, labor movements, and policy implications. The chapter proceeds with a theoretical overview, followed by sections examining each major racialized group in detail, an analysis of systemic barriers across groups, and finally a discussion of resistance, policy interventions, and paths forward toward a more equitable economic future.

11.1: The Persistence of Racial Inequality in the American Workplace is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

11.2: Theoretical Foundations- Understanding Race in the Labor Market

To comprehend the persistence of racial inequality in employment, we must move beyond individualistic explanations and examine the structural and institutional frameworks that organize economic life along racial lines. Three theoretical perspectives offer particularly valuable insights for understanding the racial dynamics of the American labor market.

Structural Racism Theory posits that racial inequality is not merely the accumulation of individual prejudices but is embedded within the normal operations of societal institutions. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's concept of "racism without racists" helps explain how ostensibly color-blind policies and practices can produce racially disparate outcomes. In the labor market, this manifests through practices like network-based hiring that reproduces existing workforce demographics, standardized testing that may contain cultural biases, and credit checks that disproportionately disadvantage people of color. These mechanisms operate without requiring individual actors to hold explicitly racist beliefs, yet they systematically advantage some groups while disadvantaging others. As Pager and Shepherd (2008) note, contemporary discrimination often occurs through organizational and structural mechanisms rather than merely through individual prejudice. This framework helps explain why racial employment gaps persist even as explicit racial attitudes have become less socially acceptable.

Segmented Labor Market Theory, developed by sociologists like Michael Piore and Edna Bonacich, argues that the labor market is divided into distinct segments with different characteristics, rewards, and mobility prospects. The primary sector offers stable employment, good wages, benefits, and advancement opportunities, while the secondary sector features unstable jobs, low wages, few benefits, and limited mobility. Historically, BIPOC have been disproportionately concentrated in the secondary sector through mechanisms ranging from explicit exclusion to more subtle forms of steering. This theory helps explain not just wage disparities but differential access to the kinds of jobs that provide economic security and upward mobility. The concentration of Black and Latinx workers in sectors like service, hospitality, and temporary employment services—precisely the sectors most vulnerable to economic downturns—illustrates the continuing relevance of this framework (Economic Policy Institute 2025, National Community Reinvestment Coalition 2025).

Intersectionality, a concept mentioned in previous chapters, provides a crucial framework for understanding how multiple social positions (race, gender, class, immigration status, etc.) intersect to create unique experiences of advantage and disadvantage. This perspective warns against treating racial groups as monoliths and instead examines how positionalities within these groups produce varying economic outcomes. For instance, the experiences of a U.S.-born Black man, a Latinx immigrant, and a second-generation Asian American woman in the labor market differ significantly due to the intersection of their racial, gender, and immigration statuses. Recent data revealing that Black women are experiencing particularly severe employment declines while Black men's employment remains more stable powerfully illustrates the necessity of intersectional analysis (Economic Policy Institute 2025). Similarly, the finding that U.S.-born Latinxs rate their finances more positively than Latinx immigrants (43% vs. 28%) highlights how citizenship status intersects with ethnicity to shape economic experience.

11.2: Theoretical Foundations- Understanding Race in the Labor Market is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

11.3: Latinx Workers- Between Progress and Precarity

The Latinx labor experience in the United States embodies a central paradox of the contemporary American economy: measurable aggregate progress coupled with pervasive individual precarity. As the nation's largest ethnic minority group, Latinxs' economic fortunes increasingly define the broader health of the American labor market. Recent government data shows notable improvements, with Latinx median household income increasing by 5.5% between 2023 and 2024 and the poverty rate declining from 16.6% to 15.0% (Pew Research Center 2025). These aggregate gains, however, mask significant financial vulnerability at the household level. Approximately 63% of Latinxs rate their personal financial situation as only fair or poor, with immigrants, those with less education, and women reporting particularly negative assessments (Pew Research Center 2025). This divergence between macro-level indicators and micro-level experience reveals the incomplete nature of Latinx economic incorporation.

Latinx workers are disproportionately concentrated in sectors characterized by instability, low wages, and limited benefits. They are overrepresented in construction, hospitality, agriculture, and service occupations—precisely the sectors most vulnerable to economic fluctuations and least likely to offer protections like paid sick leave, health insurance, or retirement benefits. This occupational segregation helps explain why financial precarity persists even among those who are employed full-time. Remarkably, Latinx full-time workers are just as likely as unemployed Latinxs to report struggling to pay for basic necessities like food (35%), medical care (30%), and housing (30%) (Pew Research Center 2025). This startling finding challenges conventional wisdom about the protective power of employment and highlights how low-wage work fails to provide economic security. Furthermore, Latinx workers express heightened anxiety about workplace stability, with 36% extremely or very worried about losing pay if they need to take unexpected time off, and 31% similarly worried about job loss (Pew Research Center 2025). These concerns reflect both the precarious nature of their employment and, for many, their immigration status, which creates additional vulnerabilities to exploitation.

Despite these challenges, Latinx workers have a rich history of labor organizing and collective action that has significantly shaped American labor relations. From the pecan shellers' strike led by Emma Tenayuca in 1938 to the United Farm Workers (UFW) movement co-founded by César Chávez and Dolores Huerta in the 1960s, Latinx workers have been at the forefront of struggles for workplace dignity, fair wages, and humane conditions (Library of Congress. n.d.). The UFW's innovative strategies—including consumer boycotts, religious appeals, and theatrical public actions—not only won tangible gains for agricultural workers but also transformed the landscape of American labor organizing. More recently, Latinx workers have been central to organizing efforts in poultry processing plants, hotel chains, and janitorial services, often developing creative approaches to overcome barriers like immigration status and employer retaliation. These movements have consistently linked workplace demands with broader calls for civil rights, immigration reform, and political representation, reflecting an understanding that economic justice cannot be separated from social and political inclusion.

11.3: Latinx Workers- Between Progress and Precarity is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

11.4: African American Workers- The Persistent Crisis of Black Employment

The economic position of African American workers represents one of the most enduring and vexing paradoxes of the American experience: significant educational and occupational advancement alongside persistently high unemployment, particularly during economic downturns. The phrase “last hired, first fired” has defined Black employment for generations, reflecting how Black workers serve as the economy’s “shock absorbers”—disproportionately benefiting during expansions but bearing the brunt of contractions. As of August 2025, the Black unemployment rate stood at 7.5%, representing a concerning increase over previous months and years (Economic Policy Institute 2025, National Community Reinvestment Coalition 2025). This rate is approximately double the White unemployment rate, continuing a disparity that has remained remarkably consistent for decades despite fluctuations in the overall economy. The recent downturn has been particularly devastating for Black women, who have experienced a sharp decline in employment concentrated in professional and business services, manufacturing, and federal government sectors (Economic Policy Institute 2025). Between February and April 2025 alone, approximately 300,000 Black women left the labor force, with early and mid-career professionals being especially affected (National Community Reinvestment Coalition 2025).

This racial employment gap cannot be explained by educational differences or individual characteristics alone. Audit studies reveal that employers discriminate against Black applicants even when their qualifications are identical to White applicants. The seminal study by Bertrand and Mullainathan found that resumes with White-sounding names received 50% more callbacks than those with Black-sounding names, with higher-quality resumes yielding greater returns for White applicants than for Black applicants (Bertrand and Mullainathan. 2004). This discrimination occurs across occupations and industries and is not mitigated by employers’ professed commitments to equal opportunity. Furthermore, once hired, Black workers face barriers to advancement, with 25% of African Americans reporting discrimination in equal pay and promotions (McCurtry et al. 2019). These discriminatory patterns intersect with geographical and spatial factors, as Black workers are often concentrated in neighborhoods with fewer employment opportunities and longer commutes to job-rich areas—a legacy of historical housing discrimination and ongoing residential segregation.

The current employment crisis affecting Black workers has distinctive intersectional dimensions that demand careful analysis. Black women’s disproportionate losses in professional sectors may reflect the convergence of several factors: their overrepresentation in federal government jobs that have faced cuts, their concentration in administrative and human resource positions vulnerable to automation and outsourcing, and the compounding effects of both racial and gender bias (Economic Policy Institute 2025). Black men, while experiencing more stable employment rates overall, face their own challenges, particularly as nearly 40% work in production and logistics sectors that have lost almost 100,000 jobs due to global trade tensions (National Community Reinvestment Coalition 2025). Black youth face the most severe employment challenges of any demographic group, with an August 2025 jobless rate of 24.1% (National Community Reinvestment Coalition 2025). These youth employment crises have long-term consequences, as early career unemployment reduces lifetime earnings and increases the likelihood of future joblessness. The economic precarity facing the Black community is comprehensive, affecting men and women, young and old, across educational levels and occupations.

11.4: African American Workers- The Persistent Crisis of Black Employment is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

11.5: Asian American Workers- Beyond the Model Minority

The economic experiences of Asian American workers complicate simplistic narratives of racial progress and challenge the pervasive “model minority” stereotype that homogenizes a remarkably diverse population. While aggregate statistics often show Asian Americans with higher educational attainment and median household incomes than other racial groups, these figures mask substantial internal diversity, significant discrimination, and distinct occupational vulnerabilities. A nationally representative survey found that 27% of Asian Americans reported discrimination in job applications, while 25% experienced discrimination in equal pay and promotions (McCurtry et al 2019). These rates of perceived discrimination in employment are comparable to or exceed those reported by other racial minority groups, contradicting the assumption that Asian Americans have transcended racial barriers in the workplace. Furthermore, these aggregate figures conceal important variations among Asian subgroups, with South Asians reporting particularly high levels of institutional discrimination and microaggressions (McCurtry et al. 2019).

The model minority myth once again obscures several important realities. First, it erases the substantial economic diversity within the Asian American population, which includes both highly educated professionals and groups with high poverty rates, such as Cambodian, Hmong, and Bangladeshi Americans. Second, it ignores the historical and contemporary discrimination that Asian Americans face in the labor market, including exclusionary immigration laws, occupational licensing barriers, and “bamboo ceiling” effects that limit advancement into leadership positions. Third, it pits Asian Americans against other minority groups, suggesting that their putative success proves that racism is no longer a barrier to economic mobility—a narrative that serves to justify existing inequalities. Finally, the model minority stereotype creates pressure on Asian American workers to minimize experiences of discrimination and to accept unequal treatment without complaint, lest they disrupt the narrative of their group’s exceptionalism.

Asian American workers face distinct forms of occupational segregation and discrimination that reflect both their diversity and their racialization in the American context. While some subgroups are disproportionately represented in high-skill STEM fields and professions like medicine, others are concentrated in low-wage service sectors, including nail salons, restaurants, and garment manufacturing. This bipolar distribution reflects U.S. immigration policies that have selectively recruited both highly educated professionals and refugees with limited formal education. Within professional settings, Asian Americans often encounter implicit biases that stereotype them as technically competent but lacking leadership potential, creating advancement barriers despite strong educational credentials. Additionally, Asian Americans working in customer-facing roles or those with accents report frequent microaggressions and assumptions about their language abilities or cultural origins. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated anti-Asian discrimination, with many Asian American workers reporting heightened hostility in workplaces and public spaces. These experiences highlight how Asian Americans occupy a complex position in the American racial hierarchy—sometimes celebrated as a “model minority,” but always vulnerable to being perceived as perpetual foreigners regardless of their citizenship status or generational depth in the United States.

11.5: Asian American Workers- Beyond the Model Minority is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

11.6: Indigenous Workers- Historical Legacies and Contemporary Realities

The economic experiences of Indigenous workers in the United States are uniquely shaped by a history of colonization, displacement, and systematic exclusion from the mainstream economy. American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians face some of the most severe economic disparities of any racial group, with the lowest employment-to-population ratio (54.6% compared to 59.9% for Whites) and the highest unemployment rate (9.9% compared to 4.6% for Whites) (Button and Walker 2020). These aggregate figures, however, conceal significant geographical and tribal variations, with particularly severe disadvantages for those living on or near reservations where job opportunities are scarce and poverty rates approach 40%. The economic challenges facing Indigenous workers cannot be understood outside the historical context of land dispossession, forced assimilation, and the deliberate undermining of Indigenous economic systems—historical injustices that continue to structure contemporary opportunities through intergenerational poverty, educational disparities, and geographic isolation.

Recent research on discrimination against Indigenous workers presents seemingly paradoxical findings that warrant careful sociological interpretation. A large-scale audit study involving 13,516 resumes sent to employers in 11 cities found no statistically significant difference in callback rates between Indigenous and White applicants (Button and Walker 2020). This null finding contrasts with audit studies of other racial groups and with the substantial employment disparities that Indigenous people experience. Several factors may explain this apparent contradiction. First, the study examined only the initial callback stage of hiring, leaving open the possibility of discrimination at later stages (interviews, job offers, promotions). Second, the signals of Indigenous identity used in the study (volunteer experience mentioning Indigenous status, Indigenous language skills, certain names) may not have been sufficiently salient to trigger discriminatory responses from employers. Third, the study was conducted in urban areas with presumably tighter labor markets, whereas discrimination might be more pronounced in other contexts. Importantly, the researchers conducted complementary analyses of broader labor market data and found substantial unexplained gaps in unemployment rates (4.3 percentage points for American Indians/Alaska Natives) and wages (4.1% lower for Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders), suggesting that discrimination likely operates through mechanisms not captured by the audit methodology (Button and Walker 2020).

Indigenous workers face unique structural barriers that extend beyond individual acts of discrimination. For those living on reservations, geographic isolation limits access to employment opportunities, a problem exacerbated by inadequate infrastructure and transportation. The complex legal status of tribal lands creates uncertainties for both Indigenous entrepreneurs and outside investors, inhibiting economic development. Furthermore, the history of federal control over Indigenous education has produced school systems that often fail to prepare students for either higher education or contemporary job markets, creating human capital deficits that extend across generations. Even for Indigenous people who move to urban areas, maintaining connections to tribal communities and cultural practices can create tensions with workplace expectations and norms. These structural factors, combined with the intergenerational trauma resulting from policies like Indian boarding schools and forced relocation, create obstacles to labor market success that cannot be reduced to individual discrimination in hiring. Addressing Indigenous economic inequality therefore requires not merely enforcing anti-discrimination laws but implementing comprehensive policies that acknowledge historical injustices and support tribal sovereignty and self-determination in economic development.

11.6: Indigenous Workers- Historical Legacies and Contemporary Realities is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

11.7: Systemic Barriers- Discrimination, Segregation, and Wage Gaps Across Groups

While each racialized group faces distinct historical trajectories and contemporary challenges, they all confront systemic barriers in the American labor market that reflect underlying structures of racial hierarchy. These barriers operate through multiple interconnected mechanisms that collectively reproduce racial inequality across generations. Understanding these systemic patterns is essential for developing effective interventions to create a more equitable economy.

Hiring discrimination represents the most direct barrier, denying qualified candidates of color access to employment opportunities based on racial bias rather than merit. Audit studies consistently demonstrate that employers discriminate against racial minorities at the initial screening stage. As the Bertrand and Mullainathan study mentioned above details, resumes with White-sounding names received 50% more callbacks than identical resumes with Black-sounding names. This discrimination was not mitigated by the quality of the resume; in fact, higher-quality resumes yielded greater returns for White applicants than for Black applicants. Similarly, studies have documented discrimination against Latinx applicants, particularly those with names perceived as Mexican or who indicate limited English proficiency. While one recent audit study found no discrimination against Indigenous applicants at the callback stage (Button and Walker 2020), broader statistical analyses reveal unexplained racial gaps in employment outcomes that suggest discrimination may operate at later hiring stages or through other mechanisms. These discriminatory patterns are remarkably persistent across time, occupation, and region, indicating that they reflect deep-seated structures rather than isolated prejudices.

Occupational segregation channels workers of different racial groups into distinct sectors and occupations with varying rewards, prestige, and stability. This segregation is both horizontal (across different types of work) and vertical (within occupational hierarchies). Black and Latinx workers remain disproportionately concentrated in service, hospitality, and manual labor occupations, while White and Asian workers are overrepresented in professional and managerial positions. Even within the same occupation, workers of color are often relegated to less desirable positions or shifts. For example, in the healthcare sector, White workers are disproportionately represented among physicians and administrators, while Black and Latinx workers are overrepresented among nursing assistants and orderlies. This segregation is maintained through multiple mechanisms, including educational tracking, network-based hiring, and implicit biases in promotion decisions. The consequences are substantial: segregated occupations tend to have different wage structures, benefits packages, and working conditions, creating racialized patterns of economic security and vulnerability.

Wage gaps represent perhaps the most quantifiable manifestation of racial economic inequality. Even after controlling for education, experience, occupation, and other human capital variables, significant racial wage disparities persist. These gaps reflect not only current discrimination but also the cumulative effects of historical exclusion from wealth-building opportunities, including property ownership, higher education, and business development. The wage gap is particularly severe for Black workers, who earn approximately 25% less than White workers with similar qualifications (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004). Latinx workers also face substantial wage penalties, especially recent immigrants and those with limited English proficiency. Asian American workers, while often portrayed as economically successful, face a complex wage picture: some subgroups earn more than White workers on average, but others earn significantly less, and even high-earning Asian Americans often face a “bamboo ceiling” that limits advancement to the highest leadership positions. Indigenous workers experience some of the largest wage gaps, with median incomes substantially below the national average (Button and Walker 2020). These wage disparities have compounding effects over careers and generations, contributing significantly to the racial wealth gap that represents perhaps the most profound economic divide in American society.

11.7: Systemic Barriers- Discrimination, Segregation, and Wage Gaps Across Groups is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

11.8: Policy, Resistance, and Paths Forward

Confronting racial inequality in the labor market requires moving beyond diagnosis to action—developing policies, practices, and movements that can disrupt deeply embedded patterns of discrimination and disadvantage. This final section examines promising approaches at multiple levels, from workplace interventions to broad policy reforms, while acknowledging the formidable obstacles to meaningful change in a polarized political climate.

Labor organizing and collective action have historically been crucial vehicles for advancing economic justice for workers of color, and they remain vital today. The United Farm Workers (UFW), co-founded by César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, demonstrated how marginalized agricultural workers could leverage consumer boycotts, religious networks, and public storytelling to win unprecedented protections (Library of Congress n.d.). Their success inspired subsequent organizing drives among immigrant janitors, hotel workers, and poultry processors—often led by women of color who developed innovative strategies to overcome barriers like immigration status and employer retaliation. Contemporary movements like the Fight for \$15 have highlighted how minimum wage increases disproportionately benefit workers of color, while efforts to secure paid sick leave and predictable scheduling address forms of precarity that particularly affect racial minorities. These movements increasingly connect workplace demands with broader calls for racial justice, recognizing that economic inequality cannot be separated from systems of policing, immigration enforcement, and housing discrimination. For Indigenous workers, economic justice efforts are often intertwined with struggles for tribal sovereignty and control over natural resources, reflecting a distinctive understanding of the relationship between land, labor, and community well-being.

At the policy level, several approaches show promise for reducing racial disparities in employment and economic security. Strengthening enforcement of existing anti-discrimination laws represents a crucial first step, as current penalties are often insufficient to deter discriminatory practices. “Ban the box” legislation, which prohibits employers from asking about criminal history in initial job applications, helps mitigate the disproportionate impact of mass incarceration on communities of color. Targeted hiring programs, when carefully designed to withstand legal challenge, can help diversify workforces and create pipelines for workers of color into industries from which they have been historically excluded. Investments in high-quality job training and apprenticeship programs, particularly in growing sectors like healthcare and renewable energy, can help workers of color access stable, well-paying careers (National Community Reinvestment Coalition 2025). For Indigenous communities, policies that support tribal economic self-determination and honor treaty obligations are essential for addressing the unique structural barriers created by the reservation system. At the federal level, a return to rigorous enforcement of affirmative action guidelines—particularly following the Supreme Court’s restriction of race-conscious admissions in higher education—could help counteract the trend toward “race-neutral” policies that ignore persistent inequality.

Corporate practices and organizational change represent another crucial site for intervention. While many companies have adopted diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in recent years, their effectiveness varies widely. The most promising approaches go beyond symbolic gestures to implement concrete changes in hiring, promotion, compensation, and workplace culture. Structured hiring processes that use standardized rubrics and diverse hiring committees can reduce the influence of unconscious bias in personnel decisions. Transparent promotion criteria and salary ranges help mitigate the discretion that often enables discriminatory treatment. Mentorship and sponsorship programs can help workers of color navigate organizational politics and access advancement opportunities. Perhaps most importantly, companies must move beyond framing diversity as merely a matter of corporate social responsibility and instead recognize it as essential to innovation, customer connection, and long-term competitiveness in an increasingly diverse marketplace. These internal reforms should be complemented by examination of companies’ broader economic impacts, including contracting practices, investment patterns, and political activities that may reinforce or challenge structural racism.

The path toward racial economic justice faces significant political and ideological obstacles. The ascendance of “colorblind” ideology has made it increasingly difficult to implement race-conscious remedies, even as racial disparities persist or widen. Legal challenges have weakened affirmative action, disparate impact claims, and other tools for addressing systemic discrimination. Meanwhile, well-funded opposition campaigns have successfully framed efforts to address racial inequality as themselves discriminatory or as threats to “meritocracy.” These ideological battles occur within a context of deepening economic precariousness for many Americans, which can make cross-racial solidarity more difficult to sustain even as workers of all races face common challenges from automation, globalization, and the erosion of labor protections. Overcoming these obstacles will

require building broad coalitions that connect racial justice to broader economic populism, emphasizing how racial divisions have historically been exploited to undermine the bargaining power of all workers. It will also require developing new narratives about fairness, opportunity, and the common good that can resonate across racial lines while honestly confronting the specific histories and contemporary realities of different communities.

11.8: Policy, Resistance, and Paths Forward is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

11.9: The Takeaway

The American labor market remains deeply structured by race, with historical patterns of exclusion and exploitation continuing to shape contemporary opportunities and outcomes. As this chapter has demonstrated, Latinx, African American, Asian American, and Indigenous workers each navigate distinct economic landscapes shaped by unique histories, stereotypes, and structural barriers. Yet across these differences, common patterns emerge: persistent discrimination in hiring and promotion, occupational segregation that channels workers of color into less secure and rewarding positions, wage gaps that cannot be explained by human capital alone, and intersecting disadvantages based on gender, immigration status, and geography. These inequalities are not accidental or incidental features of the American economy; they are produced and reproduced by institutional practices, cultural narratives, and power relations that systematically advantage some groups while disadvantaging others.

Addressing these deep-seated inequities requires moving beyond piecemeal solutions to confront the underlying structures that produce racialized economic outcomes. This means recognizing that labor market discrimination is not merely a matter of individual prejudice but is embedded in the normal functioning of organizations, industries, and policy regimes. It means acknowledging that the “model minority” myth and other racial stereotypes actively distort our understanding of economic reality, obscuring both the diversity within racial groups and the common challenges they face. It means developing interventions that are both universal in their commitment to economic dignity and targeted in their recognition of historically created disadvantages. Most fundamentally, it means building a new common sense about work, worth, and fairness in a multiracial society—one that honors the contributions of all workers while honestly confronting the legacies of exclusion that continue to limit human potential and undermine collective prosperity.

The task is undeniably formidable, but history suggests grounds for cautious optimism. From the multiracial alliances that built the industrial labor movement to the immigrant worker organizing that continues to expand the boundaries of workplace rights, Americans have repeatedly demonstrated the capacity to challenge entrenched hierarchies and reinvent the social contract. In an era of demographic transformation, technological disruption, and climate crisis, building an inclusive economy is not merely a moral imperative but a practical necessity. The alternative—a society divided between a privileged minority and a precarious majority, with racial divisions hardening rather than healing—threatens not only economic stability but the very foundations of democratic life. The choice before us is whether to perpetuate a labor market organized around historical hierarchies or to create one worthy of our diverse and interdependent future.

11.9: The Takeaway is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

11.10: References

Bertrand, Marianne and Sendhil Mullainathan. 2004. “Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination.” *American Economic Review* 94(4):991–1013.

Button, Patrick and Brigham Walker. 2020. “Employment Discrimination against Indigenous Peoples in the United States: Evidence from a Field Experiment.” *Labour Economics* 65:101851.

Economic Policy Institute. 2025. “What’s Behind Rising Unemployment for Black Workers?”

Library of Congress. n.d. “Labor & Organization.” *Latinx Americans in Business and Entrepreneurship: A Resource Guide*.

McMurtry, Caitlin, Mary G. Findling, Logan S. Casey, Robert J. Blendon, John M. Benson, Justin M. Sayde, and Carolyn Miller. 2019. “Discrimination in the United States: Experiences of Asian Americans.” *Health Services Research* 54(Suppl 2):1419–1430.

National Community Reinvestment Coalition. 2025. “The Jobs Recession Is Affecting the Entire Black Community.” Washington, DC: NCRC.

Pager, Devah and Hana Shepherd. 2008. “The Sociology of Discrimination: Racial Discrimination in Employment, Housing, Credit, and Consumer Markets.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 34:181–209.

Pew Research Center. 2025. “The State of Latinxs’ Finances: Outlook, Experiences, Preparedness for a Financial Downturn.” Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

11.10: References is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

12: Teaching, Learning, and Education

- 12.1: The Color of Knowledge
- 12.2: The Illusion of Meritocracy
- 12.3: Historical Foundations- Legacies of Exclusion and Control
- 12.4: The Architecture of Inequality- Structures, Funding, and Discipline
- 12.5: Curricula, Tracking, and the Social Dynamics of Achievement
- 12.6: Divergent Pathways- Comparative Analysis of Racialized Groups
- 12.7: Sites of Resistance and Visions for Transformation
- 12.8: The Takeaway
- 12.9: References

12: Teaching, Learning, and Education is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

12.1: The Color of Knowledge

This chapter examines the complex, systemic relationship between race, ethnicity, and educational inequality in the United States. The education system is not a neutral meritocracy but a central institution through which racial hierarchies are reproduced and contested. Moving beyond simple narratives of achievement gaps, the analysis employs core sociological frameworks—including structural racism, racial formation theory, and intersectionality—to dissect how historical legacies, institutional practices, and contemporary politics create and sustain disparate educational experiences and outcomes for different racialized groups. By focusing on the distinct yet interconnected realities of Latinxs, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Indigenous peoples, this chapter reveals a landscape of persistent inequity in funding, curriculum, discipline, and access, while also highlighting sites of resistance, reform, and the enduring struggle for educational justice. The evidence demonstrates that race remains a “master category” (Allen et al. n.d.) that profoundly shapes who gets taught, what they learn, and the futures available to them.

12.1: The Color of Knowledge is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

12.2: The Illusion of Meritocracy

The American education system is founded on a powerful, enduring myth: that it operates as a great equalizer, a meritocratic engine where talent and effort alone determine success. This narrative of colorblind opportunity obscures a more troubling reality. For generations, the U.S. educational landscape has been a primary site of unequal treatment, access, and outcome based on race and ethnicity (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). The dream of *Brown v. Board of Education*—that desegregated schools would deliver equality—remains largely unfulfilled 70 years later, as schools have re-segregated and inequalities have morphed into new, often more insidious, forms (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2023, Allen et al. n.d.). This chapter posits that education is a racial project, a key arena where racial categories are created, given meaning, and linked to the distribution of society's resources (Allen et al. n.d.). To understand contemporary disparities in test scores, graduation rates, and college access is to understand how racism is embedded not in individual prejudices alone, but in the very architecture of the system itself—its funding mechanisms, disciplinary policies, curricular choices, and pedagogical assumptions.

The analysis is guided by three key sociological perspectives. Structural Racism Theory helps us see how disparities are baked into policies and institutional practices that may appear race-neutral (Darling-Hammond 2001). Omi and Winant's Racial Formation Theory provides the critical insight that race is a social construct used to organize social relations and validate hierarchies, with education being a primary site of this formation (Allen et al, n.d.). Finally, an intersectional lens is essential for understanding how race compounds with class, gender, immigration status, and language to create unique educational pathways and barriers (Allen et al. n.d.). We will trace these dynamics across four major pan-ethnic groups, acknowledging the immense diversity within each while analyzing the common structural forces they navigate. The persistent truth is that a child's racial background remains one of the most powerful predictors of their educational journey from kindergarten to college.

12.2: The Illusion of Meritocracy is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

12.3: Historical Foundations- Legacies of Exclusion and Control

The roots of today's educational inequalities are deeply planted in centuries of explicit racial exclusion and control. For African Americans, this history began with anti-literacy laws enacted across slave states between 1740 and 1867, making it a crime to teach an enslaved person to read or write (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). This was not merely neglect but an active policy of intellectual deprivation designed to maintain subjugation. The post-Civil War era of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) legally sanctioned "separate but equal" schools, a doctrine that cemented underfunded, inferior education for Black children for nearly 60 years (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2023). While the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision declared this unconstitutional, the implementation triggered massive resistance, "White flight" to suburbs, and the erosion of Black teaching professionals, leaving a legacy of re-segregation and unequal resources that defines many districts today (Darling-Hammond 2001, Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024).

For Indigenous communities, federal education policy was a tool of cultural genocide and forced assimilation. The federally funded boarding school system, operational well into the 20th century, explicitly aimed to "Kill the Indian, Save the Man" by forcibly removing children from their families, prohibiting native languages, and erasing cultural practices. This traumatic history of educational violence directly contributes to contemporary disparities and the systemic underfunding of schools on reservations (Annie E Casey Foundation 2024).

Latinx and Asian American communities have faced distinct but parallel histories of exclusion and segregation. Mexican American students in the Southwest were routinely placed in segregated "Mexican schools" with inferior facilities and curriculum, a practice legally challenged in cases like *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947). Asian Americans confronted exclusionary immigration laws and, for Japanese Americans, the catastrophic disruption of internment during World War II. The 1965 Immigration Act then dramatically diversified these populations, creating new educational challenges and opportunities tied to language, immigration status, and the reception of new groups into a stratified society (Allen et al. n.d.) These historical injustices are not past; they are the bedrock upon which today's "opportunity gaps" are built.

12.3: Historical Foundations- Legacies of Exclusion and Control is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

12.4: The Architecture of Inequality- Structures, Funding, and Discipline

Contemporary educational inequality is maintained through interconnected structural features that systematically disadvantage students of color. The most fundamental of these is profoundly unequal school funding. Unlike most industrialized nations that fund schools centrally, the U.S. relies heavily on local property taxes, linking school quality directly to neighborhood wealth (Darling-Hammond 2001). This creates staggering disparities: the wealthiest 10% of U.S. school districts spend nearly 10 times more than the poorest 10% (Darling-Hammond 2001). Students of color are concentrated in the most under-resourced districts. Black students are twice as likely as White peers to be in inadequately funded districts and 3.5 times more likely to be in “chronically underfunded” ones (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). The result is a tangible deprivation of resources: fewer qualified and experienced teachers, larger class sizes, outdated textbooks, and a lack of advanced coursework, laboratories, and technology (Darling-Hammond 2001).

This resource segregation is mirrored by racial and ethnic isolation. Today, 60% of Latinx students and 59% of Black students attend schools where over 75% of their classmates share their race or ethnicity (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). Conversely, White students are most likely to attend schools with few students of color (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). These racially isolated schools are not just separate; they are inherently unequal in their access to the social and cultural capital that facilitates academic and professional success.

Within schools, disciplinary policies function as a critical mechanism of inequality, fueling the “school-to-pipeline.” Black students face disproportionately harsh punishment for subjective infractions. They are more than 3.5 times as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension as White students (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). The consequences are severe: suspension doubles the risk of dropping out, which in turn triples the risk of justice system involvement (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). The problem is exacerbated by the presence of police in schools, which causes arrests for disorderly conduct to jump fivefold (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). This punitive approach contrasts starkly with the supportive environments—with counselors, nurses, and social workers—that are more prevalent in affluent, White-majority schools (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024).

12.4: The Architecture of Inequality- Structures, Funding, and Discipline is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

12.5: Curricula, Tracking, and the Social Dynamics of Achievement

Inequality is also perpetuated through what is taught (and not taught) and how students are sorted within schools. The standard curriculum has long been criticized for centering White, Euro-American experiences and marginalizing the histories and contributions of people of color. This creates an “epistemic injustice” where the knowledge of dominant groups is validated while that of others is erased. Recent political battles highlight the high stakes of this conflict. Since 2021, at least 18 states have imposed bans or restrictions on teaching about race and racism (Najarro 2023). Despite this, polling indicates strong public support (82-85%) for teaching the history of racism and slavery and its contemporary legacy (Najarro 2023). Efforts to implement Black studies curricula are supported by 73% of voters, suggesting a significant disconnect between political legislation and public desire for inclusive education (Najarro 2023).

Academic tracking—the practice of sorting students into different course sequences (e.g., remedial, general, honors, Advanced Placement)—often replicates racial segregation within supposedly integrated schools. Students of color, particularly Black and Latinx students, are disproportionately placed in lower-track classes that offer less rigorous, more rote instruction, while White and Asian American students are overrepresented in gifted and AP courses (Darling-Hammond 2001). This tracking is influenced by implicit bias in teacher expectations and recommendations, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of lower achievement.

The pursuit of academic success itself carries different social meanings and costs across racial groups. Research informed by John Ogbu’s cultural-ecological theory suggests that some involuntary minority groups may develop an oppositional cultural frame, where academic success is stigmatized as “acting White” (Fuller-Rowell and Doan 2010). However, this view is contested. Alternative frameworks, like those offered by Margaret Beale Spencer, posit that such attitudes are not inherent to Black culture but are contextual coping strategies in response to stereotype threat and discrimination in predominantly White, high-achieving settings (Fuller-Rowell and Doan 2010). Empirical studies show that African American and Native American adolescents can experience greater social costs for academic success, particularly in high-achieving schools where they are a small minority (Fuller-Rowell and Doan 2010). This complex social-psychological terrain underscores that achievement gaps are not merely about individual effort but are shaped by powerful peer dynamics and identity negotiations in racialized school contexts.

12.5: Curricula, Tracking, and the Social Dynamics of Achievement is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

12.6: Divergent Pathways- Comparative Analysis of Racialized Groups

While all students of color face systemic barriers, their experiences are shaped by distinct historical relationships with the U.S. state and by contemporary stereotypes. An intersectional analysis that avoids pan-ethnic aggregation is crucial (Allen et al. n.d.). African American Students sit at the nexus of multiple, compounding inequalities: severe funding gaps, intense segregation, and the highest rates of exclusionary discipline. The academic consequences are stark. In 2022, 84% of Black fourth graders and 91% of Black eighth graders scored below proficiency in reading and math, respectively (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). The Black-White achievement gap is notable for widening as students progress through school, suggesting that school experiences themselves exacerbate initial disparities (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2023). The high school graduation rate for Black students (81%) lags behind the national average (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). The “acting White” hypothesis, while debated, points to the real social and psychological burdens of achieving in environments that may be hostile or unwelcoming (Fuller-Rowell and Doan 2010).

Latinx Students share similar challenges with school funding and segregation, with 60% attending highly concentrated minority schools (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). A significant differentiating factor is language. For many Latinx students, particularly immigrants or children of immigrants, the process of English language acquisition is central to their academic trajectory. Notably, the Latinx-White achievement gap tends to narrow during elementary school, a pattern scholars attribute partly to the development of English proficiency (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2023). However, disparities remain large, with 80% of Latinx fourth graders reading below proficiency. Graduation rates (83%) are above those for Black students but still below the national average. Their experience is also highly shaped by nativity, immigration generation, and national origin—differences often masked by the pan-ethnic “Hispanic” label (Allen et al. n.d.).

Asian American Students are frequently stereotyped as a monolithic “model minority”—inherently successful and high-achieving. This stereotype is dangerously misleading. Aggregate data shows high outcomes: 94% graduation rate and only 45% of fourth graders below reading proficiency (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). However, this conceals vast intra-group disparities. When data is disaggregated, it reveals that Southeast Asian groups (e.g., Hmong, Cambodian, Lao) and Pacific Islanders have significantly lower achievement and attainment rates, akin to other disadvantaged communities (Allen et al. n.d.). The model minority myth is weaponized to deny the existence of racism against Asians and to pit them against other groups in debates over affirmative action, while also erasing the needs of their own struggling subgroups (Allen et al. n.d.).

Indigenous Students (American Indian, Alaska Native) face the most severe outcomes in the system, a direct legacy of historical educational violence and ongoing neglect. They have the lowest high school graduation rate of any group at 74%, and 82% of American Indian fourth graders score below proficiency in reading (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). The challenges are compounded by geographic isolation on reservations, where schools are chronically underfunded and lack infrastructure. Their educational experience is uniquely tied to issues of tribal sovereignty and the fight for culturally sustaining curricula that honors, rather than erases, Indigenous knowledge and history.

12.6: Divergent Pathways- Comparative Analysis of Racialized Groups is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

12.7: Sites of Resistance and Visions for Transformation

Confronting this entrenched inequality requires systemic transformation, and it is actively being pursued through research, policy, and practice. Critical theoretical frameworks are essential tools for this work. Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education, pioneered by scholars like Gloria Ladson-Billings, explicitly centers race and racism to analyze school policy and practice. Quantitative Critical Race Theory (QuantCrit) challenges the neutrality of educational data and statistics, insisting that numbers are not objective but reflect the racial biases of their collectors and interpreters. These theories undergird calls for data disaggregation to break down pan-ethnic categories and reveal hidden inequities, such as those between East Asian and Southeast Asian students (Allen et al. n.d.).

At the policy and pedagogical level, evidence-based reforms are emerging. School finance reform is fundamental, advocating for increased federal funding and state formulas that direct resources based on student need, not local property wealth (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). To dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, advocates push to replace police with counselors and social workers, and to adopt restorative justice practices over punitive discipline (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). The diversification of the teaching workforce has demonstrated powerful effects: Black students randomly assigned to at least one Black teacher in elementary school see significant increases in high school graduation and college enrollment rates (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024).

Curriculum is a major battleground. The development and defense of ethnic studies and anti-racist curricula—such as AP African American Studies—represent a direct challenge to hegemonic knowledge (Najarro 2023). This work involves not just adding content but embracing culturally sustaining pedagogies that validate students' home cultures and languages as assets to learning. Finally, in higher education, the struggle continues over race-conscious admissions policies, recently dismantled by the Supreme Court but defended as necessary to address historical exclusion and create diverse learning environments essential for a pluralistic democracy (Allen et al. n.d., Annie E Casey Foundation 2024).

12.7: Sites of Resistance and Visions for Transformation is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

12.8: The Takeaway

Education in the United States has always been, and remains, a central racial project. It is an institution where the promises of democracy and equality are perpetually tested against the realities of hierarchy and exclusion. As this chapter has detailed, from the anti-literacy laws of the 18th century to the funding inequities and curricular bans of the 21st, race organizes educational life in profound and enduring ways. The sociological perspective reveals that these are not random failures but systematic outcomes produced by a structure designed to sort, track, and allocate opportunity along racial lines.

The divergent pathways of Latinx, Black, Asian American, and Indigenous students illustrate that there is no single “minority experience,” but rather distinct forms of racialization that interact with class, language, and immigration status to shape destiny. The persistence of these gaps, even amid rising overall attainment, signals the resilience of the underlying structure. Current political backlash against teaching about racism is, paradoxically, a testament to the power of education as a site of struggle—for controlling national memory, defining belonging, and shaping future power relations.

The path forward is not merely technical but profoundly political and moral. It requires a societal reckoning with history, a radical redistribution of resources, and a re-imagination of teaching and learning rooted in justice. It demands listening to and empowering the communities most harmed by the current system. The struggle for educational equity is, ultimately, a struggle over what kind of multiracial society the United States will become—one that reproduces its oldest hierarchies or one that finally makes good on its founding, yet unfulfilled, promise.

12.8: The Takeaway is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

12.9: References

Allen, Walter, Chantel Jones, and Channel McLewis. n.d. “The Problematic Nature of Racial and Ethnic Categories in Higher Education.” *Equity in Higher Education*. Retrieved December 10, 2025. (<https://www.equityinhighered.org/res...her-education/>).

Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2024. “Racial Inequality in Education.” AECF Blog, September 23. Retrieved December 6, 2025 (<https://www.aecf.org/blog/racial-inequality-in-education>).

Darling-Hammond, Linda. 2001. “Inequality in Teaching and Schooling: How Opportunity Is Rationed to Students of Color in America.” Pp. 208-233 in *The Right Thing to Do, The Smart Thing to Do: Enhancing Diversity in the Health Professions*, edited by B. D. Smedley, A. Y. Stith, L. Colburn, and C. H. Evans. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. Retrieved December 6, 2025 (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK223640/>).

Economic Policy Institute. n.d. “Education Inequalities at the School Starting Gate: Gaps, Trends, and Strategies to Address Them.” Retrieved December 6, 2025 (<https://www.epi.org/publication/education-inequalities-at-the-school-starting-gate/>).

Fuller-Rowell, Thomas E., and Stacey N. Doan. 2010. “The Social Costs of Academic Success across Ethnic Groups.” *Child Development* 81(6):1696–1713. Retrieved December 6, 2025 (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3479150/>).

Najarro, Ileana. 2023. “Many States Are Limiting How Schools Can Teach About Race. Most Voters Disagree.” *Education Week*, October 30. Retrieved December 6, 2025 (<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/many-states-are-limiting-how-schools-can-teach-about-race-most-voters-disagree/2023/10>).

U.S. Department of the Treasury. 2023. “Post 5: Racial Differences in Educational Experiences and Attainment.” *Featured Stories*. Retrieved December 6, 2025 (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/featured-stories/post-5-racial-differences-in-educational-experiences-and-attainment>).

12.9: References is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

13: Popular Culture, Mass Culture, and Media

- 13.1: Racial and Ethnic Formations in the Mediasphere
- 13.2: The Mediasphere as a Racial Project
- 13.3: Theoretical Lenses- Function, Conflict, and Symbolic Meaning
- 13.4: Racialized Representations- Four Case Studies in American Media
- 13.5: African Americans- From Caricature to Contested Visibility
- 13.6: Latinx- Between Invisibility and Stereotype
- 13.7: Asian Americans- The Peril of the “Model Minority” Myth
- 13.8: Indigenous Peoples- Erasure and Cultural Appropriation.
- 13.9: The Digital Turn- Social Media, Algorithms, and AI
- 13.10: Algorithmic Amplification and Digital Redlining
- 13.11: Generative AI and the Future of Racial Representation
- 13.12: The Takeaway
- 13.13: References

13: Popular Culture, Mass Culture, and Media is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

13.1: Racial and Ethnic Formations in the Mediasphere

This chapter examines the complex relationship between mass media, popular culture, and the social construction of race and ethnicity in the United States. Media is not a passive mirror reflecting real life, but an active and powerful institution that shapes, reinforces, and sometimes challenges racial hierarchies and ideologies. Applying the foundational sociological theories Functionalism, Conflict, and Interactionism, this analysis moves beyond traditional broadcast media to encompass the contested terrain of the digital age: social media platforms, algorithmic governance, and artificial intelligence. Through case studies and data on the representation and experiences of African American, Latino, Asian American, and Indigenous communities, the chapter reveals how racialized narratives are produced, circulated, and internalized. It concludes by analyzing contemporary struggles over representation, the political economy of media ownership, and the paradoxical role of digital spaces as both sites of liberation and new forms of racial control, framing these dynamics as central to understanding modern American racism.

13.1: Racial and Ethnic Formations in the Mediasphere is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

13.2: The Mediasphere as a Racial Project

In the 21st century, the domains of popular culture, mass media, and digital communication constitute a pervasive and powerful mediasphere. This mediasphere is not a neutral space of entertainment and information but a primary social institution where race is continuously made, remade, and given meaning. From Hollywood films and network news to TikTok algorithms and AI-generated imagery, racial categories and stereotypes are constructed, circulated, and contested. This chapter posits that the mediasphere functions as a critical racial project, a concept derived from racial formation theory (Omi and Winant 1994) that describes the process by which social, economic, and political forces shape racial identities and hierarchies. Media representations are not mere reflections of societal attitudes; they are active components in the social construction of race, teaching audiences who matters, who is threatening, who is exotic, and who is invisible.

The sociological significance of this process is profound. As Interactionism teaches, we derive meanings about ourselves and others through symbolic communication, and media provides a primary source of these symbols. A child who has never met a Native American person may form their understanding from century-old Westerns or sports mascots. An adult's perception of crime may be disproportionately shaped by local news over-coverage of Black suspects. These mediated interactions form a culture of prejudice, where racist imagery and narratives are so embedded in our cultural fabric that they become normalized and difficult to interrogate. This chapter will explore this culture across three key areas: the theoretical frameworks for understanding race and media, the historical and contemporary representation of major racialized groups, and the transformative—and often troubling—impact of digital technologies and AI.

13.2: The Mediasphere as a Racial Project is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

13.3: Theoretical Lenses- Function, Conflict, and Symbolic Meaning

To decode the mediasphere's role in racial dynamics, sociologists employ several complementary theoretical frameworks. A Functionalist analysis asks what role racialized media content plays in society. At a surface level, media can promote social cohesion through shared cultural experiences. However, Functionalists like Nash (1964) argue that racial stereotypes also serve a latent function: they morally justify an unequal racial order for the dominant group. The historical portrayal of Black people as contented servants or buffoons, for example, served to legitimize slavery and later, segregation. The dysfunction, as Arnold Rose noted, is the massive waste of human potential and the social resources expended to maintain artificial racial boundaries.

In stark contrast, Conflict views the mediasphere as an arena of ongoing power struggle. From this perspective, media ownership and control are concentrated in the hands of a predominantly White, corporate elite whose economic and ideological interests shape content (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism 2025). This control allows the dominant group to manipulate narratives, spread ideologies that justify the status quo, and marginalize counter-narratives. The decades-long underrepresentation and stereotyping of people of color in news and film can be seen not as an accident but as a mechanism of social control, minimizing their perceived social power and legitimizing their subordination (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism 2025). The recent, intense political backlash against Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in media and other sectors fits this model perfectly, representing a conflict over narrative power and resource allocation.

At the micro-sociological level, Interactionism provides crucial insight into how media consumption translates into racial consciousness. Herbert Blumer posited that prejudice is formed through interactions within the dominant group, which create an abstract, stereotyped picture of the subordinate group. Mass media exponentially amplifies this process. For individuals with little direct contact with other racial groups, media becomes the primary source of “interaction,” providing the symbols—the images, phrases, and storylines—that define what it means to be Black, Latinx, Asian, or Indigenous. The “culture of prejudice” means we are all, to some degree, immersed in this symbolic ecosystem from childhood, making it difficult to identify or challenge its assumptions. When these micro-level interactions are scaled by digital algorithms, their power to shape perception is magnified, a point we will return to later.

13.3: Theoretical Lenses- Function, Conflict, and Symbolic Meaning is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

13.4: Racialized Representations- Four Case Studies in American Media

The dynamics described by these theories manifest in distinct ways for different racialized groups, each with a unique history of representation that reflects their particular position within America's racial hierarchy.

13.4: Racialized Representations- Four Case Studies in American Media is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

13.5: African Americans- From Caricature to Contested Visibility

Black representation has a long and painful arc, from the degrading caricatures of the minstrel show to the “Magical Negro” tropes of 1990s cinema. While the #OscarsSoWhite movement and the success of Black-led productions like *Black Panther* signify important shifts, conflict is ever-present. The political backlash is evident in movements to ban books by Black authors and dismantle DEI programs. Furthermore, control of narrative remains a battle. As of 2025, only 15% of top editors at major U.S. news outlets are people of color, a decline from previous years, ensuring that the framing of stories about Black communities—from crime to culture—remains largely in non-Black hands (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism 2025). Political documents like “Project 2025” explicitly threatened to unwind civil rights monitoring and data collection, which would make systemic media bias harder to document and challenge (Thurgood Marshall Institute at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund 2024).

13.5: African Americans- From Caricature to Contested Visibility is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

13.6: Latinx- Between Invisibility and Stereotype

Latinx communities, now the nation's largest minority group, have long been subject to a paradoxical media invisibility coupled with narrow, stereotypical roles (the gang member, the hypersexualized “spitfire,” the undocumented laborer). This misrepresentation has material consequences, shaping public policy and interpersonal discrimination. Notably, perceptions of discrimination vary: while 90% of Democrats believe Latinx people face discrimination, only 54% of Republicans agree—a stark partisan divide that media consumption patterns likely reinforce (Pew Research Center 2025). The functionalist might ask if the “Latin lover” or “illegal alien” stereotypes serve to mark this growing population as perpetually foreign, justifying political exclusion and economic exploitation.

13.6: Latinx- Between Invisibility and Stereotype is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

13.7: Asian Americans- The Peril of the “Model Minority” Myth

Asian Americans are often hailed as a media success story, with increased visibility in film and television. However, this visibility is frequently filtered through the “model minority” stereotype, which paints Asians as universally successful, hardworking, and politically passive. This myth, a functionalist tool, is used to dismiss systemic racism and pit minority groups against each other. It also erases immense diversity within the category, obscuring the struggles of Southeast Asian refugees and Pacific Islanders. The myth masks ongoing discrimination; 82% of Asian Americans themselves believe they face discrimination, a higher rate than other groups perceive for them (Pew Research Center 2025). Furthermore, it can mutate easily into the “perpetual foreigner” stereotype, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic when anti-Asian hate surged.

13.7: Asian Americans- The Peril of the “Model Minority” Myth is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

13.8: Indigenous Peoples- Erasure and Cultural Appropriation.

Perhaps no group has been more subject to symbolic annihilation—erasure from contemporary representation—than Indigenous peoples. When present, they are often confined to historical, romanticized, or savage tropes (the noble savage, the bloodthirsty warrior). This relegation to the past legitimizes the ongoing dispossession of land and sovereignty. Their cultures are simultaneously erased and appropriated as fashion or mascots, a process symbolic interactionists see as stripping sacred symbols of their original meaning for dominant-group consumption. The fight for accurate representation is thus a fight for present-day existence and sovereignty.

13.8: Indigenous Peoples- Erasure and Cultural Appropriation. is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

13.9: The Digital Turn- Social Media, Algorithms, and AI

The rise of digital platforms has dramatically transformed the racialized mediasphere, creating new avenues for agency and new mechanisms of control. Social media has empowered communities of color to bypass traditional gatekeepers. Movements like #BlackLivesMatter, #StopAsianHate, and #NoDAPL were born and amplified online, allowing for grassroots narrative control, community organizing, and transnational solidarity. Indigenous TikTok creators use the platform to share languages and cultures, performing what Anishinaabe scholar Hayden King calls “digital survivance.” This represents a significant challenge to established media power structures from below.

13.9: The Digital Turn- Social Media, Algorithms, and AI is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

13.10: Algorithmic Amplification and Digital Redlining

Conflict theory warns that technology often reproduces existing inequalities. Algorithmic bias is a fundamental concern: machine learning systems trained on historically biased data perpetuate discrimination, from facial recognition software that misidentifies people of color to ad delivery algorithms that “digitally redline” by showing fewer ads for high-paying jobs to Black users. These are not glitches but automated forms of institutional racism. Furthermore, platforms’ engagement-driven logic often amplifies extreme and polarizing content, including racist hate speech and disinformation, which can fuel real-world violence and deepen partisan divides over the reality of racism itself (Pew Research Center 2025).

[13.10: Algorithmic Amplification and Digital Redlining](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

13.11: Generative AI and the Future of Racial Representation

The emergence of generative AI (e.g., DALL-E, ChatGPT) presents a frontier in the social construction of race. These tools, trained on the vast corpus of the internet (which contains all its biases), risk automating and scaling the production of stereotypes. If prompted to generate an image of a “CEO,” will it default to a White man? If asked to write a story about a “drug dealer,” what race will it assign? The danger is the creation of a feedback loop of bias: AI learns from human-generated media, then produces new media that reinforces those same biases for human consumption. This makes the fight for inclusive and ethical AI development a critical new front in media justice.

[13.11: Generative AI and the Future of Racial Representation](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

13.12: The Takeaway

The sociology of race, media, and popular culture reveals a domain of relentless contestation. The mediasphere is a key site where the “culture of prejudice” is nurtured through symbolic interaction, where functionalist narratives justify inequality, and where conflict theorists observe a continuous struggle over narrative power between dominant and subordinate groups. The digital age has democratized and complicated this struggle, offering tools for counter-narrative and community building while introducing powerful new forms of algorithmic governance and automated bias.

The path forward requires multi-pronged effort rooted in sociological understanding. It necessitates supporting independent media by creators of color, demanding transparency and accountability from tech platforms, developing ethical frameworks for AI, and critically consuming media with an intersectional lens. Ultimately, the question of who gets to tell the story, who owns the means of distribution, and who designs the algorithms will determine whether our collective mediasphere reinforces a stratified racial order or helps imagine a more just and equitable future. The battle over representation is, in essence, a battle over reality itself.

13.12: The Takeaway is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

13.13: References

Blumer, Herbert. 1958. "Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position." *Pacific Sociological Review* 1(1):3–7.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Nash, Manning. 1964. "Race and the Ideology of Race." *Current Anthropology* 3(3):285–288. Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. 1994. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Pew Research Center. 2025. "Views of How Much Discrimination Racial and Ethnic Groups in the U.S. Face." Retrieved January 8, 2026 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2025/05/20/views-of-how-much-discrimination-racial-and-ethnic-groups-in-the-u-s-face/>).

Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. 2025. "Race and Leadership in the News Media 2025: Evidence from Five Markets." University of Oxford. Retrieved January 8, 2026 (<http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/race-and-leadership-news-media-2025-evidence-five-markets>).

Rose, Arnold. 1951. *The Roots of Prejudice*. Paris: UNESCO.

Thurgood Marshall Institute at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. 2024. "Attack on Our Power and Dignity: What Project 2025 Means for Black Communities." Retrieved January 8, 2026 (<https://tminstituteldf.org/what-project-2025-means-for-black-communities/>).

U.S. Department of the Treasury. 2022. "Racial Inequality in the United States." Retrieved January 8, 2026 (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/featured-stories/racial-inequality-in-the-united-states>).

13.13: References is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

Glossary

Sample Word 1 | Sample Definition 1

Detailed Licensing

Content in the Front and Back Matter, directories and similar can be uncopywriteable, being simple listings and these are also shown as *undeclared*.

Overview

Title: [Appearance and Behavior: A Sociology of Race and Ethnicity \(Murguia\)](#)

Webpages: 180

Applicable Restrictions: Noncommercial

All licenses found:

- [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#): 94.4% (170 pages)
- [Undeclared](#): 5.6% (10 pages)

By Page

- [Appearance and Behavior: A Sociology of Race and Ethnicity \(Murguia\)](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [Front Matter](#) - *Undeclared*
 - [TitlePage](#) - *Undeclared*
 - [InfoPage](#) - *Undeclared*
 - [Table of Contents](#) - *Undeclared*
 - [Licensing](#) - *Undeclared*
 - [1: An Introduction to Race and Ethnicity](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.1: Of Social Institutions, Race, Ethnicity, Dogs, and Cats](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.2: Defining Race and Ethnicity](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.3: A Sociological Overview of Race, Ethnicity, and Social Constructions](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.4: The Takeaway](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.5: References](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2: Sociological Theory](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.1: Of Theories and Bicycles](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.2: Three Sociological Theoretical Perspectives](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.3: Structural Functionalism](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.4: Conflict Theory](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.5: Symbolic Interactionism](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.6: The Takeaway](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.7: References](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3: Research Methods](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.1: From Méthodos to Methods](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.2: Three General Research Methods](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.3: The Takeaway](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.4: References](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4: A Sociological History of Race and Ethnicity](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.1: No History is Linear](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.2: The Foundational Era- Scientific Racism and the Du Boisian Challenge \(Late 19th - Early 20th Century\)](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.3: Social Darwinism and Scientific Racism](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.4: The Chicago School and Assimilation Theory](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.5: The Du Boisian Seminal Challenge](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.6: The Mid-Century Shift- Assimilation's Peak and its Critical Challenges \(1940s - 1960s\)](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.7: The Orthodoxy of Assimilation](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.8: The Emergence of Power-Conflict Theories](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.9: The Paradigm Shift- Structural Racism and the Ethnic Revival \(1970s - 1980s\)](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.10: The Theory of Racial Formation](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.11: Critical Race Theory \(CRT\)](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.12: Symbolic Ethnicity and the Primordialist-Instrumentalist Debate](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.13: Contemporary Developments- Intersectionality, Color-Blindness, and Global Racism \(1990s - Present\)](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.14: Intersectionality](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.15: Systemic Racism](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.16: The Study of Color-Blind Racism](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)

- 4.17: Global and Comparative Perspectives - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 4.18: The Takeaway - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 4.19: References - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 5: Science and Knowledge - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 5.1: The Racialization of Scientific Progress - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 5.2: Science, Race, and Racism- A Sociological Examination - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 5.3: The Historical Construction of Race in Science - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 5.4: Race as a Social Construct - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 5.5: Scientific Racism in the Modern Era - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 5.6: The Actual Science of Race- Skin Pigmentation and Trichromatic Photoreception - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 5.7: The Biochemical and Evolutionary Foundations of Skin Color - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 5.8: The Physiology of Color Vision- Constructing Visual Reality - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 5.9: The Social Alchemy- From Biological Continuum to Social Hierarchy - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 5.10: The Takeaway - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 5.11: References - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 6: Norms, Traditions, and Culture - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.1: The Mosaic Within- Cultural Norms, Traditions, and Identity in Four American Ethno-Racial Communities - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.2: Latinx Americans- Familismo, Faith, and Hybridity - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.3: Familismo as a Foundational Norm - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.4: Religious Syncretism and Popular Religiosity - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.5: Linguistic and Cultural Hybridity- Spanglish and Beyond - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.6: Asian Americans- The “Model Minority” Myth, Confucian Values, and Panethnicity - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.7: Deconstructing the “Model Minority” Myth - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.8: Confucian and Other Cultural Foundations - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.9: Transnational Ties and the Creation of “Ethnoburbs” - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.10: African Americans- Cultural Resilience, Innovation, and the Black Public Sphere - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.11: The Black Church and the Ethos of Freedom - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.12: Kinship and Community Norms - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.13: Aesthetic Innovation- From Blues to Hip-Hop - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.14: Language and Communicative Practices - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.15: Indigenous Americans- Sovereignty, Land, and Cultural Revitalization - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.16: The Primacy of Sovereignty and Land - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.17: Cultural Trauma and Historical Legacy - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.18: Ceremonial Life and Worldview - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.19: Visual and Narrative Sovereignty - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.20: Comparative Analysis- Intersectionality and the Evolving American Mosaic - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.21: The Takeaway - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.22: References - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 7: Marriage, Family, and Relationships - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.1: The Intimate Mosaic- Marriage, Family, and Kinship Across Racial and Ethnic Lines - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.2: Theoretical Frameworks- Understanding the Family-Race Nexus - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.3: Historical Legacies and Their Contemporary Echoes - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.4: African American Families and the Aftermath of Slavery - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.5: Indigenous American Families and Cultural Genocide - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.6: Latino and Asian American Families and Immigration Law - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.7: Marriage Patterns and Mate Selection - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.8: Intermarriage and Assimilation - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.9: Kinship, Gender, and Family Norms - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.10: Parenting and Ethnic-Racial Socialization - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.11: Contemporary Challenges and Adaptations - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.12: The Impact of Mass Incarceration - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

- 7.13: The Growth of Multiracial Families - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 7.14: The Takeaway - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 7.15: References - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8: Faith, Belief, and Religion - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 8.1: Sacred Ties- The Intersection of Faith, Race, and Ethnicity in America - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 8.2: Religion as a Source of Social Cohesion and Identity - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 8.3: Religion as a Site of Conflict and Domination - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 8.4: Religion as a Tool Kit for Meaning-Making - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 8.5: African American Religion- The Black Church as a Fortress of Community - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 8.6: Religious Expression and Theodicy - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 8.7: Diversity Within Black Religion - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 8.8: Latinx Religiosity- Mestizaje and Lived Faith - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 8.9: Asian American Religions- Diversity, Adaptation, and the “Second-Generation” - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 8.10: The “Second-Generation” Complex - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 8.11: The “Model Minority” and Religious Stereotypes - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 8.12: Indigenous American Spiritualities- Land, Sovereignty, and Decolonization - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 8.13: Comparative Analysis and Emerging Trends - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 8.14: The Takeaway - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 8.15: References - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 9: Government, Law, and Politics - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.1: Race, Ethnicity, and the American Political-Legal System - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.2: Theoretical Frameworks- The State as a Racial Project - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.3: A Historical Legacy- The Legal Construction of Race - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.4: The Civil Rights Movement as a Counter-Project - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.5: Contemporary Legal-Political Battlegrounds - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.6: Affirmative Action and the Myth of Colorblindness - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.7: Resistance and Mobilization- Politics from Below - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.8: The Takeaway - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.9: References - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 10: Deviance, Crime, and Disrepute - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.1: The Racialization of Crime and Social Control - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.2: The Social Construction of Deviance and Crime - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.3: Conflict Theory and the Racial Politics of Crime - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.4: Interactionism and the Question of Definition - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.5: The Racialization of Crime and Deviance- Historical Foundations of Racial Criminalization - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.6: Social Ecology and Concentrated Disadvantage - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.7: Racial Invariance Hypothesis and Structural Inequality - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.8: Policing, Prosecution, and Sentencing- Racial Disparities in Legal Processing - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.9: Prosecutorial Discretion and Charging Decisions - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.10: Sentencing Disparities and Mandatory Minimums - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.11: Collateral Consequences and Community Impacts - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.12: Intersectionality- Race, Gender, and Incarceration - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.13: Resistance, Reform, and Paths Forward- Social Movements and Advocacy - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.14: Evidence-Based Policy Reforms - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.15: Restorative and Transformative Justice Approaches - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.16: The Takeaway - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.17: References - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 11: Labor, Employment and Economy - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 11.1: The Persistence of Racial Inequality in the American Workplace - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 11.2: Theoretical Foundations- Understanding Race in the Labor Market - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 11.3: Latinx Workers- Between Progress and Precarity - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 11.4: African American Workers- The Persistent Crisis of Black Employment - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 11.5: Asian American Workers- Beyond the Model Minority - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 11.6: Indigenous Workers- Historical Legacies and Contemporary Realities - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

- 11.7: Systemic Barriers- Discrimination, Segregation, and Wage Gaps Across Groups - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.8: Policy, Resistance, and Paths Forward - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.9: The Takeaway - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.10: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12: Teaching, Learning, and Education - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.1: The Color of Knowledge - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.2: The Illusion of Meritocracy - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.3: Historical Foundations- Legacies of Exclusion and Control - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.4: The Architecture of Inequality- Structures, Funding, and Discipline - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.5: Curricula, Tracking, and the Social Dynamics of Achievement - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.6: Divergent Pathways- Comparative Analysis of Racialized Groups - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.7: Sites of Resistance and Visions for Transformation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.8: The Takeaway - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.9: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13: Popular Culture, Mass Culture, and Media - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.1: Racial and Ethnic Formations in the Mediasphere - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.2: The Mediasphere as a Racial Project - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.3: Theoretical Lenses- Function, Conflict, and Symbolic Meaning - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.4: Racialized Representations- Four Case Studies in American Media - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.5: African Americans- From Caricature to Contested Visibility - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.6: Latinx- Between Invisibility and Stereotype - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.7: Asian Americans- The Peril of the “Model Minority” Myth - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.8: Indigenous Peoples- Erasure and Cultural Appropriation. - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.9: The Digital Turn- Social Media, Algorithms, and AI - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.10: Algorithmic Amplification and Digital Redlining - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.11: Generative AI and the Future of Racial Representation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.12: The Takeaway - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.13: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- Back Matter - *Undeclared*
 - Index - *Undeclared*
 - Glossary - *Undeclared*
 - Detailed Licensing - *Undeclared*
 - Detailed Licensing - *Undeclared*

Detailed Licensing

Overview

Title: [Appearance and Behavior: A Sociology of Race and Ethnicity \(Murguia\)](#)

Webpages: 180

Applicable Restrictions: Noncommercial

All licenses found:

- [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#): 94.4% (170 pages)
- [Undeclared](#): 5.6% (10 pages)

By Page

- [Appearance and Behavior: A Sociology of Race and Ethnicity \(Murguia\)](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [Front Matter](#) - [Undeclared](#)
 - [TitlePage](#) - [Undeclared](#)
 - [InfoPage](#) - [Undeclared](#)
 - [Table of Contents](#) - [Undeclared](#)
 - [Licensing](#) - [Undeclared](#)
 - [1: An Introduction to Race and Ethnicity](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.1: Of Social Institutions, Race, Ethnicity, Dogs, and Cats](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.2: Defining Race and Ethnicity](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.3: A Sociological Overview of Race, Ethnicity, and Social Constructions](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.4: The Takeaway](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1.5: References](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2: Sociological Theory](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.1: Of Theories and Bicycles](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.2: Three Sociological Theoretical Perspectives](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.3: Structural Functionalism](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.4: Conflict Theory](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.5: Symbolic Interactionism](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.6: The Takeaway](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2.7: References](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3: Research Methods](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.1: From Méthodos to Methods](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.2: Three General Research Methods](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.3: The Takeaway](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.4: References](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4: A Sociological History of Race and Ethnicity](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.1: No History is Linear](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.2: The Foundational Era- Scientific Racism and the Du Boisian Challenge \(Late 19th - Early 20th Century\)](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.3: Social Darwinism and Scientific Racism](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.4: The Chicago School and Assimilation Theory](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.5: The Du Boisian Seminal Challenge](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.6: The Mid-Century Shift- Assimilation's Peak and its Critical Challenges \(1940s - 1960s\)](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.7: The Orthodoxy of Assimilation](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.8: The Emergence of Power-Conflict Theories](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.9: The Paradigm Shift- Structural Racism and the Ethnic Revival \(1970s - 1980s\)](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.10: The Theory of Racial Formation](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.11: Critical Race Theory \(CRT\)](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.12: Symbolic Ethnicity and the Primordialist-Instrumentalist Debate](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.13: Contemporary Developments- Intersectionality, Color-Blindness, and Global Racism \(1990s - Present\)](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.14: Intersectionality](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.15: Systemic Racism](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.16: The Study of Color-Blind Racism](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.17: Global and Comparative Perspectives](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.18: The Takeaway](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.19: References](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5: Science and Knowledge](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)

- 5.1: The Racialization of Scientific Progress - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 5.2: Science, Race, and Racism- A Sociological Examination - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 5.3: The Historical Construction of Race in Science - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 5.4: Race as a Social Construct - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 5.5: Scientific Racism in the Modern Era - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 5.6: The Actual Science of Race- Skin Pigmentation and Trichromatic Photoreception - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 5.7: The Biochemical and Evolutionary Foundations of Skin Color - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 5.8: The Physiology of Color Vision- Constructing Visual Reality - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 5.9: The Social Alchemy- From Biological Continuum to Social Hierarchy - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 5.10: The Takeaway - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 5.11: References - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 6: Norms, Traditions, and Culture - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.1: The Mosaic Within- Cultural Norms, Traditions, and Identity in Four American Ethno-Racial Communities - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.2: Latinx Americans- Familismo, Faith, and Hybridity - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.3: Familismo as a Foundational Norm - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.4: Religious Syncretism and Popular Religiosity - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.5: Linguistic and Cultural Hybridity- Spanglish and Beyond - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.6: Asian Americans- The “Model Minority” Myth, Confucian Values, and Panethnicity - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.7: Deconstructing the “Model Minority” Myth - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.8: Confucian and Other Cultural Foundations - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.9: Transnational Ties and the Creation of “Ethnoburbs” - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.10: African Americans- Cultural Resilience, Innovation, and the Black Public Sphere - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.11: The Black Church and the Ethos of Freedom - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.12: Kinship and Community Norms - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.13: Aesthetic Innovation- From Blues to Hip-Hop - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.14: Language and Communicative Practices - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.15: Indigenous Americans- Sovereignty, Land, and Cultural Revitalization - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.16: The Primacy of Sovereignty and Land - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.17: Cultural Trauma and Historical Legacy - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.18: Ceremonial Life and Worldview - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.19: Visual and Narrative Sovereignty - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.20: Comparative Analysis- Intersectionality and the Evolving American Mosaic - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.21: The Takeaway - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.22: References - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 7: Marriage, Family, and Relationships - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.1: The Intimate Mosaic- Marriage, Family, and Kinship Across Racial and Ethnic Lines - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.2: Theoretical Frameworks- Understanding the Family-Race Nexus - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.3: Historical Legacies and Their Contemporary Echoes - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.4: African American Families and the Aftermath of Slavery - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.5: Indigenous American Families and Cultural Genocide - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.6: Latino and Asian American Families and Immigration Law - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.7: Marriage Patterns and Mate Selection - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.8: Intermarriage and Assimilation - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.9: Kinship, Gender, and Family Norms - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.10: Parenting and Ethnic-Racial Socialization - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.11: Contemporary Challenges and Adaptations - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.12: The Impact of Mass Incarceration - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.13: The Growth of Multiracial Families - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.14: The Takeaway - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 7.15: References - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8: Faith, Belief, and Religion - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

- 8.1: Sacred Ties- The Intersection of Faith, Race, and Ethnicity in America - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8.2: Religion as a Source of Social Cohesion and Identity - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8.3: Religion as a Site of Conflict and Domination - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8.4: Religion as a Tool Kit for Meaning-Making - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8.5: African American Religion- The Black Church as a Fortress of Community - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8.6: Religious Expression and Theodicy - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8.7: Diversity Within Black Religion - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8.8: Latinx Religiosity- Mestizaje and Lived Faith - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8.9: Asian American Religions- Diversity, Adaptation, and the “Second-Generation” - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8.10: The “Second-Generation” Complex - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8.11: The “Model Minority” and Religious Stereotypes - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8.12: Indigenous American Spiritualities- Land, Sovereignty, and Decolonization - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8.13: Comparative Analysis and Emerging Trends - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8.14: The Takeaway - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 8.15: References - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 9: Government, Law, and Politics - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.1: Race, Ethnicity, and the American Political-Legal System - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.2: Theoretical Frameworks- The State as a Racial Project - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.3: A Historical Legacy- The Legal Construction of Race - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.4: The Civil Rights Movement as a Counter-Project - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.5: Contemporary Legal-Political Battlegrounds - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.6: Affirmative Action and the Myth of Colorblindness - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.7: Resistance and Mobilization- Politics from Below - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.8: The Takeaway - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 9.9: References - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 10: Deviance, Crime, and Disrepute - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.1: The Racialization of Crime and Social Control - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.2: The Social Construction of Deviance and Crime - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.3: Conflict Theory and the Racial Politics of Crime - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.4: Interactionism and the Question of Definition - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.5: The Racialization of Crime and Deviance- Historical Foundations of Racial Criminalization - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.6: Social Ecology and Concentrated Disadvantage - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.7: Racial Invariance Hypothesis and Structural Inequality - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.8: Policing, Prosecution, and Sentencing- Racial Disparities in Legal Processing - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.9: Prosecutorial Discretion and Charging Decisions - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.10: Sentencing Disparities and Mandatory Minimums - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.11: Collateral Consequences and Community Impacts - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.12: Intersectionality- Race, Gender, and Incarceration - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.13: Resistance, Reform, and Paths Forward- Social Movements and Advocacy - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.14: Evidence-Based Policy Reforms - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.15: Restorative and Transformative Justice Approaches - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.16: The Takeaway - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 10.17: References - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- 11: Labor, Employment and Economy - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 11.1: The Persistence of Racial Inequality in the American Workplace - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 11.2: Theoretical Foundations- Understanding Race in the Labor Market - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 11.3: Latinx Workers- Between Progress and Precarity - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 11.4: African American Workers- The Persistent Crisis of Black Employment - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 11.5: Asian American Workers- Beyond the Model Minority - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 11.6: Indigenous Workers- Historical Legacies and Contemporary Realities - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 11.7: Systemic Barriers- Discrimination, Segregation, and Wage Gaps Across Groups - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 11.8: Policy, Resistance, and Paths Forward - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

- 11.9: The Takeaway - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.10: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 12: Teaching, Learning, and Education - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.1: The Color of Knowledge - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.2: The Illusion of Meritocracy - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.3: Historical Foundations- Legacies of Exclusion and Control - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.4: The Architecture of Inequality- Structures, Funding, and Discipline - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.5: Curricula, Tracking, and the Social Dynamics of Achievement - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.6: Divergent Pathways- Comparative Analysis of Racialized Groups - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.7: Sites of Resistance and Visions for Transformation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.8: The Takeaway - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 12.9: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13: Popular Culture, Mass Culture, and Media - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.1: Racial and Ethnic Formations in the Mediasphere - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.2: The Mediasphere as a Racial Project - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.3: Theoretical Lenses- Function, Conflict, and Symbolic Meaning - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.4: Racialized Representations- Four Case Studies in American Media - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.5: African Americans- From Caricature to Contested Visibility - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.6: Latinx- Between Invisibility and Stereotype - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.7: Asian Americans- The Peril of the “Model Minority” Myth - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.8: Indigenous Peoples- Erasure and Cultural Appropriation. - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.9: The Digital Turn- Social Media, Algorithms, and AI - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.10: Algorithmic Amplification and Digital Redlining - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.11: Generative AI and the Future of Racial Representation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.12: The Takeaway - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
 - 13.13: References - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- Back Matter - *Undeclared*
 - Index - *Undeclared*
 - Glossary - *Undeclared*
 - Detailed Licensing - *Undeclared*
 - Detailed Licensing - *Undeclared*