

Culture and Diversity in the United States

So Many Ways to Be American

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First published 2015

ISBN 13: 978-1-138-82668-7 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-1-138-82669-4 (pbk)

ISBN 13: 978-1-315-73912-0 (ebk)

Chapter 3

Race and Racial Thinking

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3 Race and Racial Thinking

Alexis de Tocqueville, that early and observant chronicler of American society, noted in 1830 that its inhabitants “are not, as in Europe, shoots of the same stock. It is obvious that there are three naturally distinct, one might almost say hostile, races. Education, law, origin, and external features too have raised almost insurmountable barriers between them; chance has brought them together on the same soil, but they have mixed without combining, and each follows a separate destiny. Among these widely different people, the first that attracts attention, and the first in enlightenment, power, and happiness, is the white man, the European, man par excellence, below him come the Negro and the Indian. These two unlucky races have neither birth, physique, language, nor mores in common; only their misfortunes are alike. Both occupy an equally inferior position in the land where they dwell; both suffer the effects of tyranny, and, though their afflictions are different, they have the same people to blame for them” (1969: 316–17).

How can the concept—and the history—of race in the US be reconciled with the American ideals of equality, liberty, and justice? Does “race” necessarily lead to “racism”? Can the US be a race-conscious society and, at the same time, a society of equality? And can the US ever cease to be a race-conscious society?

One of the defining practices and institutions of the United States, slavery, has been called “the peculiar institution”—peculiar perhaps because it was so contrary to the founding principles of the new democracy (not, certainly, because it was unusual in the world). To be sure, America was a slave society for a longer period of time than it has been without slavery, abolishing the practice only 150 years ago. If slavery is the peculiar institution in American history and society, then its underlying concept, race, must be the peculiar concept in American thought and experience. As we will see, not all societies have possessed quite the race concept prevalent in the US, nor have they used their race concept to quite the same ends. Race is, almost certainly, a, if not the, central and inescapable problem in American experience and consciousness.

If de Tocqueville is correct that the early US was the home of three races, then we will postpone the discussion of the other “unlucky race,” the Native Americans, until the next chapter. In the present chapter, we will focus on black and white groups and relations, finding, first, that “white” is as much (or as little) a race as “black” and, second, that there is and long has been significant diversity *within* each of these groups or categories just as between them.

Race, Race Categories, and Race Ideology in the United States

Race is an inevitable part of American discourse; hardly any discussion of history, class, politics, or contemporary social problems fails to raise the issue. Race is even present in discussions of “color-blind society” or “post-racial America,” of how race supposedly does not matter anymore. Yet, despite the omnipresence of race in American experience, there is a wide (although not quite complete) consensus that race is not a natural, objective, “real” thing at all. Rather, as Audrey Smedley has written in her major analysis of race in North America, the “reality of race” resides in “a set of beliefs and attitudes about human differences, not the differences themselves” (1999: xi). Franz Boas, one of the founders of modern anthropology, critiqued the race concept even more strenuously, arguing first that there “is little clarity in regard to the term ‘race’” (1928: 19), since people use it to refer to everything from the English race or the French race to the white or black race to the human race. Second, he insisted that the races as we think of them are a product of admixture from many different population sources; in other words, there “are not pure racial types. We do not know how much their descendants may vary from themselves and what their ancestry may have been” (22–3). Third, he discovered that racial traits, although physical, were not fixed and immutable but rather appeared to change over time; the defining features of a race only *seemed* stable as long as populations remained apart and environmental (including the social environment) conditions remained the same.

The most devastating attack on the race concept came from Ashley Montagu who, in his book *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*, concluded that “Such a conception of ‘race’ has no basis in scientific fact or in any other kind of demonstrable fact. It is a pure myth, and it is the tragic myth of our tragic era” (1945: 8). He pressed the point that race was less a physical fact than a social relationship, “a term for a social problem which is created by special types of social condition and by such special conditions alone. In terms of social relations so-called ‘race problems’ are, in the modern world, essentially of the nature of caste problems” (67). The physical characteristics ascribed to a race “are merely the pegs upon which culturally generated hostilities are made to hang” (66).

Manning Nash has helpfully redirected our attention away from the details of race characteristics and categories to the matter of racial thinking itself, to what he calls the “ideology of race.” While questioning the natural, factual side of race, he continued to recognize the social importance and efficacy of race ideology, understood as

a system of ideas which interprets and defines the meanings of racial differences, real or imagined, in terms of some system of cultural values. The ideology of race is always normative: it ranks differences as better or worse, superior or inferior, desirable or undesirable, and as modifiable or unmodifiable. Like all ideologies, the ideology of race implies a call to action; it embodies a political and social program; it is a demand that something be done.

(1962: 285)

Smedley has gone so far as to identify five key components of the ideology of race in the US. These include the notions that:

- 1 a race is an “exclusive and discrete biological” entity;
- 2 races are fundamentally unequal, and the relations between races are necessarily hierarchical (some are “better” than others);
- 3 “the outer physical characteristics” of races are “but surface manifestations of inner realities [such as] behavioral, intellectual, temperamental, moral, and other qualities”;
- 4 all of the qualities of a race are “natural” and genetically inherited—and inherited as a single indivisible bundle;
- 5 therefore, the differences and hierarchies between races are immutable, “fixed and unalterable, [and] could never be bridged or transcended” (1999: 28).

In other words, races are believed to be categorial, in the sense we discussed in Chapter 1: the categories of “white” or “black” or whatever are taken as absolute, mutually exclusive, and exhaustive. These categories are thus seen as real, permanent, and (at least ideally) unmixable; they are also inevitably ranked in relation to (i.e., superior or inferior to) each other. Most crucially, the traits of a race are thought to include psychological, cultural, and even “moral” ones, which are also “fixed and unalterable”: some races are simply smarter or dumber, or more prone to crime or vice or delinquency.

Finally, as Nash proposed three decades earlier, a system of thought like American racial ideology is likely to develop in certain social contexts. Specifically, an ideology of race tends to coalesce when there is a conflict between two or more groups that are distinguishable in physical terms; when there is a division of labor based on this distinction that results in the “subordination or systematic deprivation of one group”; when the subordinate group resists its subordination; and interestingly when there is dissent within the dominant group over the “prevailing facts of disprivilege” (288). Under such conditions, racial thinking serves not only to subjugate the “lower race” but to help the “dominant race” justify to itself its advantages and privileges. Racial thinking is, then, a way of naturalizing social or cultural differences: the subordinate group is subordinated *because of* its inferior racial attributes. If Nash is correct, the appearance and elaboration of a race system would *be caused by* the social inequalities which it explains, legitimates, and perpetuates rather than *be a cause of* those inequalities.

A History of Race in the US

As de Tocqueville reminds us, from the moment that Europeans stepped on North American soil, there was racial diversity on the continent (Europeans and Native Americans). However, when most Americans think of race, they think in terms of “black” and “white.” In the previous chapter we mentioned that Africans were also in America within a decade of the first permanent English settlements, the initial twenty arriving at Jamestown in 1619. Leon Higginbotham (1978), in his major study of race in colonial America, claimed that these unlucky souls were brought to Virginia involuntarily but not exactly as slaves; instead, they were treated, he determined, more or less as additions to the already existing social class into which whites had often been pressed—that of indentured servant. Although both were a form of compulsory labor, the status of indentured servant differed from the status of slave in two critical ways: in duration (indenture often consisted of a limited term of service) and in degradation (indentured

servants were not deprived of all rights nor regarded as the property of their masters). And, consequentially, indentured servitude was not a status reserved solely for Africans; many Scottish and Irish laborers came to the colonies in the same boat, as it were.

Africans and Slavery

The traffic in African laborers grew steadily over the decades, as did the strictness of their servitude. In the 1650s over one thousand reached colonial America, mostly Virginia. The 1660s brought twice as many (2,377), and by the 1690s the slave trade had escalated to more than 6,600. At its peak (1730s), greater than 60,000 Africans disembarked in the future US, almost half destined for Virginia and most of the rest headed for Georgia and the Carolinas. The slave trade declined fairly steadily after that, to 14,000 in the 1790s, although there was a brief spike to 73,000 in the years from 1801 to 1810, then only 91 in the 1820s. Officially the importation of slaves was outlawed in 1808, although slavery still continued and as many as tens of thousands of new slaves may have been imported illegally. All in all, between 400,000 and 600,000 living Africans arrived on American soil during the era of the slave trade (many more died during the Atlantic passage), some 90 percent from coastal West Africa and interior West-Central Africa. By most reckonings, the traffic in Africans to the British colonies constituted 5–6 percent of the total trade, much greater numbers destined for Brazil (38 percent), Spanish America (17 percent), and French America (13 percent).

As this physically distinct population grew, the institution of slavery gradually solidified: “By the later part of the seventeenth century,” Higginbotham found, “slavery would be defined as a lifetime and hereditary form of servitude” (1978: 25). Virginia imposed lifetime servitude on Africans in 1640, although as late as 1669 it was still conceivable for an African to be a freeman or even to have power over whites (30). Further, an act of the Virginia legislature in 1669 decriminalized the killing of a slave who dared to escape from or even resist his/her white master. Between 1680 and 1682 an explicit “slave code” emerged in Virginia,

expressing a mixture of fear, greed, and prejudice, [which] simply reduced the privileges and rights of blacks. [The whites] rationalized their actions on the ground of security, without religious or moral qualm whatsoever. . . . And just as often, they probably made no effort at all to find a rationale; they simply dehumanized those who were black because of the color of their skins and because blacks were largely powerless to prevent it.

(38–9)

It was only around this time (1690s) that Africans began to arrive in South Carolina in large numbers, and by 1708 blacks actually outnumbered whites in the colony. Perhaps because of this demographic reality, or perhaps because of Virginia’s prior experience, South Carolina “started with a relatively definitive legal structure on slavery based on a fierce determination to use slavery wherever it was profitable” (152). The colony of Georgia, chartered in 1732, at first seemed poised to avert the worst of the new slave system, but “with the writing and passage of slave codes of 1755, 1765, and 1770, Georgia quickly became as strict as any other American colony in the prohibitions on freedom enforced against enslaved blacks” (217).

Despite the noble assertion in the 1776 Declaration of Independence that all men were created equal, slavery persisted during and after the American Revolution. In the first US Census in 1790, 697,681 slaves were counted, among the 757,000 blacks in the country or 19 percent of the nation's population of nearly 4 million. (The slave population rose to 3,950,546 by 1860, on the eve of the Civil War.) In that first census, Virginia still claimed almost half of slaves (over 300,000), with Maryland and North and South Carolina each containing over 100,000. Despite these noteworthy numbers, slavery was by and large a small-scale enterprise: 50 percent of slave owners possessed less than five slaves at a time, and almost three-quarters owned less than ten. It was the rare rich white landholder who mastered more than a dozen—like George Washington, who claimed 188 on his property in 1782.

As mentioned, the slave trade was banned in 1808 but the peculiar institution of slavery persisted. Notwithstanding a growing abolition movement (to end slavery altogether), many white Americans could not or would not foresee the end of the practice. For many, slave labor was an absolute necessity for the economy of the expanding society, especially after the introduction of the cotton gin in 1793 and the increased profitability of farm production; at least, they+ maintained, freedom should come slowly, and owners should be compensated for their losses. More than a few accepted the natural inferiority of the black person and the impossibility of his/her emancipation. And some positively lauded the institution as a blessing: as reported by Waldrep and Bellesiles, one “moderate” newspaper in Atlanta stated, “We regard every man in our midst an enemy to the institutions of the South, who does not boldly declare that he believes African slavery to be a social, moral, and political blessing” (2006: 146). Either way, the feelings over slavery were white-hot, leading to difficult “compromises” like the 1820 agreement to admit Missouri into the Union as a slave state in exchange



Image 3.1 Slave sale in Charleston, South Carolina.

(Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)

for Maine as a non-slave state. The so-called Missouri Compromise was repealed in 1854 with the Kansas–Nebraska Act, which provided for popular determination as to whether any new states would be slave-owning or not. This led, not unpredictably, to confrontations and violence between proponents and opponents of slavery, in which people were assaulted or killed and the entire city of Lawrence, Kansas was burned in 1856. In fact, one pro-slavery advocate named Benjamin Stringfellow actually urged his side to “mark every scoundrel . . . that is the least tainted with free-soilism or abolitionism, and exterminate him. . . . I advise you, one and all, to enter every election district in Kansas . . . and vote at the point of the bowie-knife and the revolver” (quoted in Waldrep and Bellesiles 2006: 144).

Diversity Fact:

The distribution of Africans in the early United States varied dramatically by region. In 1790 there were 657,000 black slaves in the South and only 40,000 in the North. However, not all blacks in the South were enslaved: there were also 32,457 free blacks in the South (and 27,000 in the North, or more than one-third of the Northern black population). Virginia alone held 41 percent of the black slave total, and New England held virtually none. In 1860 the entire Northeast had altogether 18 black slaves and 156,000 free blacks, while the South had 3.8 million slaves, representing 34.5 percent of the region’s people. Virginia had the largest number of slaves (more than 472,000), but South Carolina had the largest state percentage of slaves (57.2 percent).

From Emancipation to Segregation

In 1860 African slavery was a well-entrenched institution. There were approximately 4 million slaves in the US, more than 3.5 million in the South and almost half a million in the border states. The total number of slave owners was around 385,000, including nearly one-third of all households in the South and close to one-half of all households in South Carolina and Mississippi. In the Dred Scott case of 1857 (*Scott v Sanford*), the Supreme Court had already upheld the legality of slavery, declared that blacks were not qualified to be US citizens, and ruled that the federal government did not have the authority to ban slavery in states. As is generally known, the American Civil War was fought partly over slavery, or more broadly over states’ rights, that is, whether each state could make its own laws on slavery and other issues or whether the federal government could impose standard laws on all states. In the midst of the Civil War (1861–5), Abraham Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. Of course, the Proclamation had little effect until the war was won and slavery was officially abolished by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution (ratified December 6, 1865), which stipulated simply that “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” This was followed by the Fourteenth Amendment (1868), which granted that “All persons born or naturalized in the United States,” including former slaves, were

citizens with all the “privileges and immunities” proper to a citizen, and the Fifteenth (1870), which legally secured the right to vote regardless of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

And so it would seem that America’s race problem was solved. Instead, of course, immediately the practical and the legal/political status of African Americans did not change much at all. Most freed slaves, with little other option, continued to labor on Southern farms, now as “sharecroppers” instead of slaves; however, their economic wealth and political power did not advance much, if at all. Additionally, the military occupation of the South by the federal government (known as Reconstruction) turned many white Southerners against the reforms imposed from outside. Even the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which ostensibly granted equal rights to African Americans in public accommodations and access to court, had little impact and was soon reversed (see below). And to be sure, generations of racist attitudes were not going to be altered suddenly with the stroke of a pen.

In 1877 Reconstruction ended, federal troops were withdrawn from the South, and national efforts to guarantee black rights were curtailed. From that moment, new legal restrictions were enacted in Southern states to re-establish much of the privilege of whites that had been lost in the Civil War. These laws, known popularly as “Jim Crow” laws, formed the basis of the system of segregation for nearly a century. In 1881, for instance, public transportation (railroad cars) was segregated in Tennessee, then in other Southern states. In 1883 the Civil Rights Act was negated, ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. This unleashed a new set of initiatives to constrain freed slaves, including poll taxes and literacy tests to disqualify them from voting. In many locations, separate (and substandard) schools, hospitals, restaurants or dining areas, bathrooms, old-age homes, prisons, neighborhoods, and (in Louisiana) ticket-booths at the circus were established, essentially creating two parallel societies, one white and one black. Obviously, intermarriage or “miscegenation” was prohibited in several states. All of this was sanctioned again by the Supreme Court in 1896 with its *Plessy v Ferguson* decision, ruling that “separate but equal” facilities and accommodations for different races were legal.

The renewed oppression of Africans did not take the form merely of legal restrictions, though; in multiple instances, it took the form of true violence. Lynching was one of the principal coercive means of keeping the freed blacks in their place. Lynching, a kind of vigilante justice in which gangs of men would seize and typically kill and/or burn a victim, was an old tradition in the US, and one not reserved exclusively for blacks; rather, it was applied to undesirables of all sorts, from horse thieves to drunks to the poor and indigent. However, according to one major study of the practice (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People 1919), of the 3,224 people lynched in the period from 1889 to 1918, 78.2 percent were black and 21.8 percent were white. Whites were actually the majority of victims in most parts of the country, but in the South over 80 percent were black.

In addition to individual lynchings, there were also sporadic and destructive race riots, a number in the years immediately after the Civil War: New Orleans, Louisiana (1866, 1868, and 1874), Memphis, Tennessee (1866), Meridian, Mississippi (1870), Vicksburg, Mississippi (1874), and Yazoo City, Mississippi (1875). Another wave of rioting occurred in the late 1800s and early 1900s, in places like Lake City, North Carolina (1898), Wilmington, North Carolina (1898), Greenwood County,

Table 3.1 Lynching victims by race and region, 1889–1918

<i>Region</i>	<i>Total white</i>	<i>Percent white</i>	<i>Total black</i>	<i>Percent black</i>
All of US	702	21.8	2,522	78.2
New England	118	54.4	101	45.6
Mid-Atlantic	4	50	4	50
East North Central	33	53.1	30	46.9
West North Central	80	54.7	67	45.3
South Atlantic	78	9.1	784	90.9
East Central South	134	13.3	880	86.7
West Central South	213	21.7	745	78.3
Mountain West	114	92.3	12	7.7
Pacific West	43	93.5	3	6.5
Alaska and Unknown	15	100	0	0

Source: NAACP. *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States 1889–1918*

South Carolina (1898), New Orleans (1900), New York City (1900), Wilmington, Delaware (1903), Springfield, Ohio (1904), Atlanta (1906), Greenburg, Indiana (1906), Brownsville, Texas (1906) and Springfield, Illinois (1908). Some of the worst riots happened in the aftermath of World War I, as in Philadelphia (1917), Houston (1917), Washington DC (1919), Chicago (1919), Omaha (1919), Charleston, South Carolina (1919), Longview, Texas (1919), and perhaps most notoriously Tulsa, Oklahoma (1921), where up to 76 people were killed during the destruction of a thirty-square-block predominantly black area of north Tulsa. Some observers even maintained that whites used airplanes to bomb the neighborhood.

The late 1800s and early 1900s was also, not surprisingly, the era of “scientific racism” and of eugenics, the empirical and quantitative study of “racial differences” to explain and justify racial inequality as well as the attempt to control and “breed out” unwanted physical traits. In the name of **anthropometry**, for instance, efforts were undertaken to measure and compare bodily features like head size and shape, face shape and angle, and length of limbs in order to determine the “superior” and the “primitive” characteristics of humanity. Of course, these scientists found what they wanted to find: that Africans had smaller brains, less desirable cranial and facial shapes, and more “primitive” anatomy than whites. As Haller noted in his study of scientific racism, the consistently low ranking of Africans proved to the contemporary racists that the black race bore “a far closer relationship to the ape” than did any other race (1971: 34), which “relegated the Negro to the bottom of the scale of race development” (49–50). More than a few influential figures of the day, like Edward Drinker Cope, insisted that the “inferior character of the Negro mind in the scale of evolution made him unfit for American citizenship” (198), while Nathaniel Southgate Shaler went so far as to excuse lynching as a legitimate form of race self-defense (184–5).

It will be noted above that some of the race riots of the last century occurred in Northern cities like Philadelphia and New York. This is because arguably the single most significant change in African American demographics since the introduction of slavery was the migration of a great many Southern blacks to the North a generation or two after the Civil War. In what is sometimes dubbed the Great Migration, almost 5 million African Americans moved northward in the first half of the twentieth century,

most to large cities like Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and New York. This, naturally, shifted the demographics of the North and of urban areas in historically important ways, driving many white people out of city centers and into (generally racially segregated) suburban neighborhoods (what is known as “white flight”) and creating black-majority and predominantly poor downtown districts characterized by ghetto or slum conditions (see Chapter 12). (Interestingly, the last couple of decades have witnessed a noteworthy migration of African Americans *back* to Southern cities like Atlanta.)

As happens in all situations of migration and urbanization, African Americans in the early twentieth century began to become more conscious of their status as a disadvantaged population and to organize and mobilize on that basis. One of the key and most enduring institutions established in this period was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded on February 12, 1909 (Lincoln’s birthday) as an organization to promote the legal and civil rights of blacks. One of the leading figures in the formation and early activity of the NAACP was William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, better known as W. E. B. Du Bois. An effective activist and an accomplished sociologist, Du Bois not only spearheaded the drive for black equality but also studied and wrote about the social and psychological plight of Africans in America. His best-known work is *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), in which he identified the duality, the otherness, not only in American society, riven as it was by racial difference and unrest, but in the African American personality and soul specifically.



Image 3.2 The “Great Migration” to the North—Chicago, 1918.

(Courtesy of Chicago History Museum/Getty Images)

Box 3.1 “Double-Consciousness” among African Americans

According to Du Bois, Africans in the US suffered an almost insurmountable problem—their own double-consciousness as Americans and yet non-Americans, as an indelible part of American society and yet not really a part of American society at all. In *The Souls of Black Folk* he wrote:

the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, 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. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. . . . The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.

(2006: 9)

Integration or Separatism?

This internal duality was reflected in the diversity of African American attitudes and initiatives, in the first years of the twentieth century and beyond, especially in the split between “integrationists” and “separatists.” Du Bois (and later Martin Luther King) was an integrationist, who aspired and worked for a single united America in which, as King put it, white children and black children would be equally welcome and individuals would be judged by their character and not by their skin color. However, not all blacks in America shared this same vision and goal.

In Du Bois’ own time, the main rival to the integrationist activities of the NAACP was Marcus Garvey and the “Back to Africa” movement. Arising around 1920, Garvey and his some 3 million followers concluded that the white majority would never accept blacks as equals and that blacks should stop trying to gain white acceptance. Instead, black Americans should develop self-reliance and racial pride (what would, decades later, be expressed as “black is beautiful”). Blacks should voluntarily separate themselves from white American society, creating their own institutions and exercising their own power. But, since this goal seemed impossible on the North American continent, Garvey advocated a return to Africa, where blacks could once again be “at

home” and, thus, resolve once and for all their double-consciousness by rejecting their American consciousness and embracing their African identity.

In the 1930s, a still more radical version of African separatism emerged, this time associated not with the land of Africa as much as with the religion of Islam. Its leaders, like Elijah Muhammad, argued that Islam was the true religion and identity of Africans and that Christianity was a white religion forced upon blacks by slavery—one dimension of the deculturation of Africans in America, that is, the suppression of their true selves. Hence came the Nation of Islam or, as its full name suggests, the Lost Found Nation of Islam in the Wilderness of North America. During the 1950s the Nation of Islam gained members and attention under the guidance of Malcolm X, who disdained “white culture” including Christianity and English (or “slave”) names, referring black identity back to Islam and Africa (where there had, in fact, been powerful Islamic societies in central Africa prior to slavery). In the 1950s and 1960s many prominent African Americans took Islamic names, most famously the championship boxer Cassius Clay, who became Muhammad Ali. Some black separatists went so far as to demand their own racial territory in the US as well as reparations for the damage done to them by slavery; after all, they argued, it was their labor that had built this country, and they had never received anything in return. Malcolm X was killed in 1965, and in recent years Louis Farrakhan has been the face of the Nation of Islam.

Meanwhile, the integrationist side strived for inclusion and justice in mainstream American society. Its crowning achievement was the 1954 *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* Supreme Court decision, which ruled, after nearly a century of legal segregation, that “separate but equal” facilities were unconstitutional. The NAACP had argued the case against official segregation, and now the federal government was empowered to begin the dismantling of Jim Crow laws and the system of racial discrimination pervading American society. However, a court ruling does not automatically change the law, let alone human attitudes. Inspired by the decision, and for the purpose of directly challenging segregation laws, the “civil rights” movement got underway in 1955 when Rosa Parks of Montgomery, Alabama intentionally refused to give her bus seat to a white person. Her action sparked a boycott by blacks of the bus system and other white businesses and led to the formation of the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) in 1957, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King advocated a unique form of action, based on Mahatma Gandhi’s policy of nonviolence in resistance to British colonialism in India. **Civil disobedience**, that is, deliberately breaking unjust laws, coupled with nonviolent resistance (for example, sit-down strikes and peaceful demonstrations, with no attempt to avoid arrest), allowed the civil rights activists to claim the moral high ground as Americans watched menacing white authorities attack peaceful crowds with dogs and water hoses.

The racial integrationist movement always focused its efforts on law and institutions, especially schools. Jim Crow had called for separate schools and colleges, but *Brown v Board of Education* banned them. Accordingly, President Eisenhower ordered federal troops into Little Rock, Arkansas to enforce school desegregation, while Governor George Wallace of Alabama stood on the steps of the University of Alabama to prevent black students from entering and to promote “segregation now and forever.” In 1963, 200,000 marchers gathered in Washington, DC to demand their civil rights, and in 1964 the Civil Rights Act provided for equality of all citizens

in voting, education, public accommodations, and federally funded programs. A further Act in 1968 ensured equality in access to housing and real estate.

Despite these gains, or perhaps because of them, the separatist and even militant side of black activism continued to expand. After 1965 the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) became a leading voice in the “black power” movement. Personalities like Stokely Carmichael echoed Marcus Garvey’s and Malcolm X’s earlier calls for autonomous black action and the preservation of the African American community and culture, that is, non-assimilation. With the slogan “Black is beautiful,” the movement sought to empower African Americans to solve their own social, political, and economic problems through control of their own institutions like schools, businesses, and government. Rioting also broke out again, in 1964 in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts and after Martin Luther King’s assassination in 1968. Finally, the Black Panthers, formed to prosecute an aggressive program of civil rights and social justice, expressed in their “Ten Point Plan”:

- 1 “We want freedom, we want power to determine the destiny of our black and oppressed communities.
- 2 “We want full employment for our people.

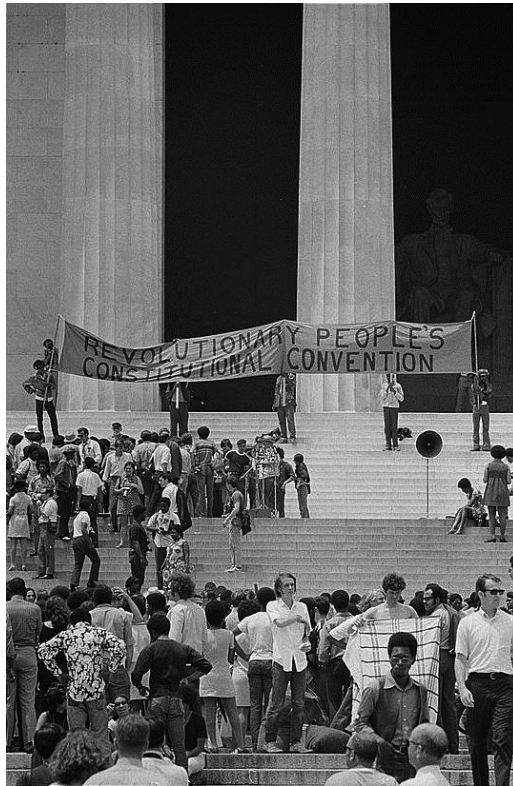


Image 3.3 Black Panther rally, Lincoln Memorial, 1970.

(Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)

- 3 “We want an end to the robbery by the capitalists of our black and oppressed communities.
- 4 “We want decent housing, fit for the shelter of human beings.
- 5 “We want decent education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.
- 6 “We want completely free health care for all black and oppressed people.
- 7 “We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people, other people of color, all oppressed people inside the United States.
- 8 “We want an immediate end to all wars of aggression.
- 9 “We want freedom for all black and oppressed people now held in US federal, state, country, city, and military prisons and jails. We want trials by a jury of peers for all persons charged with so-called crimes under the laws of this country.
- 10 “We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, peace, and people’s community control of modern technology.”

Race in Contemporary American Society

Not only the racial composition but the racial thinking and the very racial categories of the US have changed over time. In the Census of 1850, for instance, “color” was polled, and three options were available (white, black, and “mulatto” or mixed); theoretically, then, only two actual races were officially recognized. The 1880 Census introduced more categories: white, black, mulatto, Chinese, and Indian (Native American). The most recent census, conducted in 2010, took a very different approach, asking respondents first to identify as “Spanish/Hispanic/Latino” or not and then to select a race from a remarkably longer list of alternatives or to write in “some other race” (see Figure 3.1). The principal race categories employed were “White,” “Black or African American,” “American Indian and Alaska Native,” “Asian,” “Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander,” and “Some Other Race,” defined as follows:

- White “refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicated their race(s) as ‘White’ or reported entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, or Caucasian.”
- Black or African American “refers to people having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicated their race(s) as ‘Black, African Am., or Negro,’ or reported entries such as African American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian.”
- American Indian and Alaska Native “refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment. This category includes people who indicated their race(s) as ‘American Indian or Alaska Native’ or reported their enrolled or principal tribe, such as Navajo, Blackfeet, Inupiat, Yup’ik, or Central American Indian groups or South American Indian groups.”
- Asian “refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands,

Thailand, and Vietnam. It includes people who indicated their race(s) as ‘Asian’ or reported entries such as ‘Asian Indian,’ ‘Chinese,’ ‘Filipino,’ ‘Korean,’ ‘Japanese,’ ‘Vietnamese,’ and ‘Other Asian’ or provided other detailed Asian responses.”

- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander “refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands. It includes people who indicated their race(s) as ‘Pacific Islander’ or reported entries such as ‘Native Hawaiian,’ ‘Guamanian or Chamorro,’ ‘Samoan,’ and ‘Other Pacific Islander’ or provided other detailed Pacific Islander responses.”
- Some Other Race finally “includes all other responses not included in the White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander race categories described above. Respondents reporting entries such as multiracial, mixed, interracial, or a Hispanic or Latino group (for example, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Spanish) in response to the race question are included in this category.”

By these standards and definitions, the racial composition of the US was as reported in Table 3.2.

5. Is this person of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano

Yes, Puerto Rican

Yes, Cuban

Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin — *Print origin, for example, Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.* ↴

6. What is this person's race? Mark one or more boxes.

White

Black, African Am., or Negro

American Indian or Alaska Native — *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.* ↴

Asian Indian Japanese Native Hawaiian

Chinese Korean Guamanian or Chamorro

Filipino Vietnamese Samoan

Other Asian — *Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.* ↴

Other Pacific Islander — *Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.* ↴

Some other race — *Print race.* ↴

Figure 3.1 2010 Census questions on Hispanic origin and race.

Source: US Census Bureau. 2010 Census Brief: Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin

Table 3.2 US population by race and Hispanic origin, 2010

<i>Race</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent of population</i>
Total population	308,745,538	100
One race	299,736,465	97.1
White	223,553,265	72.4
Black or African American	38,929,319	12.6
American Indian and Alaska Native	2,932,248	0.9
Asian	14,674,252	4.8
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	540,013	0.2
Some other race	19,107,368	6.2
Two or more races	9,009,073	2.9
Hispanic or Latino	50,477,594	16.3

Source: US Census Bureau. 2010 *Census Brief: Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin*

In 2000, for the first time in American history, the Hispanic population outnumbered the African American population—a potentially significant development (see Chapter 4). Also, of those who self-identified with more than one race, the most common combinations were “White and Black/African American” (1,834,212), “White and Some Other Race” (1,740,924), “White and Asian” (1,623,234), and “White and American Indian/Alaska Native” (1,432,309). Finally, to make matters maximally complicated, 676,469 people identified as three races, 57,875 as four races, 8,619 as five races, and 792 as six races. The utility of America’s trusty race categories suddenly appears to be in question.

Desegregation and Affirmative Action

Political initiatives like the 1964 Civil Rights Act, as epochal and well-intentioned as they are, do not automatically change social realities; they merely provide the basis for changing them. These realities included individual and institutional discrimination against non-whites in housing, education, and employment. Even before the Civil Rights Act, President John F. Kennedy had issued Executive Order 10925, instructing those businesses that received government contracts to “take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed, and that employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin.” The order also created an agency, the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. Hence the policy known as affirmative action was born.

The philosophy of affirmative action was premised on the historical and informal disadvantages that prevented non-whites from achieving equality, even when the formal barriers had been removed. As President Lyndon Johnson explained in 1965,

You do not take a person who for years has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, “You’re free to compete with all the others,” and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates.

(Johnson 1966: 635)

So, proactive steps were to be taken to correct past injustices. The two main arenas of these steps were in jobs and education. In late 1971 the Department of Labor (Revised Order No. 4) mandated that all its contractors develop “an acceptable affirmative action program” to determine where they were “deficient in the utilization of minority groups and women” and to establish “goals and timetables to which the contractor’s good faith efforts must be directed to correct the deficiencies.” These goals were conceived not as “rigid and inflexible quotas” but as “targets reasonably attainable” through “good faith efforts.” Eventually, affirmative action was imposed on or adopted by other employers besides federal contractors.

The other main area of desegregation was the school system. Part of the problem of school segregation was explicit exclusion and class inequality (e.g., the inability of non-whites to enter elite colleges), while another problem was residential separation. At the primary and secondary school level, access to schools in the US is basically local: students attend their local neighborhood school. However, if different groups live in segregated neighborhoods with unequal educational facilities, equal-opportunity laws will not alter that fact. Short of shifting people to new neighborhoods, the best solution seemed to be to shift the students to new schools. So began the era of busing. In 1970 a federal court ruled that North Carolina should achieve racial integration by using buses to move black students to white schools and vice versa. In 1971 the Supreme Court heard the case of *Swann v Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* and decided to allow mandatory busing to integrate segregated schools. School systems around the country (Richmond, Virginia 1971, Boston 1974, Wilmington, Delaware 1976, Los Angeles 1978, to name a few) voluntarily or under order devised busing programs, often with great protest by parents who objected to their children being shipped so far from home and/or to inferior facilities. Often the effect of mandatory busing was not racial integration but the flight of white students to private, parochial, or suburban schools.

Meanwhile, colleges were adopting their own affirmative action policies in regard to admission. The University of California was among the colleges that considered race as an issue in evaluating applicants, and in 1978 the Supreme Court (*Regents of the University of California v Bakke*) ruled that it was indeed acceptable to use race as one factor in selecting candidates for admission; however, it ruled against an actual quota system that reserved eighteen places specifically for minority students. In 1998 the same university ended its affirmative action efforts for undergraduate admissions, resulting in a 61 percent decline in admissions for African American, Latino, and Native American students at UC-Berkeley and a 36 percent drop at UCLA.

Naturally, there were those who objected to mandatory desegregation, affirmative action, and race-conscious hiring and admissions, and not only those who were racists. Some argued that, by the 1990s or 2000s, it was unnecessary, since minorities had achieved reasonable equality. Others argued that it was unfair, that it took jobs or college seats from equally or more qualified white applicants; many called it “reverse discrimination.” And others argued that it was fundamentally un-American, that employment or education was to be achieved on the basis of individual merit, not group membership and entitlement. Two court cases against the University of Michigan in 2003 resulted in a split decision: *Grutter v Bollinger* approved of the university’s narrow use of race in admission to its law school in the interest of student-body diversity, but *Gratz v Bollinger* rejected an explicit system that awarded points toward undergraduate admission for race and ethnicity.

By the late 1990s electoral efforts were also being launched to stop affirmative action. One prominent case was Proposition 209 on California's 1996 ballot, a constitutional amendment mandating that the state would "not discriminate against or grant preferential treatment to any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting." One of the strongest supporters of the measure was Ward Connerly, a prominent black figure. The proposition passed with 54 percent of the vote, was challenged but upheld in court, and spawned a series of subsequent efforts in other states from Washington to Texas, Michigan, and Florida. Clearly, the debate and struggle over racial equality and racial access to wealth and status in the US is far from over.

Diversity Fact:

The effects of prohibiting affirmative action or race-based admissions in colleges have been mixed by race, by state, and by institution. There was almost always a drop in minority enrollment immediately after such bans: for instance, at the University of California-Berkeley, Hispanic enrollment peaked in 1990 at 23 percent and African American enrollment at 8 percent in 1997, but by 2011 those groups constituted only 11 percent and 2 percent of the student body, respectively. At the University of Texas, Hispanic enrollment dipped slightly from 16 percent to 13 percent at the 1997 ban but rose to a high of 23 percent in 2010, and African American enrollment rose modestly from 3 percent to 5 percent over the same period. At Florida State University, Hispanic enrollment rose while African American enrollment fell, and at the University of Michigan, Hispanic enrollment was roughly flat while African American enrollment declined by almost half.

The Achievement Gap

Despite the real and significant fact that non-whites have made observable advances in American society, a number of troubling inequalities still remain. As we will discuss more fully in Chapter 5, most non-white groups continue to linger behind whites in wealth and to surpass whites in poverty. For instance, since 1980 the median income for black households has consistently hovered around 60 percent of median income for white households (in 2011, \$32,229 compared to \$55,214); Hispanic households tend to fare better than black ones (\$38,624), while Asian American households have outperformed all others (\$65,129). And while the poverty rate for whites was 12.8 percent in 2011, it was 27.6 percent for blacks, and 25.3 percent for Hispanics (but only 12.3 percent for Asian Americans).

One of the most concerning and confusing differences between white Americans and minority groups like African Americans and Hispanics is the disparity in academic success between the two groups, which is often called the **achievement gap**. Black and Hispanic students tend to lag behind their white counterparts in high school performance, high school graduation rates, and college attendance and graduation. For example, according to the 2000 Census, out of every 100 white children who entered kindergarten, 91 would graduate from high school, 62 would attend college,

and 30 would earn a bachelor's degree by age 24; the same 100 black kindergarteners would produce only 87 high school graduates, 54 college students, and 16 bachelor's degrees. For Hispanics it was a bleak 62, 29, and 6, respectively.

The gap shows up in the early years of education. The National Assessment of Educational Progress for 2003 (Donahue et al. 2005) indicated that more white fourth-graders (39 percent) achieved proficiency in reading than their black (12 percent) or Hispanic (14 percent) peers—none of which, by the way, are very impressive percentages. By age 17, African American and Latino students were doing math and reading at the level of 13-year-old white students. SAT scores in 2006 for white test-takers averaged 1,063, but only 863 for blacks, 919 for Hispanics, and 981 for Native Americans, but 1,088 for Asian Americans. The Schott Foundation for Public Education found that high school graduation rates for African Americans, especially males, fell behind their white counterparts in every state in the country in 2003/4, in all but three cases by double digits (Alaska, Rhode Island, and Arizona), and by as much as 40 percent in Illinois and 47 percent in Wisconsin (Holzman 2006: 2). In 2008, 9.9 percent of African American school-age youths had dropped out of school—and an alarming 18.3 percent of Hispanic youths—compared to 4.8 percent of whites and 4.4 percent of Asians. The problem is so serious, and so persistent (no major gains have occurred since 1980), that Harvard University has actually formed an Achievement Gap Initiative.

The explanations offered for the achievement gap vary. In the case of Hispanics, one obvious potential issue is language; the standard use of English as the language of instruction represents a type of institutional discrimination against non-English speakers. This is the justification for bilingual programs in American schools (see Chapter 8). Language cannot quite be the culprit in the case of African Americans, nor does it seem to deter Asian Americans on the whole. Another explanation that is sometimes given is the relevance of the curriculum: non-white students who are taught a Eurocentric curriculum, it is argued, might not see themselves and their group in the material and might suffer disinterest or, worse, a blow to their self-esteem. A third variable that cannot be overlooked is class. Since, as noted already and explored further in Chapter 5, non-whites tend to be poorer than whites, this economic disadvantage could translate into an academic disadvantage. This is no doubt a concern, but Richard Rothstein (2004) finds that the gap still exists when family income is corrected for; that is, black and white children perform unequally even when those children come from households of similar class and income. No matter what the source, the achievement gap—and underachievement by any element of society—is a major problem that should worry all Americans.

Box 3.2 Critical Race Theory

“Today, while all manners of civil rights laws and precedents are in place, the protection they provide is diluted by lax enforcement, by the establishment of difficult-to-meet standards of proof, and worst of all, by the increasing irrelevance of antidiscrimination laws to race related disadvantages, now as likely to be a result of social class as of color”—so wrote Derrick Bell (1987: 5), a legal scholar like Kimberlé Crenshaw who noted the persistent legal inequalities faced

(continued)

(continued)

by African Americans and the intersectionality of multiple variables of disadvantage. Bell's books *And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice* (from which the above sentence is taken) and *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (1992) were the impetus behind what became known as "critical race theory." **Critical Race Theory** or CRT, according to Rollock and Gillborn (2011), is a movement and "a body of scholarship steeped in radical activism that seeks to explore and challenge the prevalence of racial inequality in society. It is based on the understanding that race and racism are the product of social thought and power relations; CRT theorists endeavor to expose the way in which racial inequality is maintained through the operation of structures and assumptions that appear normal and unremarkable." Born at a time when and out of a sense that the civil rights movement had stalled and perhaps failed (as the discussion above suggests), Bell and others came to conclude that racism could not be countered by legislative or judicial action, since it was spawned by a deeper mindset, "an experientially limited bundle of presuppositions, received wisdom, and shared cultural understanding that persons in the majority"—that is, white persons—bring to discussions of race" (cummings 2012: 55). As Gary L. Williams put it in a recent issue of the journal *Myriad* dedicated to it, CRT insists "that we are not a colorblind society: that justice is not blind and that scales of justice are not balanced. Additionally, CRT validates voices and experiences of those who are victims of the 'isms' and other forms of subordination, especially at the institutional level" (2011: 2). From the institutional side, CRT maintains "that racism is endemic in US society, deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically" and thus "that laws to remedy racial inequality are often undermined before they can be fully implemented" (4). Interestingly and significantly, since the experiences of African Americans transcend the available categories and "isms"—that there is no "singular truth or reality" of race in America—CRT often resorts to unconventional writing styles, such as storytelling or "counter-narrative" which "may be semi-autobiographical or allegorical in nature" and which presents the "voices of people of color" (Rollock and Gillborn 2011) rather than claiming to arrive at the final truth of race and American society.

Race and the Criminal Justice System

Among the many dimensions of American society in which race makes a difference is the law. It is often observed that African Americans comprise more than their share of Americans in trouble with the law. A watch-dog group, the Sentencing Project, has defined this glaring racial disparity in the criminal justice system as the situation in which "the proportion of a racial/ethnic group within the control of the system is greater than the proportion of such groups in the general population" (2000: 2). As Table 3.3 and Figures 3.2 and 3.3 clearly illustrate, African Americans, who number only one-sixth of the white population, comprise as many prison inmates as whites, and therefore a much higher incarceration rate, and have done so for many years.

Table 3.3 Imprisonment rate (State and Federal) of males by race, 2011

Race	Rate (per 100,000 population)
Total	492
White male	478
Black male	3,023
Hispanic male	1,238

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, US Department of Justice. *Bulletin: Prisoners in 2011*

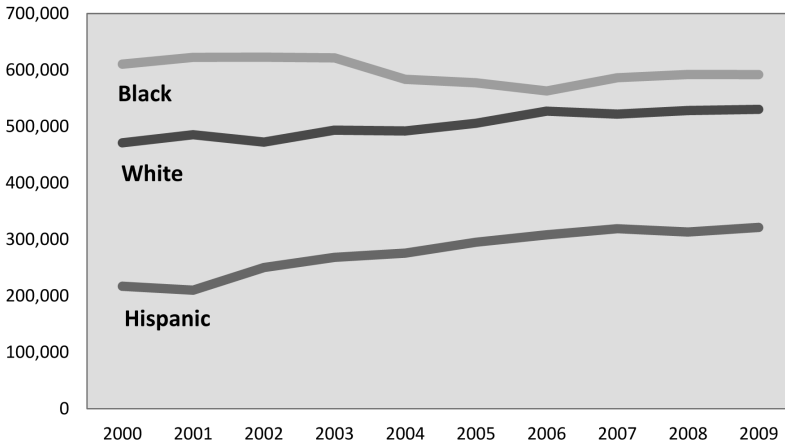


Figure 3.2 Number of sentenced prisoners (State and Federal) by race and Hispanic origin, 2000–2009.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, US Department of Justice. *Bulletin: Prisoners in 2009*

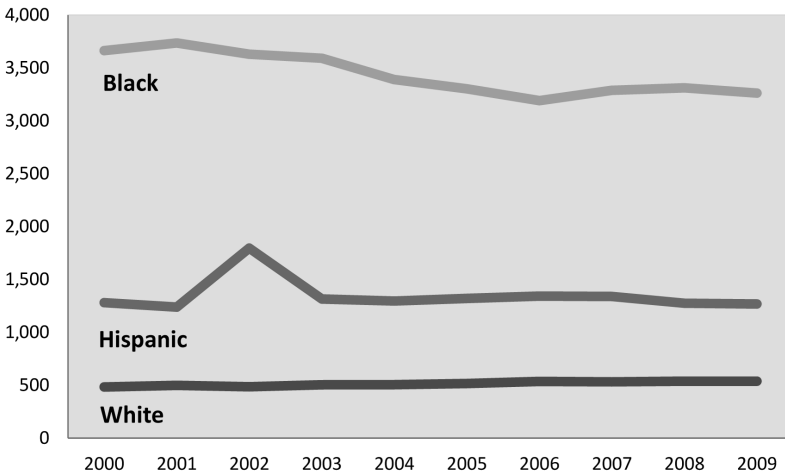


Figure 3.3 Rate of sentenced prisoners (State and Federal) per 100,000 population by race and Hispanic origin, 2000–2009.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, US Department of Justice. *Bulletin: Prisoners in 2009*

As the Bureau of Justice Statistics summarizes, blacks were six times as likely to be in prison as whites, and nearly three times as likely as Hispanics. Back in 1990 it was calculated that almost one-quarter of all young black males (under age 30) were “under supervision” by the criminal justice system in some way (in prison, on parole, on probation, etc.), and this trend has continued. In 2004 one-quarter of adult black men were under supervision in Texas, and in 2005 the Justice Policy Institute reported that 52 percent of young black men in Baltimore were in the criminal justice system. The Drug Policy Alliance Network (2009) found that African Americans amounted to 13 percent of the nation’s drug users but 35 percent of its arrests for drug possession, 55 percent of its drug convictions, and 74 percent of its prison population on drug charges. Most seriously, blacks are more likely to receive the harshest correctional sentence, death, than whites or any other group: while the death-row population has risen dramatically since 1970 (from less than 1,000 to over 3,000), blacks make up almost half of that amount.

Ironically perhaps, African Americans are not only more likely to be the perpetrators of crime but also the victims of crime. The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) of 2011 found that blacks, both male and female, were victimized at higher rates than whites in nearly every type of crime, for instance 26.4 per 1,000 for violent crimes versus 21.5 per 1,000 of whites (although Native Americans led both groups with 45.4 per 1,000). Black women suffered almost three times the rate of rape compared to white women. According to the NCVS, race was by far the greatest basis for hate crimes.

New African Immigrants

One of the most underappreciated yet most remarkable developments in African American demographics in recent years has been the upsurge in new immigrants from Africa. When most Americans think of “African American,” they think of an ancestry of slavery in the United States going back generations. However, according to the Population Reference Bureau (<http://www.prb.org>), the foreign-born black population of the US increased from less than 1 percent of all US blacks in 1980 to 8 percent in 2005—threatening to change the very meaning of the term “African American.”

Prior to 1980, black immigration to the US was, as Sam Roberts of the *New York Times* (2006) phrases it, a trickle, but by the turn of the twenty-first century more blacks were arriving annually from Africa and other black regions than during the heights of the slave trade. During the 1980s, over 700,000 came to the country, in the 1990s almost 900,000, and from 2000 to 2005 another 656,000. According to a report by Capps, McCabe, and Fix (2011), in 2009 the total number of African immigrants living in the US was 1.5 million, representing about 4 percent of all immigrants; however, they also note that only 74 percent of those African immigrants identified themselves as black, since other races also inhabit the African continent.

Diversity Fact:

During the period from 2008 to 2009, more than 1 million new black African immigrants stepped ashore, of whom 201,000 originated in Nigeria, 143,000 in Ethiopia, 110,000 in Ghana, and 68,000 in Kenya. Interestingly, not all immigrants

from Africa were black; in fact, only 74 percent were, others being white or Arab. And not all black immigrants were from Africa: in 2008–9, more than half of all black immigrants (1.7 million) arrived from countries in the Caribbean region, especially Jamaica and Haiti.

In every case, these new groups brought with them not only racial differences from the white American majority but cultural and linguistic differences from both white and black Americans. The new African Americans (and Caribbean-African Americans) tend to settle in five states (New York, Texas, California, Florida, and Illinois) and to concentrate in cities, with almost two-thirds of Caribbean black immigrants living in New York City or Miami. For some reason an unexpectedly large number have ended up in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota (African-born blacks comprised 15.4 percent of the entire black population of the twin cities, according to the 2000 Census), including the Nuer (pastoralists of Sudan) described by Jon Holtzman (2000) in his ethnography of these refugees from Sudanese political violence.

With the exception of the Nuer and other similar tribal groups, the new black immigrants bring more “human capital,” as Capps, McCabe, and Fix put it, to their new homelands than most new arrivals. Almost half (46 percent) of all black immigrants, and over one-fifth (21 percent) of black African immigrants already speak English, and only 2–3 percent speak no English. They also tend to come with high education and good job skills: black immigrants bring almost the same percentage (16 percent) of college degrees as the native-born population, and black Africans specifically actually have a greater percentage (23 percent). Remarkably, 15 percent of black African immigrants possess a graduate or professional degree, compared to 10 percent of the native-born population. As a group they have higher rates of employment than the general population, though they are often employed in relatively low-paying jobs. The same problem has been noted for black African immigrants to Canada, where African degrees and professional experience are not always recognized, language accents are disfavored, and racial discrimination often occurs (Creese 2011). Finally, African immigrants, who often identified by tribe or region or language or country back in Africa, are often surprised and confused to find themselves assigned to the “black” category along with people whom they consider very different from themselves.

Biracial and Multiracial America

As mentioned above, some 2.9 percent of Americans identified themselves as belonging to two or more races in the last census. While this is a small number, it is larger than the percentage of Americans who are Mormon or Jewish (1.3 percent each) and is almost certainly a growing trend, so it deserves our attention.

The structure of the 2010 Census, with its six official race categories and multiple race possibilities, allowed for dozens of combinations of two or more races. Of these combinations, thirteen had more than 100,000 members. The four largest combinations accounted for the vast majority of biracial and multiracial citizens, approximately 6.5 million individuals. As already stated, the single largest mixed-race group was

“White and Black” (1.8 million or 20.4 percent of all mixed-race Americans), followed by “White and Some Other Race” (1.7 million or 19.3 percent), “White and Asian” (1.6 million or 18 percent), and “White and American Indian/Native Alaskan” (1.4 million or 15.9 percent). Interestingly but sensibly, the bi/multiracial groups were much younger than the general population, indicating the novelty of interracial marriage and interracial children. Because of their youth, and because of the increasing acceptability of interracial marriage, we can expect to see a continuing growth in the two-or-more-races categories as these young people marry and have children themselves. Very generally speaking, bi/multiracial people tend to be lower in wealth and status than the general population, but this varied widely by particular race combination.

We can say confidently that the diversity of race in America is becoming more so daily and that the standard historical race categories seem destined to lose much if not most of their meaning and value in the years ahead.

The White Supremacist Movement

The Census predicts that by 2050 the white population of the US will decline to 72 percent from its 2000 level of 81 percent, of which a mere 50.1 percent will be white and non-Hispanic; at the same time, the black population will rise to 14.6 percent and the Hispanic population to a historic 24.4 percent. Clearly, this will not only challenge the traditional dualistic concept of race in the country, with “white” and “black” as only two categories, but it will also seriously challenge white domination. Obviously, not everyone in America will approve of this change.

White citizens who take their whiteness seriously, and especially who perceive their white group threatened by political, economic, or social forces, have repeatedly organized themselves “in defense of” their white race. The best-known example is undoubtedly the Ku Klux Klan, formed in the aftermath of the Civil War, allegedly in Tennessee in late 1865 or early 1866. While perhaps started as a prankish club for former Confederate soldiers, it quickly evolved into a terrorist organization, an expression of the vigilante tradition so deep in American culture. According to an observer of the time, Lewis Merrill,

Beyond doubt the object of the organization . . . is to terrify the negroes [sic] into obeying the whites in voting and to compel them to stay away from the polls. The more active and intelligent of the negroes who have influence with their own color and who advise them are to be driven away or killed, and such white men as affiliate with the negroes politically are to be handled the same way.

(quoted in Wade 1987: 97)

By 1871 the Klan had become such a problem that President Ulysses Grant had to order a military suppression of the group.

The KKK was revived in the early 1900s, when immigration was at its highest level and when World War I broke out, both adding to the hostility toward and suspicion of foreigners who were not proper whites. Consequentially, a fateful mixture of white racism, American nationalism, and Christianity shaped the new Klan—a combination that would shape many later movements as well. A Klan document of the era proclaimed:

Only native born American citizens who believe in the tenets of the Christian religion and owe no allegiance of any degree or nature to any foreign Government, nation, political institution, sect, people, or person are eligible [which excluded Catholics]. . . . We avow the distinction between races of mankind as same has been decreed by the Creator, and we shall ever be true to the faithful maintenance of White Supremacy and will strenuously oppose any compromise thereof in any and all things.

(quoted Wade 1987: 148–9)

So, clearly, the ideology of the Klan had expanded from anti-black to anti-all-things-not-WASP, including ethnic whites and non-Christians.

A third incarnation of the Klan arose in the 1960s, in reaction to the civil rights movement. Black residences and churches were fire-bombed, and civil rights activists were



Image 3.4 Ku Klux Klan parade held in Washington, DC, c.1926.

(Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)

attacked. When three such activists—James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner—were found dead, the Klan came under withering criticism and investigation from the FBI and institutions like Klanwatch (an arm of the Southern Poverty Law Center), and it began to fade. By this time, though, other groups were emerging to take up the struggle for white supremacy. Some of them were inspired by Nazism, some by militant Christianity (especially Christian Identity and Anglo-Israelism), and some by both. **Christian Identity** is a movement that asserts that the white race is the true Christian nation: Kingdom Ministry, a major proponent of the position, explained on its website (now inactive) that “We believe the White, Anglo-Saxon, Germanic and kindred people to be God’s true, literal Children of Israel. Only this race fulfills every detail of Biblical Prophecy and World History concerning Israel and continues in these latter days to be heirs and possessors of the Covenants, Prophecies, Promises, and Blessings of YHVH God made to Israel.” **Anglo-Israelism** is an extension and refinement of Christian Identity, arguing again that not the entire white race but only the English (or American) branch of the white race is the true Israel, God’s true people; all non-whites, and all non-English whites, are inferior and godless.

Other and more virulent organizations like the Posse Comitatus, Aryan Nations, and White Aryan Resistance (with the acronym WAR), emerged over time, with similar philosophies and greater propensities for violence; often their enemies were less blacks than Jews and communists. James Wickstrom, a figure in these formative movements, wrote that “Yahweh our father is at work setting the stage for the final act against the Christ-murdering Jews and their father, Satan” (quoted in Stern 1996: 50). The Aryan Nations goes further, stating:

We believe in the preservation of our Race, individually and collectively, as a people as demanded and directed by Yahweh (Aryan Nations members do not call the supreme being God because God is dog spelled backwards). . . . We believe that Adam, man of Genesis, is the placing of the White Race upon this earth. Not all races descend from Adam. Adam is the father of the White Race only. . . . We believe that the Cananite [sic] Jew is the natural enemy of our Aryan (White) Race. . . . The Jew is like a destroying virus that attacks our racial body to destroy our Aryan culture and the purity of our Race.

(quoted in Snow 1999: 2)

Finally, the White Aryan Resistance, on their website (www.resist.com), take the battle not only to America’s racial diversity but to its cultural and ethnic diversity too, its very immigrant origins, complaining that America

is not a real nation. This is a bastard nation, with almost no roots, where millions of non-Whites can claim only one generation on the land. That land usually being the asphalted big metropolis. . . . The metropolises being the gaping anal cavities of a sick and dying nation [sic]. To those unclean places flock the worst of all races. Only the most degenerate of the White race struggle to stay on top of the maggots pile in such unnatural settings.

Obviously, while such groups encompass and represent only a small portion of the white population of the US, they are a significant factor in the society and express a long- and deeply-held view by many.

Conclusion

Race is a potent and recurrent mode of thinking in the United States. Although the specifics (the number, the traits, the relations) of race have varied over time, racial thinking in the US has consistently emphasized certain key physical characteristics distinguishing supposedly distinct and closed groups which also determine other non-physical qualities like intelligence or moral character. The ideology of race has been categorial, hierarchical, and, until recently, largely binary.

The central race issue throughout American history has been black/white relations, and there is some reason to conclude that the negative status of Africans in America is at least to an extent a *product* of slavery rather than a *cause* of slavery. It is certainly true that black status declined precipitously in the 1700s and 1800s, as slavery institutionalized. After slavery was abolished, new forms of inequality were invented (segregation and Jim Crow laws), which were sanctioned for decades by governments and courts. African Americans themselves demonstrated some ambivalence over whether to strive for integration and equality with whites or not, but the civil rights movement initiated a process of inclusion and racial justice that is not quite completely fulfilled today.

Race continues to make a difference in the United States, whether or not races are “real” or “natural” categories. Differences and inequalities in wealth and class, in education, and in legal treatment persist, and other differences—in health, religion, language, etc.—will be explored in later chapters. Despite the efforts of prejudiced, anti-immigrant, and even racial supremacist individuals and groups, America continues and promises to become a more racially diverse and a more racially mixed society, challenging the old binary and categorial ideology of race.