Racial and Ethnic Relations

Sociological Agents
Race and Ethnicity Defined

• **Race** is a socially defined category, based on real or perceived biological differences between groups of people.

• **Ethnicity** is a socially defined category based on common language, religion, nationality, history, or another cultural factor.
Race as a Social Construct

• Sociologists see race and ethnicity as social constructions because they are not rooted in biological differences, they change over time, and they never have firm boundaries.
  • Ex: Differing opinions of how light skin color needs to be in order to be classified as “white”
• The distinction between race and ethnicity is important because ethnicity can be displayed or hidden, depending on individual preferences, while racial identities are always on display.
  • Ex. Skin color can not be permanently hidden, but it is easy to hide German ethnicity
Minorities

• A *minority group* is made up of members of a social group that is systematically denied the same access to power and resources available to the dominant groups of a society, but who are not necessarily fewer in number than the dominant group.
Racism and Power

• **Racism**: a set of beliefs about the superiority of one racial or ethnic group.
  • Used to justify inequality
    • Ex. Apartheid South Africa or Jim Crow United States
  • Often rooted in the assumption that differences between groups are genetic
    • Eugenics
• By definition non-European Americans cannot be racist against European Americans because of the lack of political and social dominance over European Americans
  • European Americans have maintained a monopoly over power and have used it to disadvantage other racial groups
Prejudice, Discrimination, and Bigotry

• **Prejudice**: (a thought process)
  • an idea about the characteristics of a group
  • applied to all members of that group
  • unlikely to change regardless of the evidence against it.

• **Discrimination**: (an action)
  • unequal treatment of individuals because of their social group
  • usually motivated by prejudice

• **Bigotry**: (a thought process)
  • Intolerance to others based on differences of ideals or appearance
    • Ex. Hating someone because of their skin color
Conflict or Cooperation

• **Assimilation** the minority group is absorbed into the mainstream or dominant group, making society more homogeneous.

  • **Racial assimilation** racial minority groups are absorbed into the dominant group through intermarriage.

  • **Cultural assimilation** racial or ethnic groups are absorbed into the dominant group by adopting the dominant group’s culture.
Present Racial Makeup of United States
Number of Executions and Race of Prisoners Executed, 1976–2009

Total Number of Executions: 1,170

- Black
- Native American
- White
- Asian
- Latino

Number of executions

Educational Attainment Based on Race, 2007

Percentage completing high school:
- Asian Americans: 87.8
- Whites: 86.2
- African Americans: 82.3
- Cuban descent: 79.8
- Puerto Rican descent: 73.5
- Mexican Americans: 53.9

Percentage completing college (or higher):
- Asian Americans: 52.1
- Whites: 29.1
- African Americans: 18.5
- Cuban descent: 27.2
- Puerto Rican descent: 16.4
- Mexican Americans: 9.0
Median Net Worth of Households

- Hispanics: $18,359 vs $6,325
- Blacks: $12,124 vs $5,677
- Asians: $168,103 vs $78,066
U.S. Life Expectancy by Race, 2007