CHAPTER 1

Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations

All over the world, ethnic tension, strife, and conflict can be found. Everywhere we look, we can see that people are trying to kill each other, or at the very least, treat each other as inferior and dangerous. Ethnicity is thus a force that mobilizes people's emotions ranging from a sense of ethnic pride, on the one side, to fear and hatred of other ethnicities, on the other. In very few places are tolerance and mutual understanding of ethnic differences accepted as normal, or even as desirable. True, ideologies often preach ethnic tolerance and celebration of diversity, but in actual practice, most of the world reveals ethnic tensions, open conflict, and in a few cases, efforts to exterminate others who are seen as different. Tensions are often so profound that societies are de-evolving, breaking apart along ethnic lines. The Soviet Union has collapsed around old ethnic lines; Yugoslavia has disintegrated into episodes of ethnic cleansing; Czechoslovakia is now two nations; French-speaking Canadians want to break away from the union; and India and Pakistan stand ready to use their newfound nuclear weapons as they dispute over the borders that were created to partition ethnic subpopulations. For those populations who cannot be split into new nations, the tensions persist, often erupting into violence and almost always producing systematic efforts at discriminations. And when ethnics migrate to new lands, they almost always encounter discrimination and, at times, violence. Thus, the world is filled with ethnic tension and outright conflict. Noisy and threatening protests, long-term oppression, terrorist bombings, mass killings, and war can be found everywhere on the globe. Ethnicity is one of the most volatile forces of the twenty-first century.

Why does ethnic tension and racial hatred persist in patterns of human organization? Why did the early white settlers in North America, for example, kill so many Native Americans? Why did slavery exist? Why are neo-Nazi hate groups emerging in Germany? Why are churches attended by African Americans arson targets? Why do Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland wall themselves off from each other? Why do ethnic jokes about Pollacks, Wops, Japs, Jews, and
others still persist in America at the close of the twentieth century? Why do European-origin Americans so fear Latinos? And so the questions go.

Our goal in this book is to answer these and the many related questions that can be asked about ethnicity. Our emphasis is on American ethnic tensions, but we will also seek to place these tensions in a more global perspective. Indeed, compared to the violence and killings in many parts of the world, the dynamics of ethnicity in America can appear rather muted. This is not to say, however, that tensions among American ethnicities are not severe. On the contrary, the existing divisions among ethnicities in the United States are at a critical phase; America will either become a viable multiethnic society, or it will degenerate into patterns of hatred and violence so evident in our nation’s past and so clear in much of the world today. The task before us, then, is to understand American ethnic antagonisms; and with this understanding, perhaps we can better appreciate what needs to be done in order to reduce the conflicts among ethnic groups in America.

In this chapter, we will get started in this task by clarifying basic concepts. To understand a phenomenon like ethnicity, we need to define key terms that will be used to understand how this phenomenon operates. So let us begin with a conceptual mapping of our subject; and in the next chapter, we can turn to theorizing about the dynamic properties of American ethnic relations in global perspective.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

The term “race” connotes biological differences among peoples—skin color, facial features, stature, and the like—that are transmitted from generation to generation. As such, these biological differences are seen as permanent characteristics of people. The notion of race does not make much sense as a biological concept, however, because the physical characteristics that make people distinctive are trivial. A few alleles on genes are what account for these differences, and, most importantly, these alleles are on genes that are not determinative of basic biological functions. These biological differences are, in essence, superficial. Moreover, they do not mark clear boundaries: Where does “black” end and “white” begin? Is the child of an Asian mother and a European father more Asian or more European?

Even though biological differences are superficial and difficult to use as markers of boundaries between peoples, they are important sociologically. For if people believe that others are biologically distinctive, they tend to respond to them as being different. And when people associate superficial biological differences with variations in psychological, intellectual, and behavioral makeup, they may feel justified in treating members of a distinctive group in discriminatory ways. For example, if some individuals in a society consider dark skin an important distinction, and this distinction becomes associated in their minds with differences in the behavior of “black people,” then this superficial biological difference will influence how those with black skin are treated in that society.

ETHNIC GROUPS

What is a group? Sociologists generally define a group as a gathering of individuals in face-to-face interaction. According to this definition, an ethnic “group” would be a number of interacting individuals distinguished by their ethnicity. Not every one of these individuals interacts face to face, but they may interact in various social settings. Obviously, when we use the term “ethnic group,” we have something much bigger, broader, more inclusive in mind. Subpopulations of individuals in a society can be distinguished by their history as well as by their distinctive behavior, organization, culture, and, perhaps, superficial biological features. An ethnic group is a subpopulation of individuals who are labeled and categorized by the general population and, often, by the members of a group itself as being of a particular type of ethnicity. They reveal a unique history as well as distinctive behavioral, organizational, and cultural characteristics, and, as a result, they often are treated differently by others. In addition to the term “ethnic
group,” in this text we use the terms ethnic subpopulation and ethnic population, which more accurately describe the groups that we are discussing.

MINORITY GROUPS
What is a minority group? Louis Wirth (1945:347) long ago offered the basic definition, the general thrust of which is still used today: “A group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out or others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination.” There are many problems with this definition, however. First, it is not a group but members of a larger subpopulation who are singled out for unequal treatment. Second, the label “minority” is not always accurate; sometimes it is a majority, as was the case historically in South Africa, that is discriminated against. Thus, we should begin to revise this traditional definition of “minority group” by acknowledging what it really means: an ethnic subpopulation in a society subject to discrimination by members of more powerful ethnic subpopulations. Usually the victimized subpopulation is a numerical minority, and the more powerful discriminators are in the majority. Since this is not always true, however, the important issue is this: Which ethnic subpopulation has the power to discriminate? The more powerful subpopulation is the dominant or superordinate ethnic group, and the less powerful ethnic subpopulation is the subordinate group. This latter terminology, which revolves around dominance and subordination, more accurately frames the issues that were once classified as “minority group relations.”

ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION
Phrases like “unequal treatment” and “distinctive treatment” have been used rather loosely thus far. These and related terms can be consolidated by one key term: “discrimination.” In general, discrimination is the process by which an individual, group, or subpopulation of individuals acts in ways that deny another individual, group, or subpopulation access to valued resources. So, in the context of ethnic relations, ethnic discrimination is the process by which the members of a more powerful and dominant ethnic subpopulation deny the members of another, less powerful and subordinate ethnic subpopulation full access to valued resources—jobs, income, education, health, prestige, power, or anything that the members of a society value.

Today, the term “reverse discrimination” is often used to emphasize that programs designed to overcome the effects of past discrimination against members of a subordinate subpopulation often deny some members of the dominant subpopulation equal access to valued resources. What makes these programs so controversial is that those denied access to resources—say, particular classes of jobs—are usually not the ones who engaged in discrimination in the past. Thus, they feel cheated and angry—emotions that the victims of discrimination almost always feel. The phrase “reverse discrimination” is pejorative in that it emphasizes the net loss of resources for those who may no longer discriminate but whose forefathers did; and so, they ask: Is this fair? On the other side, those who must live with the legacy of past discrimination ask: How are the effects of past discrimination to be overcome? There is no easy answer to either of these questions, but one thing is clear: The term “discrimination” often becomes the centerpiece of ideological and political debate over ethnic tensions (Kinder and Sanders, 1990; Thomas, 1990; Feagins, 1990; and Ross, 1990).

The process of discrimination is the most important force sustaining ethnicity in a society. Discrimination denies some people access to what is valued, making it a highly volatile process. Because discrimination varies in nature, degree, and form, we need to identify some of its dimensions.

Types of Discrimination
The ways in which discrimination is perpetrated against an ethnic population vary considerably. The most intense form is genocide, when members of an ethnic subpopulation are killed or, potentially, an entire ethnic group is exterminated. The Nazi death camps with their gas chambers constituted an effort at genocide; the exposure of Native Americans to diseases and then the carnage of the Indian wars resulted in the virtual genocide of the original population in America. More recently, the “ethnic cleansing” policies of the Serbians in the former Yugoslavia are another example of genocidal behavior.

Expulsion is a somewhat less intense form of discrimination because those who are expelled from a society retain access to at least one highly valued resource: life. Expulsion is a common form of discrimination. For example, during the time of slavery in the United States, several American presidents, including Abraham Lincoln, considered the creation of a black state in Africa to which “free” black people would be sent. Expulsion is usually forced, but it is often the case that one group makes life so miserable for another that the latter leaves “voluntarily.” Thus, the concept of expulsion has ambiguity: If we confine its use only to cases in which people are thrown out of a country by direct coercion, the importance of indirect expulsion, people’s lives made sufficiently miserable that they pack up and leave, is underemphasized.

Segregation is a process of spatially isolating an ethnic subpopulation in areas where they cannot have the same access to valued resources as do those who are not isolated. For instance, as we will see in Chapter 4, most African Americans were confined to the decaying cores of large cities during the post–World War II era by governmental and private housing policies; and as a result, they were denied access to the jobs, schools, and housing enjoyed by white Americans who moved to suburbia. The black townships and various rules of residence in South Africa mark another segregation pattern that historically denied access to resources. The Indian reservations that dot the American landscape are yet another form of segregation.
Discrimination denies people access to valued resources, such as jobs and income. Most of the analyses of ethnic groups in this text emphasize the ethnic subpopulation as a whole, but it is also necessary to emphasize that ethnic discrimination reveals a gender dimension: Men and women of any ethnic population have different degrees of access to many important resources, indicating that women and men are treated differently in American society. For example, examine the figures in the table below. Across the board, in 1999 women received less income than their male counterparts. These differences reflect not only the income discrepancies between men and women in the same occupation but also the disproportionate numbers of women in lower-paying occupations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Population</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Proportion of Median Female Earnings to Male Earnings, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White American</td>
<td>$37,931</td>
<td>$27,199</td>
<td>0.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>26,897</td>
<td>22,765</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>21,005</td>
<td>18,664</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>35,293</td>
<td>29,112</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1 on page 7 compares the occupational distribution of men and women in 1999. In the top-paying category—managerial and professional—the proportion of women equals or tops that of men, except within the Asian American population. But in the lower-paying technical, sales, and administrative support jobs (mostly secretarial), the proportion of women nearly doubles that of men. Coupled with the virtual exclusion of minority women from higher-skill, better-paying blue-collar positions such as precision production workers, craft laborers, repair people, operators, fabricators, and laborers (who are often unionized), the reason for the lower incomes of most minority women becomes clear: These women are excluded from most higher-paying occupations.

Exclusion is a pattern of discrimination that denies members of an ethnic group certain positions, independent of the effects of segregation. Slaves were denied basic citizenship rights. Up to just a few decades ago, African Americans were excluded from most craft unions; even in industrial unions, they were allowed to rise only to certain grade levels and not beyond. For many decades, African Americans and Latinos in the Southwest were excluded from the political arena through poll taxes, literacy tests, gerrymandering of districts, and other exclusionary tactics. Exclusion in the job sphere is especially harmful because it denies members of an ethnic group the money they could use to buy other valued resources—health care, housing, education, and political power. Exclusion from the political arena denies an ethnic group the power to move out of its subordinate position.
Selective inclusion is the process of allowing members of ethnic subpopulations into certain positions, while at the same time excluding them from other positions. For instance, Jews in Europe historically were excluded from most economic, social, and political positions but were included in the world of finance. In the United States, early Asian immigrants were allowed access to some positions—the Chinese were laborers on the railroads and later ran small service businesses. According to Takaki (1993), the Japanese were denied access to the industrial labor market in California during the 1920s; as a result, many moved into the agricultural labor market, in which they used their entrepreneurial skills to become successful farmers and land owners. Today, many Asian immigrants are given easy access to ownership of small retail businesses but are excluded, to some degree, from white- and blue-collar positions in large companies. In the past and still today, Mexican American laborers were included in the low-wage farm labor workforce and, later, in other low-paying jobs in light industry, but they were excluded from better-paying economic positions as well as positions in the political and educational arena. Thus exclusion and selective inclusion tend to operate simultaneously, in a pincerlike movement that denies access to some positions and opens access only to those areas that are often (though not always) financially un rewarding or lacking in power and prestige.

The intensity of discrimination varies according to its type: from genocide and expulsion to physical segregation to exclusion and selective inclusion. None is pleasant, if you are on the receiving end. Historically, these patterns of discrimination have been implemented in various ways, but the underlying mechanisms of discrimination are much the same, as we explore below.

The Institutionalization of Discrimination

Acts by individuals to deny others access to valued resources are the most salient form of discrimination. When a white refuses to sell a house to an Asian, when a police officer physically abuses a member of a minority group, or when a supervisor refuses to promote an ethnic worker and these actions are taken simply because a person is a member of an ethnic group, discrimination is at work. These examples are isolated acts of discrimination if (1) they are not sanctioned by cultural values, beliefs, and norms; (2) they are not performed as a matter of policy within an organized structure such as a corporation, police department, board of realtors, school, or factory; and (3) they are not frequent and pervasive in the informal contact among people within an organization. In contrast, institutionalized discrimination exists when these individual acts are sanctioned by cultural values, beliefs, laws, and norms; when they are part of the way a social structure normally operates; and when they are a pervasive and persistent feature of the contact among people.

The distinction between isolated acts of discrimination and institutionalized discrimination is easier to make in a definition than in practice. For example, when discrimination is institutionalized in one sphere—say, housing practices—it becomes easier to commit acts of discrimination in other arenas, such as schooling, politics, or jobs. If enough people practice such isolated acts of institutional discrimination, these acts become institutionalized. In the United States, civil rights laws and cultural beliefs do not condone discrimination as they once did; indeed, they demand that all individuals be given equal access to schools, jobs, housing, and other important resources. They even mandate punishments for those who discriminate, and they have led to the creation of watchdog and enforcement agencies. Yet, individual acts of informal discrimination are so widespread in many communities that discrimination is informally institutionalized even in the face of formal prohibitions.

Thus, the process of institutionalized discrimination is subtle and complex. It can operate at formal and informal levels, and these two levels can even be in contradiction. Isolated acts of discrimination can increase in frequency when they constitute a normatively sanctioned and, hence, institutionalized form of discrimination.

The subtlety and complexity of institutionalized discrimination is demonstrated in the lingering effect of past patterns of discrimination that are now formally banned and no longer practiced. The legacy and cumulative effects of past discrimination can be so great that they prevent ethnic subpopulations from gaining equal access to resources. Many blacks (and Native Americans, Latinos, and others) are systematically denied by their present circumstances the same access to valued resources as whites have. Even if we could assume that no employer, realtor, teacher, or police officer currently acts in a discriminatory way, many African Americans and other ethnic groups would not have
the same degree of access to resources as white Americans have because of their present location in segregated slums with a long history of exclusion from most spheres of mainstream life in America. Many African Americans today live in urban slums away from decent schools, housing, and jobs because of past patterns of discrimination. In this environment, they do not acquire the education, job skills, or motivation that would enable them to leave the slums and take advantage of new opportunities that were not available even thirty years ago. Thus, sometimes the legacy of the past operates as a barrier in the present and constitutes a pervasive pattern of discrimination. We must acknowledge that institutionalized discrimination has a lag effect beyond the period in the past when individuals and organizations practiced discrimination routinely.

Another facet of institutionalized discrimination is that it is often unintentional. This is certainly the case with the holdover effects of past discrimination, but more is involved. To take the most obvious example in the United States today—schools—it is now clear that the school curriculum, testing procedures, and classroom activities place some ethnic students at a disadvantage in comparison with other students. This type of discrimination is not intentional, at least in most instances; and it could be argued (albeit problematically) that schools facilitate the acquisition of the critical skills necessary for success and for overcoming the effects of past discrimination. Yet, if the schools are organized in ways that are, for example, alien to students, that are unresponsive to the problems of poor children or immigrant children, and that are insensitive to the distinctive culture of a minority population, then the schools can become a source of discrimination. Students will have difficulty adjusting and will become discouraged—dropping out and finding themselves with few prospects for jobs and income. The school may not have intended this to occur—indeed, just the opposite—but the very nature of its structure and operation has worked to discourage students and, in so doing, has subtly and inadvertently discriminated against students whose access to resources is dramatically lowered when they drop out (Hilliard, 1988; Medina, 1988; Trueba, 1986; and McCarthy, 1990). In a society that uses educational credentials as a quick and easy way to sort people out in a labor market, the consequences for members of ethnic subpopulations who find the school experience unrewarding extend to all spheres of their life—job, home, income, and health.

Thus, the institutionalization of discrimination is an important force in ethnic relations. The pattern of institutionalization affects the type of segregation, exclusion, and selective inclusion that a subordinate ethnic subpopulation experiences, if it is not killed off or sent away. As the pattern of institutionalized discrimination changes, so do patterns of segregation, exclusion, and selective inclusion.

ETHNIC STRATIFICATION

Discrimination, as it operates to segregate, exclude, and selectively include members of a subordinate ethnic subpopulation within a society, produces a system of ethnic stratification. Because discrimination determines how many and which types of valued resources the members of an ethnic subpopulation are likely to have, it establishes the location of an ethnic subpopulation within the stratification system of a society. Moreover, discrimination also determines the patterns of mobility, if any, across social class lines.

For our purposes, ethnic stratification refers to several interrelated processes:

1. The amount, level, and type of resources—such as jobs, education, health, money, power, and prestige—an ethnic subpopulation typically receives.
2. The degree to which these resource shares locate most members of an ethnic subpopulation in various social hierarchies.
3. The extent to which these resource shares contribute to those distinctive behaviors, organizations, and cultural systems that provide justification to the dominant group for making the ethnic subpopulation targets of discrimination.

We can take almost any ethnic group—Latinos, for example (see Chapter 6)—and determine their average income, their level of political representation, and their average years of education. In performing this exercise, we soon find that, on the whole, many Latinos in America have relatively low incomes, are underrepresented in the halls of political power, and attain less education than Anglo-Americans. The statistics can be determined by simple counts of average income, years of education, and number of political offices held. The numbers show the share of resources that Latinos possess in American society. One often finds, in addition, differences in the shares of resources within an ethnic subpopulation. There are affluent Latinos as well as very poor ones; their average level of affluence, power, and prestige tends to vary in terms of which subpopulation—Mexican American, Cuban, Puerto Rican, South or Central American—is being addressed. Yet, when ethnic stratification is in evidence, a majority of a subpopulation does reveal a particular level and configuration of resource shares. On various social hierarchies—power, income and wealth, prestige, and education—a profile of resource shares locates a majority of the ethnic group at a particular place in the broader system of stratification. There are always deviations, of course, but when ethnic stratification is in force, these deviations apply to a minority of cases. Some Latinos, such as Mexican Americans, are located near the bottom of the power, income and wealth, prestige, and education hierarchies, thereby placing them in the lower and working classes. There are middle- and upper-class Mexican Americans, to be sure, but they are a tiny minority of this subpopulation as a whole. This profile of resource shares and the resulting location on various social hierarchies contribute to the distinctiveness of Mexican Americans and, as a consequence, justify new and continuing prejudices and discrimination against them, thereby perpetuating the ethnic dimensions of social stratification.

In general, discrimination causes members of an ethnic subpopulation to be (1) overrepresented in lower and working classes or (2) overrepresented in a narrow range of middle-class positions, usually in small businesses of
various kinds. As discrimination lessens, mobility to other classes and positions within classes occurs, but a holdover effect persists that limits such mobility for many.

Institutionalized discrimination, as it segregates, excludes, and selectively includes, determines the kinds and shares of resources received by members of an ethnic subpopulation; these shares locate them on society's hierarchies. By virtue of its pattern of resource shares and location on various social hierarchies, an ethnic subpopulation's distinctiveness is created and sustained. Thus, the principal consequence of ethnic discrimination is to give the broader stratification system in a society an ethnic dimension, one that is often more tension-producing and volatile than the normal antagonisms between members of different social classes.

ETHNIC PREJUDICE

The terms "prejudice" and "discrimination" are often uttered together, for it is presumed that prejudiced people discriminate, and vice versa. Prejudice is a set of beliefs and stereotypes about a category of people; hence, ethnic prejudices are beliefs and stereotypes about designated subpopulations who share certain identifying characteristics—biological, behavioral, organizational, or cultural—or at least are perceived to share these identifying characteristics. Those prejudices that lead to, and are used to justify, discrimination are negative, emphasizing the undesirable features of a subpopulation.

Does prejudice invariably lead to discrimination? In a classic study in the early 1930s, Richard La Pierre (1934) observed in his travels with a Chinese couple that, despite a climate of hostility toward Asians in the United States at that time, the couple was served and treated courteously at hotels, motels, and restaurants. He was puzzled by this observation because all the attitude surveys at that time revealed extreme prejudice by white Americans toward the Chinese. La Pierre sent a questionnaire to the owners of the establishments where he and his Asian companions had experienced courteous service, asking if they would "accept members of the Chinese race as guests in your establishment." More than 90 percent said no, thus demonstrating that prejudice and discrimination do not always go together.

Robert Merton (1949) defined four categories of people in his analysis of the relationship between prejudice and discrimination:

1. All-weather liberals who are not prejudiced and do not discriminate.
2. Reluctant liberals who are unprejudiced but will discriminate when it is in their interest to do so.
3. Timid bigots who are prejudiced but afraid to show it.
4. Active bigots who are prejudiced and quite willing to discriminate.

In La Pierre's study of motel owners, then, he encountered timid bigots who, in face-to-face contact with an ethnic group, did not implement their prejudices.

Even though prejudice does not always translate into discrimination, it is an important force in ethnic relations, for several reasons. First, prejudicial beliefs and stereotypes highlight, usually unfairly and inaccurately, certain characteristics of an ethnic subpopulation. By spotlighting these characteristics, they make ethnic group members more identifiable, alerting others to their existence, separating them from the majority, and potentially making them easier targets for discrimination. Second, prejudices present negative images of an ethnic group, legitimizing discrimination against such "undesirable" persons. Third, prejudices arouse fears about, and anger toward, an ethnic group, placing members of the ethnic group in constant tension with those who are prejudiced and, often, making them vulnerable to unprovoked acts of discrimination. Fourth, prejudice creates a general climate of intolerance for differences not only in a selected ethnic group but in other categories of individuals as well (such as the disabled or the elderly).

Prejudice may generate potential or actual discrimination, but the reverse is also true: Acts of discrimination can generate prejudice or, as is often the case, reinforce existing prejudices. Most people feel they must justify their acts of discrimination; in a society like the United States, where cultural values emphasize equality and freedom, discrimination, which violates these values, has to be rationalized and made to seem appropriate. Prejudice is one mechanism for doing this because it makes the denial of freedom and equality seem acceptable "in this one case" since "after all, these people are so . . . (fill in the prejudice)." Those who are victims of discrimination react in different ways: sometimes passively and other times aggressively. The results of people's reactions against prejudice and discrimination vary—prejudicial stereotypes are sometimes reinforced, other times changed or eliminated.

Thus, prejudicial beliefs based on negative and stereotypical portrayals of an ethnic subpopulation stimulate and sustain ethnic tensions. Such beliefs do not always translate into direct discriminatory action, but they target, highlight the negative, arouse fears and anger, and create a culture of intolerance that can erupt into discriminatory acts or legitimize those that have been practiced in the past. Prejudice provides the rationale for discrimination, either before or after the fact, and is thus central to understanding discrimination and patterns of ethnic stratification.

ADAPTATIONS TO PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

When confronted with discrimination, members of a subordinate subpopulation respond. Usually, they seek to make the best of a difficult situation. Depending upon the nature and magnitude of discrimination, as well as upon other social conditions, several responses are possible: (1) passive acceptance, (2) marginal participation, (3) assimilation, (4) withdrawal, (5) rebellion, and (6) organized protest. Different segments of a minority population may resort to several of these adaptations at the same time, or a population may pass through different patterns of adaptation.
Passive Acceptance

If the power of an ethnic group is small and the magnitude of the discrimination great, members of the group may have no choice but to accept the discrimination. During the slavery era in the United States, it was virtually impossible for African slaves to do anything but accept subjugation. Yet, even under severely oppressive conditions, populations acquire interpersonal techniques for dealing with their oppressors while maintaining their sense of identity and dignity. The stereotypical slave, as portrayed in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, offers a vivid example of such techniques. Uncle Tom’s bowing and scraping and repeated use of the phrase “Yes sir, yes sir” allowed him to gain favor with white people and to enjoy some degree of privilege. Passive acceptance, then, is often not passive but, rather, active manipulation of a situation. Some slaves were able to develop their own culture and to enjoy some of the basic pleasures of life through the appearance of passive acceptance. Of course, such a pattern of adjustment tends to perpetuate itself; the subordinate population does not initiate change, and the majority is not pressured to cease its discriminatory practices.

Marginal Participation

At times, subordinate ethnic subpopulations can find a niche where they can use their creative resources and prosper. In essence, these subpopulations are allowed marginal participation. For example, Jews have often been able to find business opportunities and to prosper in societies that actively discriminated against them. At the turn of the century and up to the present, many Chinese Americans were able to prosper in small businesses providing services to the white American majority. Such marginal niches are created when the majority is not inclined to enter a specialized field. Marginal participation tends to be most successful when the minority population is small and does not enter areas dominated by the majority. It is probably for this reason that African Americans and Chicanos have been unable to find specialized niches; their numbers are simply too great.

Assimilation

Assimilation is the process by which the members of an ethnic group become part of the broader culture and society, losing their distinctive character. Minorities that are less identifiable biologically and culturally are more readily assimilated. Ethnic populations that can be easily identified, however, have greater difficulty assimilating. It is for this reason that white ethnic groups in America, such as the Protestant Irish and Germans, have become largely assimilated, although enclaves are thriving in some large eastern cities. Other Caucasian migrants, such as Poles, Italians, and Catholic Irish, have also tended to assimilate, although the East and Midwest have cohesive ethnic cultures of these populations. African Americans, on the other hand, have had a more difficult time assimilating because of their visibility and the resulting ease with which the majority can locate them as targets of discrimination.

Withdrawal and Self-Segregation

Another adaptation to discrimination is withdrawal and the creation of a self-sustaining “society” within the broader society. Such self-segregation enables a population to create and support their own communities, businesses, schools, leadership, churches, and other social forms. For example, the early black Muslim movement in America advocated a separate African American community, self-supporting and isolated from “white” institutions. Urban communities as well as rural communes were established and still prosper, although there has been a clear trend away from complete withdrawal and isolation among many black Muslims. Self-segregation is a difficult adaptation to maintain. Opportunities are necessarily limited compared to those in the broader society. As a result, some seek these outside opportunities. Moreover, economic, political, and social isolation is often difficult to sustain in urban, media-dominated societies, in which alternatives and options constantly present themselves.

Revolt and Rebellion

Subordinate ethnic subpopulations do not always accept, assimilate, withdraw, or marginally participate. Frequently they rebel. Such rebellion can take a number of forms, one being general hostility and aggressive behavior toward the majority. Few white Americans would feel comfortable walking through a black ghetto or a Chicano barrio because they fear that there is some likelihood of intimidation and assault. Another form of rebellion is rioting, such as the widespread urban riots in the United States in the 1960s and the turmoil associated with the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles in the early 1990s. All forms of rebellion involve minorities’ “striking back” and venting their frustrations, and at times, these revolts become extremely violent, mobilizing people for mass killings.

Organized Protest

Rebellious outbursts are often part of a larger social movement, and, hence may become organized protests, when subordinate ethnic groups become organized to make broad-based and concerted efforts to change patterns of discrimination. The civil rights movement represents one such effort. Beginning with sit-ins and freedom rides in the 1960s, progressing to large-scale demonstrations (sometimes boiling over into riots), and culminating in creation of
A young man gives the Black Power salute during the 1992 Los Angeles riots that erupted after white police officers were acquitted of charges of brutally beating a black motorist, Rodney King.

Box 1.2
Where Minorities Are a Majority

When minorities—African Americans, Latinos, and Asians—are all counted together, the 1990 census shows that minorities constitute a majority in 51 of the 200 cities with at least 100,000 population. Most of the increase in minority population in such cities comes from Latino and Asian immigration over the last decade. Since 1980, 20 cities have seen minorities become the majority (these are starred below). These shifts in the relative numbers of ethnic groups foretell of changes in power and patterns of discrimination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Percent Minority</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Percent Minority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>62.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>Macon*</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>Memphis*</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridgeport*</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>87.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>New Haven*</td>
<td>50.8</td>
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<td>Chula Vista*</td>
<td>50.0</td>
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<td>52.1</td>
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<td>36.5</td>
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SUMMARY

Ethnic antagonism is one of the oldest and most pervasive dimensions of human social organization. To study this phenomenon, it is necessary to define terms and key concepts. The term "race" is of little importance biologically, but it is relevant sociologically. For if people perceive and believe others to be biologically distinctive and different, superficial biological traits become
an important consideration in the formation of ethnicity. For our purposes, “ethnicity” refers to the history as well as the behavioral, organizational, and cultural features of people that make them distinctive and distinguishable from others. People can be distinguished on the basis of superficial biological traits, but these traits are associated with presumed behavioral, organizational, and cultural features—that is, with ethnicity.

The term “ethnic group” is commonly used, but we prefer the term “ethnic subpopulation.” The latter term emphasizes the fact that people who are distinguished on the basis of an interrelated cluster of characteristics—biological, cultural, behavioral, and organizational—constitute a population more than a closed group. They are not all necessarily engaged in face-to-face contact, as the notion of “group” implies. To be sure, people’s involvement in local groups and other structures sustains their distinctive patterns of organization, but these do not embrace the population as a whole. Ethnic subpopulations exist, instead, within a larger, more inclusive population. This point is not merely semantic; it is fundamental to an understanding of the dynamics of ethnicity.

The term “minority group” is also limited. Not all ethnic subpopulations subject to discrimination are minorities. They can constitute the majority in a community or in a nation as a whole. The underlying issue is power. Which groups have the power to limit the activities of other groups? More accurate terms are “superordinate ethnic subpopulations” and “subordinate ethnic subpopulations.”

Discrimination is the process of denying others access to valued resources. Ethnic discrimination occurs when members of a superordinate ethnic subpopulation are able to limit or deny members of a subordinate ethnic population access to valued resources—jobs, income, education, power, health care, and anything else that is valued and prized in a society. Ethnic discrimination surfaces in several different forms: genocide, or the systematic killing of members of a subordinate ethnic population; expulsion, or the exiling of all or selected members of an ethnic population; segregation, or the spatial confinement or isolation of members of an ethnic group so that they have difficulty gaining access to resources; exclusion, or the denial of rights to positions in a society that provide access to valued resources; and selective inclusion, or the confinement of members of an ethnic subpopulation to a narrow range of positions in the society. These types of discrimination gain effectiveness as discrimination becomes institutionalized. We define “institutionalized discrimination” as individual acts of discrimination that are (1) pervasive; (2) culturally supported in norms, beliefs, and values; and (3) lodged in social structures as matters of policy and practice. The more institutionalized the discrimination is, the more a subordinate ethnic subpopulation is segregated, excluded, and selectively included, while being vulnerable to genocide and expulsion. Discrimination is thus the central process underlying ethnic problems in society.

Institutionalized discrimination produces ethnic stratification. When members of a subordinate ethnic subpopulation receive only certain types and levels of valued resources, it becomes possible to establish their location on the social hierar-

Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations

chies of society. On the basis of this location, the distinctiveness of an ethnic group is retained, thereby making it a target of further prejudice and discrimination.

“Prejudice” refers to negative and stigmatizing beliefs, concepts, and stereotypes about people; “ethnic prejudice” is based on negative beliefs, conceptions, and stereotypes about members of a subordinate population distinguishable in terms of their history and biological, behavioral, cultural, and organizational features. Prejudice and discrimination are not perfectly correlated, but discrimination cannot be easily institutionalized without widespread prejudice among dominant ethnic subpopulations.

Prejudice and discrimination force their targets to respond and adapt. Assimilation, or the elimination of ethnically distinct characteristics and adoption of those of the superordinate ethnic population, is one method of adaptation. At the other extreme are rebellion and revolt against superordinate ethnic groups, the goal being redistribution of power and, hence, the patterns of discrimination. Another response to discrimination is organized protest, often arising out of or even prompting acts of rebellion, in which ethnic groups and their allies organize to change patterns of discrimination. Yet another response is withdrawal and self-segregation of the subordinate ethnic group in order to isolate itself from the discriminatory acts of others. Members of an ethnic group may choose to accept their position passively, or they may participate marginally, finding narrow niches in which they can secure resources.

This chapter has presented many useful terms and distinctions that will deepen our understanding of and provide a perspective on ethnic relations in America. These terms and distinctions do not explain ethnic relations; they merely describe them. We also need to know why people focus on perceived ethnic differences, why they discriminate, why they hold prejudices, and why superordinate ethnic groups force subordinate groups to adapt in certain ways. Explaining these “why” issues is the job of theory. Within the framework of definitions and distinctions developed in this chapter, we can move on to explore the theories that have been used to explain ethnicity, prejudice, discrimination, and other aspects of ethnic relations.

POINTS OF DEBATE

In any society where distinct ethnic subpopulations exist, the issue of ethnicity is a subject of debate and controversy. No society revealing ethnic differences has ever been able to organize itself in ways that avoid the tension and conflict accompanying ethnic identity. The United States is not an exception; indeed, American society is one of the few in history that have sought to integrate so many large and diverse ethnic subpopulations into its cultural core. The problems of ethnicity in the United States have stimulated and continue to create many points of debate. When reading the coming chapters, keep in mind the following controversial issues.
1. The “first American dilemma”: How can a society that values equality and freedom engage in systematic discrimination against minority subpopulations? This question is rhetorical because the evidence is irrefutable that discrimination has occurred, and continues to occur, on a massive and long-term scale. Can the accumulated effects of such discrimination be undone?

2. The “second American dilemma”: Can the values of freedom and equality be used to justify efforts to compensate the descendants of past discrimination? An affirmative answer to this question has many implications, all of which are debatable: (a) Are Americans willing to spend billions of tax dollars to create jobs, housing, and educational programs to overcome the effects of past discrimination? (b) Is private enterprise willing or able to participate on a massive scale in creating jobs for members of particular ethnic groups who have been the victims of this legacy of discrimination? (c) Are white Americans willing to give up some of their access to valued resources so that disadvantaged minority groups can increase their access, or is such action simply going to encourage accusations of “reverse discrimination”?

3. If Americans are unwilling to meet the challenges posed by the second American dilemma, what is the alternative? Conflict and violence among ethnic groups are escalating; poverty among ethnic groups is on the rise; out-of-wedlock childbearing is reaching epidemic proportions (now 63 percent) among African Americans; substance abuse and other social problems among minority groups are growing; the number of crimes committed by minority group members is increasing; and innumerable problems are arising from the accumulated effects of past discrimination. This reality confronts Americans in their daily lives. What is to be done? Nothing? Build more prisons? Hire more police? Actively try to address the problems at enormous cost? What are the viable options? Such questions are ultimately part of any discussion of ethnicity in America.

CHAPTER 2

Explaining Ethnic Relations

A theory tries to explain why specific events occur. In the context of ethnic relations, then, theories seek to explain why ethnic distinctions are made in the first place, why they are sustained over time, why some ethnic groups discriminate against others with varying degrees of severity, why prejudice exists, why some ethnic groups remain identifiable, and why others melt into the dominant culture.

Many different theories exist concerning ethnic relations. Our goal in this chapter is to pull these theories together so that we have a coherent framework within which to examine specific ethnic groups in America—African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and European-origin white ethnics. The first step is to review the range of diversity in existing theories; later we can incorporate the strengths of each theory into a more general one that can guide us throughout our review of ethnic relations in America.

THEORIES OF ETHNIC RELATIONS

Assimilation Theories

Part of the early American creed was a belief that successive waves of ethnic immigrants could be incorporated into the mainstream of social life. Robert Park, one of the earliest American theorists on ethnic relations, saw such assimilation as “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them into a common cultural life” (Park and Burgess, 1924:735).

Park proposed stages of assimilation, beginning with contact among diverse ethnic groups. Out of such contact comes a competitive phase in which ethnic populations compete over resources, such as jobs, living space, and political representation. The next stage is an unstable accommodation in which immigrants