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
and their descendants are forced to change and adapt to their new environment. During this phase, there is some degree of stabilization of relations between immigrants and those in the host society, even if this accommodation forces immigrants into lower social strata. Moreover, once ethnic stratification exists, the pace of assimilation is dramatically reduced, although Park believed that, ultimately, even a lower-class, subordinate ethnic subpopulation could be assimilated. It might take hundreds of years, but eventually assimilation would occur. Thus, the last phase in Park’s theory is assimilation in which the migrant ethnic merges with other ethnic groups (Park, 1950).

More recent assimilation theories have been more explicit about (1) the nature of the host society and culture to which migrant ethnic groups must adapt and (2) the various types, levels, and degrees of assimilation that can develop. For instance, as Milton Gordon (1964) emphasizes, it is to “the middle class cultural patterns of . . . white, Anglo-Saxon” culture that immigrants to the United States have had to adapt. Various ethnic subpopulations may evidence, however, different degrees of progress in adapting to the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture. Cultural assimilation occurs when the values, beliefs, dogmas, ideologies, language, and other systems of symbols of the dominant culture are adopted. Most ethnic groups become, to varying degrees, culturally assimilated. In contrast to cultural assimilation, structural assimilation occurs when migrant ethnic groups become members of the primary groups within dominant ethnic subpopulations—their families, close friends, cliques within clubs, and groups within organizations. Gordon emphasizes that structural assimilation is more difficult to achieve than cultural assimilation because it involves penetration into the close interactions and associations of dominant ethnic groups. Even when members of ethnic groups penetrate more secondary and formal organizational structures—schools, workplaces, and political arenas—they may still lack more primary and personal ties with members of dominant ethnic groups.

Other types of assimilation are based on the degree of cultural and structural assimilation an ethnic group is able to achieve: marital assimilation, or the emergence of high rates of intermarriage between the migrant and dominant ethnic groups; identification assimilation, in which individuals no longer see themselves as distinctive and, like members of dominant groups, stake their personal identities to participation and success in the mainstream institutions of a society; attitude-receptiveness assimilation, or the lack of prejudicial attitudes and stereotyping on the part of both dominant and migrant ethnic groups; behavioral-receptiveness assimilation, or the absence of intentional discrimination by dominant ethnic groups against subordinate ethnic groups; and civic assimilation, or the reduction of conflict between ethnic groups over basic values and access to the political arena.

According to Gordon, assimilation occurs over generations in the United States. By the third generation, a considerable amount of assimilation has occurred, especially among white ethnic groups. They have become culturally assimilated; they have made inroads into the primary groups or, at the very least, into the organizations of the Anglo-Saxon core; they have begun to intermarry with members of other ethnic groups; they identify with the institutional system; they are victims and perpetrators of fewer prejudices, stereotypes, and acts of discrimination; and they are engaged in less conflict over values and political rights. But what about nonwhite ethnic groups? For them, the assimilation process, Gordon (1961) admits, is slower, but he is optimistic that even the most identifiable subordinate ethnic groups in America—African Americans and Native Americans—are on the path to further assimilation.

Assimilation theories probably paint an overly benign view of ethnic relations, viewing assimilation as inexorable. Yet, they provide us with a way to measure how far an ethnic group has moved into the dominant culture along various dimensions—cultural, structural, marital, identification, attitude, behavioral, political. Indeed, the amount and pace of assimilation along these dimensions provide clues about how much and what type of discrimination has been working against an ethnic subpopulation. For example, if we find that, after hundreds of years of coexistence with the dominant Anglo-Saxon society, African Americans and Native Americans are structurally unassimilated and only partially assimilated in terms of culture, reveal low rates of intermarriage with other ethnic groups, identify only partially with the society and its institutions, suffer many prejudicial stereotypes, experience acts of discrimination, and remain partially disenfranchised from the political arena, then it is likely that massive informal and institutional discrimination exists and has existed. Assimilation theories do not explain how these discriminatory forces operate, but they provide a sense of what their consequences are.

Pluralism Theories

Partially in reaction to the “melting pot” assumption underlying most assimilation theories are those theories that stress the process of maintaining patterns of ethnicity. Indeed, the maintenance of distinct cultural, organizational, and behavioral characteristics is often a way of coping with discrimination. A distinct ethnic identity provides sources of support and guidance in a sometimes hostile world. When ethnic identity is nurtured, a pluralistic and permanent mosaic of ethnic subpopulations becomes evident.

Most scholars who subscribe to this more pluralistic view do not deny that some assimilation into the dominant segments of a society occurs. Rather, they argue, ethnicity remains a powerful force, even among white ethnic groups who are often presumed to be fully assimilated. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan (1970) were among the first to emphasize that even as many of their customs are replaced with those of the dominant Anglo-Saxon society, white ethnic groups continue to reveal residential, behavioral, organizational, and cultural patterns that mark their distinctive ethnic identity, one that subtly separates them from the middle-class, Anglo-Saxon Protestant core.

The term ethnogenesis is often employed to describe this process of creating a distinctive ethnicity as a means of adapting to discrimination, even as some degree of assimilation occurs. Andrew Greeley (1971, 1974) has been one of the most forceful advocates of this position, arguing that there is considerable
maximization of fitness is the goal of genes, an explanation is needed for the fact that people help others with whom they do not share any genes. Reciprocal altruism seeks to provide this explanation: People offer assistance to nonkin because they know that at some future time their acts of altruism will be reciprocated by those they help. Such reciprocation promotes fitness and, thereby, enables individuals to keep their genes in the pool.

Van den Berghe uses these two concepts—kin selection and reciprocal altruism—to explain ethnicity. He extends the idea of kin selection to a larger subpopulation. Historically, larger kin groups (composed of lineages) constituted a breeding population of close and distant kin who sustained trust and solidarity with one another and mistrusted other breeding populations. Van den Berghe coins the term “ethny” for “ethnic group.” An ethny is an extension of these more primordial breeding populations, a cluster of kinship circles created by endogamy (in which mate selection is confined to specific groups) and territoriality (physical proximity of its members and relative isolation from nonmembers). An ethny represents a reproductive strategy for maximizing fitness beyond the narrower confines of kinship, because by forming ethny—even a very large one of millions of people—individuals create bonds with those who can help preserve their fitness, whether by actually sharing genes or, more typically, by reciprocal acts of altruism with fellow ethnys. An ethny is, therefore, a manifestation of more basic “urges” to help “those like oneself.” Although ethnys become genetically diluted as their numbers increase and become subject to social and cultural definitions, the very tendency to form and sustain ethnys is the result of natural selection, which produced biological tendencies for people who share genetic material to help each other.

Thus, sociobiology provides an evolutionary explanation—a highly controversial one, we might add—for why members of an ethnic group band together and maintain distinctiveness. While this perspective has not gained a wide following among sociologists, sociobiology has taken center stage in the field of biology; as a result, we need to be aware of theories emanating from this quarter.

**Human Ecology Theories**

Also drawing inspiration from biology are ecological theories stressing the forces of competition, selection, and “speciation” of distinctive ethnic groupings. Robert Park’s assimilation theory was couched in a larger ecological framework for analyzing urban areas (Park, 1916; Park and Burgess, 1924). This framework emphasized that living patterns in urban areas are produced by competition for scarce resources—land, housing, and jobs. Human groups exist in a kind of Darwinian struggle for survival, each trying to find a viable social niche. Thus, as populations migrate to urban areas, they accelerate the level of competition for resources with those already present and, Park believed, set in motion the processes of accommodation and assimilation.

More recent ecological theories stress that competition for resources often escalates the level of conflict between ethnic subpopulations, forcing subordinate
Chapter 2

Ethnic groups into segregated housing niches and a narrow range of economic positions. Once members of an ethnic group find such niches, their boundaries and distinctiveness are preserved, thereby making them easier targets of discrimination. Susan Olzak (1986, 1992) is one of several scholars working in the human ecology tradition. Her theory holds that violence between ethnic subpopulations, especially attacks by members of the dominant group on subordinate groupings, occurs when members of subordinate ethnic subpopulations move into the occupational and housing niches of superordinate groups. Acts of violence against these mobile subordinates increase as members of the dominant subpopulations feel threatened. For example, Olzak (1992) has documented Anglo-Saxon Protestant attacks on nineteenth- and twentieth-century European immigrants in two scenarios: (1) when the number of immigrants expanded and (2) when economic recessions occurred. She concludes that under these conditions European immigrants were seen as a threat to the housing and occupational niches occupied by Anglo-Saxon Protestants (Roediger, 1991). These two conditions could provide reasons for the dramatic intensification of white violence against African Americans as they began to leave the rural South in the early decades of this century and to emigrate to northern cities as a low-wage labor force in tight labor markets, although it should be emphasized that African Americans and white Americans had come into conflict as early as the 1830s (Roediger, 1991). As greater numbers of African-origin people migrated north, European immigrants who had recently secured a foothold in American society felt threatened and, as a result, attacked blacks and developed intense prejudices, some of which persist to this day.

These ecological theories emphasize the relative size of ethnic subpopulations, their patterns of migration, their movement into various social niches, and their competition with other ethnic groups in markets for housing and jobs. Out of such competition come conflicts, often violent, that maintain prejudices and boundaries between antagonistic ethnic subpopulations. Thus, competition does not always lead to easy assimilation, as Park (1950) hoped, but to partitions and pluralism, punctuated by tension and conflict.

Power and Stratification Theories

Stratification theories emphasize how the process of discrimination produces overrepresentation of members of ethnic subpopulations in various social classes. All of these theories place considerable emphasis on the mobilization of power in order to control where ethnic groups are placed in the class system. Yet, each stresses a somewhat different aspect of how power is used to create systems of ethnic stratification.

Caste Theories In the early 1940s, W. Lloyd Warner and colleagues described black-white relations as constituting a caste system in which African Americans were confined to lower socioeconomic positions, denied access to power, prevented from intermarriage, and segregated in their own living space (Warner, 1941; Warner and Srole, 1945). African Americans thus constituted a distinctive caste that white Americans maintained for their own privileges.

Oliver C. Cox (1948) added a Marxist twist to this argument, emphasizing that the capitalist class of owners and managers of industry has been crucial to the caste-like subordination of African Americans. The importation of slaves was a business enterprise in which European capitalists bought and sold cheap labor—slaves—to capitalist plantations in the South. Once capitalists set this pattern of using Africans as a source of cheap labor and higher profits, it needed to be legitimated by highly prejudiced beliefs and stereotypes based on the biological characteristics of the "black race." Thus, exploitive practices are tied to the actions and interests of economic elites who mobilize power and ideologies in order to have a ready, desperate, and low-cost labor pool available for exploitation. From these early caste theories, the emphasis on power and stratification has taken a number of directions. Let us examine some representative theories.

Colonialism Theories Colonialism theories draw inspiration from the analysis of the dynamics of European colonialism in the past. External colonialism is the process by which one nation controls the political and economic activities of another, less developed and less powerful society. Robert Blauner (1969:396) has identified four components of what he terms the colonization complex: (1) forced entry into a territory and its population, (2) alteration or destruction of the indigenous culture and patterns of social organization, (3) domination of the indigenous population by representatives of the invading society, and (4) justification of such activities with highly prejudicial, racist beliefs and stereotypes.

This basic theory has also been used to study internal colonialism (Blauner, 1969, 1972), in which the dynamics of the colonization complex are seen to operate within a society. From the internal colonial perspective, much of the history of ethnic relations in America has involved the establishment of successive internal colonies of people who are not white and who are dominated by descendants of the original Anglo-Saxon Protestant colonists. For example, African Americans constitute a colony within white America because institutionalized discrimination maintains white control over the economic, educational, and political opportunities of many African Americans. This situation, it is argued, is little different from that in South Africa, where until recently a white minority, made up of the descendants of British, Dutch, and German colonists, exerted institutional control over the black population.

The motivations behind internal colonialism in the United States were twofold: (1) the need for cheap labor to increase profit and (2) the desire to take and control land, first from the Native Americans and later from the Mexicans. As Robert Blauner (1969) notes, the desire for inexpensive labor led to the creation of slavery; the desire to control the agricultural base and land of Mexicans in the Southwest was the reason white Americans pushed Mexicans into a low-wage labor pool. Similarly, the attempted genocide of Native Americans was a
way for Europeans to take their land, forcing those who survived to live on reservations—a very visible type of internal colony.

In order to create internal colonies, government must actively participate. It must provide the coercive force needed to control those who are “colonized,” while legitimating patterns of domination with laws. Thus, by virtue of their control of the state, the descendants of early European white immigrants have been able to create and sustain internal colonies for long periods of time.

Split-Labor Market Theories Split-labor market theories are much like ecological theories in their emphasis on competition between ethnic groups for resources, but they bring the mobilization and use of power to the forefront. Indeed, split-labor market theories make up for what is often considered a deficiency in ecological theories: the lack of sufficient attention to power and how the dominant class in society uses power to foster ethnic antagonism for its own benefit. Split-labor market theories emphasize that markets for labor become partitioned, with members of certain ethnic groups confined to some jobs in the labor market and not allowed to work in other, typically higher-paying jobs. The pressure to split the labor market comes from those in the more powerful ethnic populations who fear that they might lose their advantage if the labor market were to be opened up to other groups who would be willing to work for less and who would increase the supply of labor relative to the market’s demand, thereby driving wages down as more workers competed for jobs.

Edna Bonacich (1972) has developed the most important split-labor market theory. This theory has been applied to black-white relations in America (Bonacich, 1976) and to ethnic populations in other societies. The basic argument is that capitalists, or those who own and manage large businesses, have an interest in high profits. One way to raise or maintain profits is to keep labor costs low, so capitalists try to import cheap labor in order to undercut higher-wage labor. Thus, for example, low-wage African American workers were imported from the South by northern industrialists as “strike breakers” in the 1920s and 1930s in order to undermine the efforts of white workers to unionize and to develop a power base for securing higher wages and better working conditions (Bonacich, 1976). And just as ecological theory would have predicted, acts of violence against African Americans increased dramatically in the 1920s.

Threatened workers sometimes react not only violently to efforts at undermining their wages but also politically and economically. At times they enlist government to exclude an ethnic group, but this is almost always impossible when powerful capitalists have an interest in supporting and sponsoring an influx of low-wage workers. A fallback strategy is for threatened workers to create formal and informal ways of “splitting the labor market” such that a subordinate minority is excluded from the more privileged positions in this market. As a result, members of the subordinate ethnic group often find themselves forced to compete with each other for a narrow range of less privileged and less secure positions. For example, as we will see in later chapters, for over a century after the Civil War African Americans were excluded from most skilled craft unions and included in only some positions in industrial unions, creating a split in the labor market between its white and black sectors.

Thus, competition involves more than two antagonistic ethnic groups; it also involves third parties who wield power and who wish to maximize profits by stimulating competition between ethnic groups in labor markets. Such actions fuel both competition and threat, leading to discrimination ranging from acts of violence to institutionalization of a split-labor market.

Split-Class Theories Class theories emphasize economic exploitation of the lower classes by those in the higher classes. Added to this dynamic, however, is the recognition that each class includes segments or sectors that are isolated and hence subject to discriminatory practices. Theories of this sort, such as one developed by Mario Barrera (1979), generally begin with a Marxian view of the class system composed of (1) capitalists who control the investment of capital and who thereby regulate production and the purchase of labor; (2) managers who do the administrative work for capitalists and who, thereby, have control of workers; (3) petit bourgeoisie who own small businesses and buy labor; and (4) members of the working class who constitute the majority of workers and who sell their labor for salaries and wages. Aside from the conflicts of interest among these classes, Barrera argues, there are splits within each class along ethnic lines. Members of some ethnic subpopulations are subordinate within a class and are often relegated to the less desirable, lower-paying, and less secure jobs within this class. Moreover, these members can become a reserve labor force within a class, especially the large working class, in which they constitute a pool of excess labor that can be hired when needed for low wages and thrown back into the pool when not needed.

For example, within the working classes, subordinate ethnic minorities were until recently almost always excluded from the most desirable jobs—unionized craft positions (carpenters, plumbers, electricians, sheet metal workers, welders, machine workers, and the like)—and dramatically overrepresented in low-skill, low-pay, and low-job-security positions (day laborers, seasonal workers, and domestics). This is still the case, though somewhat less so, for African, Latino, and Native Americans. In Europe, Jews were historically confined to a few positions (trade, finance); even today in the United States, Jews are overrepresented in certain middle-class occupations and businesses (retail sales in certain spheres such as clothing, as well as accounting, finance, college teaching, and medicine), but they tend to be underrepresented in other spheres. Many Asian groups—Koreans, Vietnamese, and Chinese, for example—are confined to small retail and service businesses and underrepresented in other middle-class occupations and professions. Thus, there are splits in social classes, just as there are in labor markets. Indeed, splits in labor markets may extend beyond lower-paying jobs and operate in other, more affluent and privileged spheres.

Middleman Minority Theories One process that creates splits in the middle class is described by middleman minority theories. Not all ethnic groups occupy
is a subpopulation to develop and retain a distinctive ethnic identity. Thus, if forms of discrimination, such as violence, exclusion, selective inclusion, and segregation, are practiced against a subpopulation, its members will become a clearly identifiable ethnic group. Conversely, the less the discrimination practiced against an identifiable subpopulation, the less distinctive will be its ethnicity and the more likely it is that it will assimilate.

Of course, at times elements of ethnicity are retained without the threat of discrimination. Many white ethnic groups—Irish Catholics, Poles, Italians, and others in America—have tried to maintain elements of their ethnicity, such as holidays, festivals, religion, and community organizations. These ethnic elements are not immediately apparent, however; they do not define and distinguish these subpopulations in a highly visible way. Moreover, all these ethnic groups were at one time victims of discrimination, and so the effort to retain ethnicity is a holdover effect of past discrimination, in which members of the subpopulation selectively retain certain symbols and rituals of the past. Other ethnic groups, such as the Basques in America, have retained a considerable number of their ethnic traditions without ever having experienced high levels of overt discrimination. This maintenance of ethnicity has been accomplished by retaining Basque communities, patterns of intragroup marriage, important rituals and festivals, and language. Even here, though, assimilation is slowly occurring because there is relatively little outside discrimination to force Basques to retreat into their ethnic traditions. Thus, ethnicity can be retained, to an extent and for a while, without discrimination; ultimately, however, the intensity of discrimination determines whether a subpopulation remains distinctively ethnic in culture, behavior, and organization or becomes assimilated into the societal mainstream.

Another force involved in creating and maintaining ethnicity is the degree of identifiability of members of a subpopulation. To be targets of discrimination, members of a subpopulation need to be visible and readily identified. And so, the more distinctive members of a subpopulation are, the more likely they are to become targets of discrimination.

There are several bases for distinctiveness. One is biological, and so the more members of a subpopulation can be singled out in terms of biological features, such as skin color and eye shape, the more readily they can become targets of discrimination. It should come as no surprise, then, that the two ethnic groups most discriminated against in American society have been African Americans and Native Americans. After all, they can be identified biologically. Asians and Latinos have had a similar experience. Identifiability is also cultural—language, religious beliefs, normative practices, and other symbol systems. For example, if an American subpopulation uses a language other than English, has distinctive religious practices that deviate from Judeo-Christian traditions, and reveals norms that sanction behaviors and demeanors that are at odds with the American mainstream, that subpopulation becomes distinctive and identifiable. As a consequence, they are likely targets of discrimination. Behavioral and organizational characteristics also create identifiability. When members of an ethnic population have

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**A UNIFIED THEORY OF ETHNIC RELATIONS**

Let us begin by emphasizing the central force in ethnic relations: discrimination against a subordinate subpopulation. The greater the level of discrimination and the more it is institutionalized across many social arenas, the more likely
a noticeable interpersonal demeanor (such as speech styles, body language, or dress) and when they have unusual organizational structures (such as deviant kinship patterns, church practices, and business arrangements), they can become targets of discrimination.

Discrimination and identifiability are mutually reinforcing. If people can be identified and singled out for discrimination, then such acts of discrimination and their institutionalization force their victims to "remain with their own kind," among whom they interact, intermarry, and maintain their distinctive cultural, organizational, and behavioral patterns. Sometimes this maintenance of ethnic patterns is a defensive reaction, and other times it is merely the only option for segregated and excluded peoples. Most typically, however, it is a mixture of the two. Once a subpopulation is forced to maintain its identity as a result of discrimination, ironically it becomes an easier target for further discrimination. This is particularly likely to be the case if rates of marriage within the ethnic group maintain biological distinctiveness, but other bases of distinctiveness—cultural, behavioral, and organizational—are also important. As biological, cultural, behavioral, and organizational features of a subpopulation become intertwined and intercorrelated, then the members of a subpopulation become ever more visible targets of discrimination. This cycle of identifiability, discrimination, maintenance of identifiability, and further discrimination is often difficult to break— as has certainly been the case for African Americans, Native Americans, most Latinos, and some Asians (Aguirre and Baker, 1993). In contrast, for ethnic groups who are not biologically distinguishable because of skin color or facial features, it has been easier to break the cycle and to filter into the mainstream, as has been the case for members of most white European ethnic groups.

Identifiability and discrimination affect the levels and types of valued resources available to an ethnic subpopulation, such as income, power, and prestige. Resources such as human capital (skills and education) and financial capital (savings) that ethnics bring with them when they come to America are also important. But ultimately discrimination determines which resources members of a population can have and how those resources can be used. Discrimination shapes how and where immigrants who bring human and financial resources with them may use their imported resources and, as a consequence, it will affect the kinds and levels of resources they can accumulate. Discrimination keeps existing ethnic groups in the lower socioeconomic stratum and those immigrants who do not bring human or financial capital with them from acquiring resources. Whether channeling the further acquisition of resources among those with some capital or denying resources to those without capital, discrimination works to maintain identifiability indirectly because the levels and types of resources that members of a population possess influence their behavioral, cultural, and organizational characteristics. When a population has little money, low levels of education (and hence prestige in a credentialled society like the United States), and few channels of acquiring power, it develops distinctive characteristics which, in turn, make its members easier targets for further discrimination. For example, African Americans, Native Americans, and most Latinos have become even more visible as targets of discrimination because of their low shares of valued resources. Or when a population uses its financial resources to make more money but is excluded from positions of power and prestige, it also becomes distinctive, often arousing hostility over its wealth. As a result, it becomes a target of discrimination. For instance, most Asian middleman minorities have experienced this phenomenon, as have Jews over centuries of persecution in Europe and discrimination in the United States.

Figure 2.1 is a diagram of the relationships among discrimination, identifiability, and resource levels. If a population can be easily identified, it is likely to be a target of discrimination; if there is discrimination, this population develops a typical share of resources, which in turn increases its identifiability. We have added to this cycle another feature: degree of ethnic stratification. If a pattern of resource shares becomes discernible, then it usually creates distinctive pockets of ethnicity within the strata of society. For example, if African Americans are consistently overrepresented in the lower social strata, this situation increases their identifiability as somehow "not measuring up" to societal standards, and, as a result, provides a further basis for discrimination which, in turn, perpetuates their meager shares of resources and their location in the stratification system.

As discrimination denies people access to resources, it limits their capacity to fight back or to move away from their situation. If a subpopulation does not
have access to channels of power, how can it fight discrimination? If it does not have access to a good education, which leads to job opportunities and prestige, how does it become upwardly mobile? If it does not have money, how does it improve? Thus, resource shares also determine how people respond to discrimination; if their options are limited, they are more likely to accept their plight and, as a consequence, remain identifiable targets of further discrimination.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the reinforcing dynamics in the cycle of discrimination, identifiability, resource shares, and stratification—as denoted by the positive signs on the arrows. Each one increases the values of the other in the direction specified by the arrows. If these were the only processes involved in the cycles, they would be difficult to break. But other forces are involved, some of which work to intensify these cycles, a few to mitigate their effects.

Why do people discriminate? Is identifiability the only reason? Ethnic identifiability alone is not enough to generate the high levels of discrimination that perpetuate the cycles portrayed in Figure 2.1. At least one additional force is needed: a sense of threat. If a subordinate ethnic group is perceived as threatening the political power, the economic well-being, the cultural symbols (language, customs, values, and beliefs), the social structures (community organization, social clubs, rituals, and holidays), and/or the basic institutions (economy, politics, family, church, school, and medicine) of a dominant ethnic group, this perception will translate into hostility, fueling the fires of discrimination. For example, slavery may have persisted long after it was economically viable because there was great fear about the social, economic, and political consequences of a large mass of freed slaves. This fear mobilized considerable hostility toward black people in the decades before and after the Civil War, resulting in violent acts (hangings, shootings) and efforts to reinstitutionalize in law and practice the oppression of African Americans (Turner and Singleton, 1978; Singleton and Turner, 1975; and Turner, Singleton, and Musick, 1984). A more recent example is how the large influx of Latinos, especially Mexicans, into the United States has aroused fears about its effects on the economy, the existing balance of power, and schools. This fear has resulted in hostility and discriminatory practices.

Recent Asian immigrants—Koreans and Vietnamese, for instance—are sometimes seen as a threat to small-business owners because many of them possess both human and financial capital and are willing to work long hours with pooled family labor. They are, in essence, more successful than some white ethnic groups in many entrepreneurial niches, thereby arousing hostility. Moreover, their success in these niches limits opportunities for other ethnic groups—African Americans and Latinos, for example—who may wish to start small businesses as a way to rise from their particular place in the system of ethnic stratification. The result is hostility and discrimination against these midlevel minorities. Thus, the greater the sense of threat experienced by superordinate ethnic groups (and, at times, subordinate ones as well) over the influx or existence of another ethnic subpopulation, the greater is their hostility toward this subordinate population and the more likely they are to engage in discriminatory acts and to institutionalize these acts.

Which forces create a sense of threat? Is distinctiveness enough? Our sense is that two additional features of an ethnic subpopulation operate to generate hostility. One is the size of an ethnic population. A large number of immigrants or a large subordinate ethnic group poses a threat because they might (1) work for less money than the dominant ethnic groups (out of desperation for job opportunities), (2) upset the balance of political power if they become enfranchised, and (3) change existing cultural and organizational patterns if they influence the mainstream. Thus, African Americans and Latinos pose a threat to the dominant Anglo-Saxon population because of their large numbers; and as a result, they are discriminated against in order to preserve what white ethnic groups see as “the American way of life.” When an ethnic group is large, intense discrimination, fueled by a sense of threat, will usually force them to the bottom of the stratification system because there are too many people to be channeled into a narrow range of middleman minority niches and because they cannot be allowed to “dilute” the dominant culture and its institutions. Of course, when ethnic groups are denied access to resources and pushed into a lower socioeconomic group, they maintain their ethnic identity, which increases the identifiability that poses a threat—often more imagined than real. But more is involved: Large numbers of oppressed ethnic subpopulations sometimes become hostile, which causes the dominant ethnic groups to experience an escalated sense of threat. Intense discrimination against a large ethnic population only exacerbates the level of threat that prompted the discrimination; hence the cycle of threat, discrimination, hostility reaction to discrimination, escalated threat, and renewed discrimination is perpetuated.

Another force that creates a sense of threat is the entrepreneurial resources—occupational skills, education, money, and organizational abilities—that an ethnic population possesses. Usually, however, ethnic groups with entrepreneurial resources are small; hence, through discrimination, it is possible to channel them into a narrow range of middleman minority niches or a limited number of professions. The ability of these ethnic groups to outperform segments of the dominant population in economic enterprises is threatening and arouses hostility, which results in efforts to confine them to niches and positions that reduce head-to-head competition with the members of the dominant population and, perhaps, places them in competition with other subordinate minorities. Under these conditions, the resentment of the victims of discrimination is reduced because they can enjoy economic success in at least some activities, thus weakening the cycle. Because many Asian immigrants in America possess entrepreneurial resources, they have been shunted into middleman minority niches or selected professions. Yet, over time, it is difficult to maintain this kind of confinement because these ethnic groups, and their successive generations of offspring, possess skills, capital, and education that make them valuable in the mainstream; and if they can acquire at least the veneer of the cultural mainstream, they can often penetrate mainstream institutions. Because their numbers are relatively small, coupled with increased rates of intermarriage with members of the dominant ethnic subpopulation, their penetration is less threatening and arouses less hostility than would be the case with larger ethnic populations.
Thus, the level of threat posed by superordinate ethnic groups is increased not only by their distinctiveness but also by their size and entrepreneurial resources. Large numbers of ethnic groups threaten to “overrun” the mainstream, and the possession of entrepreneurial resources among ethnic groups threatens entrenched small businesses and professions.

How is this sense of threat and hostility sustained over time? The answer resides in another central aspect of ethnic relations: negative beliefs and stereotypes. Here is where prejudice becomes a significant force in ethnic relations. When dominant ethnic groups feel threatened, they develop prejudices and portray those who threaten them in a negative light. If the sense of threat is severe, these negative portrayals are codified into a series of beliefs and stereotypes about the perceived undesirable characteristics and qualities of a subordinate ethnic population. Ironically, such portrayals tend to heighten the potential “menace” of the ethnic group, thereby escalating the sense of threat, which, in turn, leads to more negative portrayals. For example, the initial justification for not freeing slaves in America was that they were “childlike” and hence incapable of “managing for themselves” (Turner and Singleton, 1978). But as the abolitionist movement gained momentum, and as the sense of threat experienced by some white Americans increased correspondingly, these portrayals became ever more vicious, shifting to a view of black males as sexually aggressive and as lustful after white women whom they were prepared to rape if ever set free. Such portrayals escalated the sense of threat in the minds of white southerners, resulting in ever more aggressive discrimination against African Americans. According to Jordan (1968:151) the perception that “Negro men lusted after white women” intensified white prejudice.

Codified beliefs and stereotypes not only escalate the sense of threat, which then ratchets up the level of discrimination, but also legitimate discrimination: If an ethnic group has undesirable qualities, it is only appropriate that they be segregated and excluded from the mainstream. And as discrimination sets in motion the cycles outlined in Figure 2.1, it appears to justify itself because the victims of discrimination tend to maintain those biological, behavioral, cultural, and organizational features that are portrayed in a negative light by stereotypes. As a consequence, the failure of ethnic groups to “change” (ignoring the obvious fact that discrimination prevents change) escalates the sense of threat and organizes the negative beliefs and stereotypes into a codified dogma. For example, Jews in Europe were denied access to many positions and forced into a narrow range of retail, finance, and professional niches; as they operated successfully in these niches and did not change their ethnic characteristics, the stereotypes about them—clannish, anti-Christian, financially ruthless, and so on—became ever more codified, thereby justifying more hostility, discrimination, and prejudice.

In Figure 2.2 we have expanded the model of discrimination presented in Figure 2.1 to include those specific variables that will guide our analyses of ethnicity in America. First we need to know the resource shares of an ethnic group as a rough measure of the effects of discrimination. On this basis, we can ask if the ethnic population under examination is firmly lodged in a system of ethnic stratification. For if an ethnic subpopulation as a whole is overrepresented in poverty or low-income positions, we can be sure that discrimination has been at work. Or, if it is confined to a narrow range of business and professional niches, we can also be certain that discrimination does exist or has existed. Next, we can review the history of discrimination against this ethnic group, paying particular attention to its institutionalization in the economic, governmental, and educational structures. We should also understand how and why an ethnic group remains distinctive or identifiable and, as such, an easy target for discrimination. We must then delve into questions about the sense of threat engendered by an identifiable ethnic population and how this sense of threat is related to its size and entrepreneurial resources. Then, we can turn to the negative beliefs and stereotypes to see how they have legitimized discrimination, while escalating the sense of threat. Finally, we need to examine the impact of egalitarian values imposing challenges to prejudicial beliefs and stereotypes about an ethnic group and to patterns of institutionalized discrimination that have denied this group access to resources. In this context, we can assess political and social movements that have arisen in recent years or that are likely to emerge in the future.

How can these self-reinforcing processes be broken? Rebellion and revolt, political mobilization, formation of a social movement, and other acts may
Box 2.1
What Do Americans Mean by Egalitarian?

Affirmative action policies have, over the last two decades, generated so much controversy that it is reasonable to ask: Why the controversy? The answer ultimately resides in two approaches for realizing egalitarian values. The first, clearly stated in the Declaration of Independence, stresses equality for individuals rather than social categories; and as this value has become translated into social policies, the goal has been to equalize opportunities for individuals. The second approach, initiated under Richard Nixon’s presidency in the 1970s, emphasizes equality for groups; and as this policy has been implemented under more recent affirmative action programs, the focus has been on equality of results.

As Seymour Martin Lipset (1991, 209) has argued, these policies represent a clash of two basic American values: egalitarianism versus individualism. Individu-alism stresses that people get ahead through their own efforts and hard work; and when combined with egalitarianism, the result is a commitment to providing compensatory help to those individuals whose circumstances keep them from realizing their full potential for hard work and success. But, when equality is stressed over individualism, the commitment is to assuring that certain categories of people—minorities and women, for example—achieve proportionate representation and results when compared to those who have been more advantaged. In this latter commitment, emphasis is on giving preferences to certain categories of individuals in order to compensate for past discrimination.

Public opinion polls in the United States have been consistent and overwhelming in their endorsement of individualistic egalitarianism. The American public is opposed to group-preference approaches; and even among minorities, who could be helped by these approaches, a clear majority is opposed to them as well. Yet, Americans are strongly in support of programs that will help individuals, as individuals rather than as a social category, overcome the disadvantages that come with present and past discrimination. It should not be surprising, then, that affirmative action—when seen as group preferences—should be so hotly debated, and that Americans have come to disagree with virtually all policies based upon a group-preference interpretation of egalitarianism. Whether this feeling on the part of the American public is good, bad, right, or wrong in some ultimate moral sense is less relevant than the fact that Americans view group preferences as unfair. In contrast, they do not feel that compensatory efforts—special programs in education and job training, for example—are unfair; indeed, Americans see these kinds of efforts as necessary to overcome present, as well as the legacy of the past, discrimination.

Another basic American value is humanitarianism—that is, those who have suffered through no fault of their own should be helped. In the minds of most Americans this value is mixed with individualism and egalitarianism to produce a clear desire for programs to help individuals realize more opportunities, regardless of their social category. Those who are poor and who have been victims of discrimination need compensatory help as individuals to realize their potential. This is as far as Americans appear to be willing to go in their humanitarianism; relatively small percentages of Americans believe that categories of individuals should be given preferential treatment. Indeed, programs which are perceived to give preferential treatment to social categories—whether this perception is accurate or not is another matter—are seen as undesirable. Hence, efforts on the part of policy makers to overcome the effects of present and past discrimination will need to be careful in constructing these programs; if they are not, programs will encounter negative evaluation by the conditional humanitarianism of most Americans: equality of opportunity is okay; equality of outcome through group preferences is not okay.

Yet, it can be asked: Without group preferences, can the cumulative effects of discrimination over hundreds of years really be overcome? Can any compensatory educational program, for example, overcome the effects of being raised in a graffiti- and bullet-marked public housing project infested by gangs and drug dealers? Or, can women ever overcome discrimination by anything but group preferences in assuring their access to job categories dominated by men? In reality, the answer to these questions is probably no, but Americans think otherwise, or think group preferences won’t work either; and, it is reasonable to assume, programs to realize egalitarian values in the face of past and present discrimination will always be limited by what the public perceives as fair and unfair.

force dominant ethnic groups to make concessions. Also, the existence of egalitarian values, as portrayed in the lower portion of Figure 2.2, may stimulate change. The negative arrows pointing to prejudicial and negative beliefs as well as to discrimination indicate that such values stand in contradiction to prejudice and discrimination. Of course, in societies without such values, the cycles portrayed in Figure 2.2 are allowed to operate, up to the point of revolt and conflict. But in the United States, where values of equality and freedom are pervasive, they legitimate opposition movements to discriminatory practices—for example, the abolitionist movement that denounced slavery and the civil rights movement that culminated in a series of federal laws in the 1960s formally outlawing discrimination. Without the existence of such egalitarian values in the dominant culture, oppressed ethnic groups must accept discrimina-tion, migrate to a more favorable environment, or incur the risks of rebellion. Historically, acceptance and migration have been the most common responses of subordinate ethnic groups; protest by a subordinate minority is usually crushed, unless the population is large and the dominant groups weak, or unless the ethnic group has allies within or outside the society. Only recently in world history have egalitarian values become a powerful force; patterns of discrimination and ethnic stratification have been a prominent feature of human societies for millennia. Since egalitarian values are hardly universal in the world today, ethnic stratification and tensions will remain part of human society in the future. This is assuredly the case when one considers that the United States, which subscribes to powerful egalitarian values, has yet to break the cycles portrayed in Figure 2.2.
The definitions in Chapter 1, coupled with the theoretical explanation offered in this chapter, provide us with a means for examining ethnic relations in America. More specifically, the model depicted in Figure 2.2 can be viewed as a springboard for discussion about each ethnic subpopulation to be examined in the chapters to follow.

When noticeable differences of an ethnic subpopulation are perceived to pose a threat, they lead to discrimination. Large ethnic populations or smaller ones with entrepreneurial skills are most likely to generate a sense of threat among dominant ethnic groups. This sense of threat leads people to construct negative beliefs and stereotypes about ethnic groups; and these beliefs are used to legitimate discrimination.

Discrimination, itself, also encourages beliefs that can make such discrimination seem legitimate; and once codified, these beliefs encourage further discrimination. The effects of additional discrimination are to limit resource shares of ethnic groups, maintain their identity and vulnerability to discrimination, and to force them into habitual locations in the stratification system; as these effects occur, a renewed cycle of threat, prejudice, and discrimination is unleashed against ethnic groups who “refuse to change” (again, ignoring the obvious reasons for why change is difficult).

The forces delineated in the theoretical model portrayed in Figure 2.2 will become the chapter headings and sections in subsequent discussions. They will provide a framework for systematically reviewing the past, present, and future of the most prominent ethnic subpopulations in America. And they will do more. Because these headings are derived from a theoretical model, they contribute to an explanation of why an ethnic subpopulation and members of the dominant Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture have formed a particular pattern of tension-provoking relations. By examining how the forces portrayed in Figure 2.2 have operated and interacted for a particular ethnic population, we will be able to explain what has occurred in the past, what is going on today, and what will be likely to happen in the future.

**SUMMARY**

Theories attempt to explain why a phenomenon exists and how it operates. Theories explaining ethnicity are diverse, each capturing an important dynamic but none incorporating all the key forces in ethnic relations. Assimilation theories emphasize the process by which members of an ethnic population become part of the mainstream of a society, but they do not adequately account for the persistence of ethnic differences and the conflicts these differences generate. Theories of ethnic pluralism arose in reaction to the “melting pot” basis of assimilation theories, arguing that the maintenance of ethnicity is often a way of coping with discrimination. More recent biological theories propose the possibility of human genetic tendencies to identify with and support members of their distinctive ethnic heritage. These biological theories are as controversial as earlier and often ethnocentric, if not racist, theories. Ecological theories emphasize that competition for scarce resources is a key force in creating and sustaining ethnic relations and that patterns of domination and subjugation among ethnic groups reflect this competition over valued resources such as jobs, incomes, and housing.

All stratification theories argue that ethnic groups are overrepresented in particular social strata because of the unequal distribution of power. Caste theories stress that many minority groups have been historically pushed to the bottom of the class system with rigid barriers preventing mobility out of this position. Colonialism theories emphasize that minority populations often become exploited “colonies” within a society—much like their international counterparts, the overseas colonies of one nation that subjugates the members of others and extracts their resources without a proportionate return. Split-labor market theories draw attention to the fact that patterns of discrimination are often created and sustained through the partitioning of labor markets so that dominant subpopulations can continue to enjoy their privilege while denying subordinate ethnic groups access to jobs and income. Split-class theories argue that divisions and partitions within social classes exist, with the least powerful typically confined to a lower class in order to maintain the privilege of the dominant sector within a class. Middleman minority theories use elements from split-labor market and split-class theories to explain how small pockets within ethnic subpopulations, mostly in a narrow range of business and entrepreneurial positions, emerge and succeed in the socioeconomic mainstream.

Finally, this chapter has sought to take the main tenets of each theory and synthesize them into a general model of ethnic discrimination in America. This model stresses several interrelated factors: ethnic identifiability, the threat that an ethnic population poses, the prejudicial stereotypes that are articulated, the resources possessed by an ethnic population, the size of an ethnic population, and the position of a subpopulation in the stratification system.

**POINTS OF DEBATE**

Each of the theories summarized in this chapter suggests points of debate, some of which are enumerated below.

1. Is assimilation the desired outcome of ethnic relations? Today, many argue that America must be a “pluralistic society,” but this raises the question: How much pluralism is possible? Historically, no society has endured without a cultural core that absorbs elements of diverse ethnic populations while remaining intact. When “ethnic pluralism” translates into competing cultural cores, history has shown that societal disintegration follows. When “ethnic pluralism” refers to a limited range of traditions such as religious beliefs and rituals, distinctive ceremonies and holidays honoring a cultural heritage and important figures in this heritage, and even maintenance of a secondary language, the disintegrative potential of ethnicity is reduced.
Can the cultural core, which is examined in Chapter 3, absorb important components of diverse ethnic populations? Must ethnic groups assimilate, and, if so, to what degree? What are the consequences for society if assimilation does not occur? To what degree are members of the dominant Anglo-Saxon cultural core willing to accommodate change?

2. Stratification theories emphasize that discrimination forces some ethnic groups into either lower-class positions or a narrow range of middleman positions. Inequality is one of the most volatile forces in human organization; when inequality takes on an ethnic dimension, it is doubly volatile. Because the socioeconomic position of many ethnic groups in America is the result of discrimination, it is reasonable to ask: How can the remaining patterns of discrimination be eliminated, or at least reduced? What can be done to compensate descendants of those who have experienced the most discrimination and those who live with the legacy of such discrimination? To the “second American dilemma,” discussed in the points of debate section in Chapter 1, we now add a caveat: People who have been subjugated for a long time become angry and strike back. Americans need to consider how they are to avoid the dangers of ethnic violence as a form of retaliation by those in lower socioeconomic positions.

3. Ethnic stratification is sustained by mutually reinforcing cycles (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2); how can these cycles be broken? The identifiability cycle, especially when based upon physical features, can be broken by intermarriage. How willing are the members of both subordinate and dominant ethnic groups to accept this type of assimilation? When members of the dominant culture, as well as other subordinate ethnic groups, feel threatened, discrimination and prejudice emerge. How is this cycle to be broken, especially as competition for resources (as emphasized by ecological theories) intensifies? Are there enough jobs, houses, or educational credentials to go around? Are those who have these resources willing to see others acquire them if it costs them some of their own privilege? How much, if anything, are people willing to give up in the name of ethnic peace and egalitarianism? What are the consequences if privileged Americans are not willing to give up anything?

CHAPTER 3

The Anglo-Saxon Core and Ethnic Antagonism

Relations between ethnic groups almost always involve elements of domination and subordination: One ethnic subpopulation is able to impose its culture and institutional arrangements on another. In the United States, this process of cultural and institutional domination is complex because of the immigration of so many diverse ethnic groups, but one fact is clear: Anglo-Saxon culture and institutions often dictate and define what other ethnic populations must become (Gordon, 1964; Vargas, 1998). Each ethnic minority in America has been expected to adapt to this Anglo-Saxon core; and each has experienced discrimination by those who have sought to maintain the cultural symbols and institutional structure of this core. Thus, before exploring the lives of the most prominent ethnic minorities in the United States, let us explore the history of those dominant sociocultural traditions that have been imposed upon other ethnics.

EARLY COLONIZATION OF AMERICA

The Anglo-Saxons

The term “Anglo-Saxon” is a bit of a misnomer; it derives from northern Germanic tribes—the Saxons and Angles—that invaded England in the fifth and sixth centuries, displacing other tribes whose lives had already been disrupted by the invasions of the Celts from continental Europe and later the Romans. Other invaders followed, such as the Normans from France; and as a result, a considerable amount of mingling among continental and English cultures ensued. Thus, the English settlers who came to America were themselves a product of a long history of conquest and blending of ethnic subpopulations. And not only were Scots and Welsh (the remnants of the old Celts) part of the early