

Ch. 11 Race and Ethnicity

The Power of Society

- Is our choice to cast a vote for a particular candidate a purely "personal" decision?

Race

- Socially constructed category
- Composed of people who share biologically transmitted traits
- Considered important by members of a society

Variations

- Meanings and importance of race vary across time and place
 - No society contains biologically "pure" people
 - There is more genetic variation within each racial "category" than between "categories"

Ethnicity

- Shared cultural heritage
- Like race, ethnicity is socially constructed
- Ethnicity is more complex than race
- U.S. is a multiethnic society

Minority

- Any category of people distinguished by physical or cultural difference that a society sets apart and subordinates
- General characteristics
 - Distinct identity: race, sex, sexual orientation, and poor
 - Subordination: often saddled with lower status
- Prejudice: rigid and unfair generalization about an entire category of people
 - Social Distance Scale
 - Student opinion shows a trend toward greater social acceptance
 - People see fewer differences among various minorities
 - 9/11/01, might have reduced social acceptance of Arabs and Muslims
- Stereotype: Exaggerated description applied to every person in some category

Racism

- Belief that one racial category is innately superior or inferior to another
- Widespread throughout U.S. History where ideas about racial inferiority supported slavery
- Decrease in overt racism in the U.S., but still serious social problem

Theories of Prejudice

- Scapegoat theory: Disadvantaged people unfairly blame minorities for their own problems
- Authoritarian personality theory: Rigid moralists see things in "black and white"
- Culture theory: Prejudice is embedded in culture
- Conflict theory
 - Self-justification for the rich and powerful in the U.S.
 - Cultivation of climate of race consciousness for greater power and privileges by minorities

Discrimination

- Institutional prejudice and discrimination
 - Bias built into operation of society's institutions
- Prejudice refers to attitudes while discrimination is a matter of action
- The vicious circle
 - Prejudice and discrimination begin as ethnocentric attitudes
 - Groups can be placed in a situation where they are socially disadvantaged and labeled
 - A group's situation is explained as a result of innate inferiority rather than looking at the social structure
- The cycle repeats itself

Majority and Minority patterns of interaction

- Pluralism: People of all races and ethnicities are distinct but have equal social standing
- Assimilation: Minorities gradually adopt patterns of the dominant culture
- Miscegenation: Biological reproduction by partners of different racial categories
- Segregation: physical and social separation of categories of people
- Genocide: systematic killing of one category of people by another

Race and Ethnicity in the U.S.

- Native Americans
 - Experienced forced assimilation, relocation, and low social standing
 - Consists of 41 American Indian nations and 6 Alaskan Native tribes, which are made up of more than 600 smaller tribal groups
 - Some prosper; most Native Americans remain severely disadvantaged and share a profound sense of injustice
- White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs)
 - 33 million claim this background
 - Highly skilled and motivated immigrants
 - Higher social standing than other immigrants
 - Wealth and power peaked in the 1950s
 - Assume terms race and ethnicity do not personally apply
- African Americans
 - Being of African descent soon became synonymous with being a slave
 - Slavery became foundation of southern colonial plantation system
 - 13th Amendment outlawed slavery
 - 1950s-1960s national civil rights movement
 - Racial castes remain strong in U.S.
- Asian Americans
 - Enormous within category diversity
 - Attention commanded as high achievers
 - "Model minority" stereotype
 - Chinese Americans. Japanese Americans. And recent Asian immigrants
- Hispanic/Latino Americans
 - Over 52 million people of Hispanic descent in U.S.
 - Cluster of distinct populations, each of which identifies with a particular ancestral nation
 - Median family income below national average

- Mexican, Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans

- Arab Americans

- Increasing in size

- Ancestors lived in a variety of countries and cultures differ from society to society

- All social classes represented

- Often stereotyped as terrorist and target of hate crimes

- White Ethnic Americans

- Persist in many U.S. cities, especially in the Northeast region of the country

- Primarily working-class men and women whose ancestors came to U.S. as immigrants

- Endured some prejudice and discrimination

Race and Ethnicity

- Looking ahead

- The U.S. will remain a land of immigrants

- Most immigrants arrived in a wave that peaked about 1910

- Immigration occurred post WWII and swelled as government relaxed immigration laws in 1960s

- Today's immigrants are Latin American, Asian, Mexicans, Asian Indians, and Filipinos