



# SOCI10103: General Sociology May Intersession 2025

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Chapter 9: race and ethnicity I

## Chapter outlines

Race and  
ethnicity

Prejudice

# Race and ethnicity

- Racial inequality has been a pressing social issue throughout United States history. In 1965, Amelia Boynton Robinson (shown here seated) marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge with other civil rights activists to go from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, to protest racial injustice and call for nonviolent change. On the fiftieth anniversary of this event in 2015, Ms. Robinson joined then-President Barack Obama and other grassroots activists to reenact this important event and raise social awareness that much remains to be done to promote racial equality and social justice.



Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images

# Race and ethnicity

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What is race? Some people think it refers to skin color (the white “race”); others use it to refer to a religion (the Jewish “race”), nationality (the British “race”), or the entire human species (the human “race”).

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Popular usages of the word have been based on the assumption that a race is a grouping or classification based on genetic variations in physical appearance, particularly skin color.

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However, social scientists, biologists, and genetic anthropologists dispute the idea that biological race is a meaningful concept.

# What is race?

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- DNA studies do not indicate that separate classifiable subspecies (races) exist within modern humans. While different genes for physical traits such as skin and hair color can be identified between individuals, no consistent patterns of genes across the human genome exist to distinguish one race from another.

# What is race?

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Today, sociologists emphasize that race is a socially constructed reality, not a biological one. Race as a social construct means that races as such do not actually exist but that some groups are still racially defined because the idea persists in many people's minds that races are distinct biological categories with physically distinguishable characteristics and a shared common cultural heritage.

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The process of creating a socially constructed reality involves three key activities: collective agreement, imposition, and acceptance of a specific construction

# Race and ethnicity: a comparison

A race is a category of people who have been singled out as inferior or superior, often on the basis of real or alleged physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, eye shape, or other subjectively selected attributes (Feagin and Feagin, 2012).

Racial categories currently identified by the U.S. Census Bureau include White; Black or African American; Asian; American Indian or Alaska Native; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and some other race (for people who do not identify with any of the other categories).



# Race and ethnicity

The categories of Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino are the two Census Bureau options used to categorize a person's ethnicity

An ethnic group is a collection of people distinguished, by others or by themselves, primarily on the basis of cultural or nationality characteristic.

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# Chinatown

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- New York City's Chinatown is an ethnic enclave where people participate in social interaction with other individuals in their ethnic group and feel a sense of shared identity. Ethnic enclaves provide economic and psychological support for recent immigrants as well as for those who were born in the United States.



# The Social Significance of Race and Ethnicity

race “permeates every institution, every relationship, and every individual” in the United States

As we . . . compare real estate prices in different neighborhoods, select a radio channel to enjoy while we drive to work, size up a potential client, customer, neighbor, or teacher, stand in line at the unemployment office, or carry out a thousand other normal tasks, we are compelled to think racially, to use the racial categories and meaning systems into which we have been socialized.

- Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994: 158)

# Racial Classifications and the Meaning of Race

Starting in 18th century US and Europe, hierarchies of races were established, placing the “white race” at the top, the “black race” at the bottom, and others in between.

Several changes occurred in the US regarding racial classification over the last century

- First, race is defined by perceived skin color: White or non-White.
- Second, categories of official racial classifications may (over time) create a sense of group membership or “consciousness of kind” for people within a somewhat arbitrary classification. Jewish, Italian, and Irish immigrants as Europeans versus Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, and Filipino Americans as Asians

## Racial Classifications and the Meaning of Race

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Third, racial purity is assumed to exist.” Census 2000 made it possible—for the first time—for individuals to classify themselves as being of more than one race.

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In the 2010 census, nine million people in the United States—about 3 percent of the total population—identified themselves as multiracial (Humes, Jones, and Ramirez, 2011).

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Between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of Americans identifying as more than one race increased by 32 percent.

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With one in seven new marriages in the United States involving spouses of different races or ethnicities, the multiracial population is likely to continue to increase.

# Dominant and Subordinate Groups

Original classification of majority group and minority group

Dominant and subordinate to identify power relationships that are based on perceived racial, ethnic, or other attributes and identities.



# Dominant and Subordinate Groups

dominant group is a racial or ethnic group that has the greatest power and resources in a society. In the United States, Whites with northern European ancestry (sometimes referred to as European Americans, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, or WASPs) have been considered to be the dominant group.

A subordinate group is one whose members, because of physical or cultural characteristics, are disadvantaged and subjected to unequal treatment and discrimination by the dominant group. Historically, Blacks and other persons of color have been considered to be subordinate-group members, particularly when they are from lower-income categories.

# Prejudice

- Prejudice is a negative attitude based on faulty generalizations about members of specific racial, ethnic, or other groups.
- Contemporary prejudice and discrimination cannot be understood without taking into account the historical background. School integration in the 1950s was accomplished despite the resistance of many Whites. Today, integration in education, housing, and many other areas of social life remains a pressing social issue.



# Bases of prejudice: ethnocentrism and stereotypes

- ethnocentrism refers to the tendency to regard one's own culture and group as the standard—and thus superior—whereas all other groups are seen as inferior. Ethnocentrism is maintained and perpetuated by stereotypes—overgeneralizations about the appearance, behavior, or other characteristics of members of particular categories.





# racism

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- Racism is a set of attitudes, beliefs, and practices that is used to justify the superior treatment of one racial or ethnic group and the inferior treatment of another racial or ethnic group.
- College campuses are not immune to racist hate speech and blatant acts of racism that target persons of color. Shown here, protesting students chant “No Diversity, No University” after a noose was found hanging on a black professor’s door at Columbia University’s Teachers College in New York City.



# A typology

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- Unprejudiced discriminators may have no personal prejudice but still engage in discriminatory behavior because of peer-group pressure or economic, political, or social interests.

	Prejudiced attitude?	Discriminatory behavior?
Unprejudiced nondiscriminator	No	No
Unprejudiced discriminator	No	Yes
Prejudiced nondiscriminator	Yes	No
Prejudiced discriminator	Yes	Yes

# Sociological Perspectives on Race and Ethnic Relations

- Symbolic Interactionist Perspectives
- Symbolic interactionists believe that intergroup contact can reduce stereotyping and prejudice if group members have equal status, pursue the same goals and cooperate to achieve them, and receive positive feedback when they interact with one another in positive ways.



# Functionalist Perspectives

- Assimilation is a process by which members of subordinate racial and ethnic groups become absorbed into the dominant culture. To some analysts, assimilation is functional because it contributes to the stability of society by minimizing group differences that might otherwise result in hostility and violence.
- Ethnic pluralism is the coexistence of a variety of distinct racial and ethnic groups within one society.
  - Equalitarian pluralism, or accommodation, is a situation in which ethnic groups coexist in equality with one another.
  - Segregation is the spatial and social separation of categories of people by race, ethnicity, class, gender, and/or religion.

# segregation

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- Segregation exists when specific racial or ethnic groups are set apart from the dominant group and have unequal access to power and privilege.



# Conflict Perspectives

Conflict theorists focus on economic stratification and access to power in their analyses of race and ethnic relations.

Some emphasize the castelike nature of racial stratification,

others analyze class-based discrimination,

and still others examine internal colonialism and gendered racism.



# Conflict Perspectives/caste system

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The caste perspective views racial and ethnic inequality as a permanent feature of U.S. society.

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Antimiscegenation laws, which prohibited sexual intercourse or marriage between persons of different races.

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Most states had such laws, which were later expanded to include relationships between Whites and Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos.

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The 1967 U.S. Supreme Court case *Loving v. Virginia* ruled that laws banning interracial marriage violate the Equal Protection and Due Process Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

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Even though these laws are no longer legal, some continue to hold biased beliefs about interracial relationships.

# Conflict Perspectives/class perspective

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Class perspectives emphasize the role of the capitalist class in racial exploitation.

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Based on early theories of race relations by black scholar W. E. B. Du Bois, sociologist Oliver C. Cox (1948) suggested that Blacks were enslaved because they were the lowest cost and best workers the owners could find for heavy labor in mines and on plantations.

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Thus, the profit motive of capitalists, not skin color or racial prejudice, accounts for slavery.



## Conflict Perspectives/Internal Colonialism

- Sociologist Robert Blauner (1972) stated that groups that have been subjected to internal colonialism remain in subordinate positions longer than groups that voluntarily migrated to the United States.
- Internal colonialism occurs when members of a racial or ethnic group are conquered or colonized and forcibly placed under the economic and political control of the dominant group.
  - Native Americans, Mexican Americans, African Americans
- this model does not explain the continued exploitation of some immigrant groups, such as the Chinese, Filipinos, Cubans, Vietnamese, and Haitians, and the greater acceptance of others, primarily those from northern Europe.

# The Split-Labor-Market Theory

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Split-labor market refers to the division of the economy into two areas of employment: a primary sector or upper tier, composed of higher-paid (usually dominant-group) workers in more secure jobs, and a secondary sector or lower tier, composed of lower-paid (often subordinate-group) workers in jobs with little security and hazardous working conditions.

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According to this perspective, white workers in the upper tier may use racial discrimination against non-Whites to protect their positions. These actions most often occur when upper-tier workers feel threatened by lower-tier workers hired by capitalists to reduce labor costs and maximize corporate profits.