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THE SOCIOLOGY OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

FRANK HAROLD WILSON

University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

Racial and ethnic relations are salient dimensions of social distinction and diversity. Although institutional changes, the civil rights movement, and federal policies have diminished the traditional problems of discrimination and segregation across racial and ethnic groups, the "color line" remains as a complex system of cultural and institutional patterns, inequality markers, and social constructions of reality. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the traditional Black-White color line, which defined the most salient boundaries of social distance in American race relations, is complicated and augmented by the increasing growth of recent immigrants from Latin America and Asia and the emergence of a new color line that has additional layers of cultural and color stratification and distinction.

Sociologists usually view racial and ethnic groups as deriving from social interactions and social definitions in which physical and cultural characteristics are distinguished and used as identifiers or markers in relationships. While a racial group is defined as a social group that persons inside or outside the group have decided is important to single out as inferior or superior on the basis of physical characteristics, an ethnic group is typically defined as a social group distinguished or set apart on the basis of cultural and nationality characteristics such as language, religion, and history. Sociologists and other social scientists such as anthropologists, psychologists, and historians have discredited any scientific basis of race or racial classification and have emphasized the interrelationships between culture and social structure in shaping different group and individual life chances and behaviors. Social definitions of racial group are to be distinguished from "natural," biogenetic, and popular conceptions that define race in terms of biological traits, such as skin color, hair texture, and other physical characteristics, and generalize from these surface manifestations deeper underlying differences between groups in intelligence, temperament, physical aggression, and sexuality.

The study of racial and ethnic relations in sociology has been an important concern throughout the twentieth century and shows signs of continuing in significance in the twenty-first century. Not only have academic concerns among sociologists contributed to the focusing and refocusing of problems and controversies of race relations. Simultaneously, larger historical, social, cultural, economic, and political factors have interacted to redefine what is meant by race and ethnicity and the social factors explaining this phenomenon. As such, the concept of race relations has been to an important degree an interdisciplinary one, which has implications for knowledge. This essay will examine the following concerns: (1) the classical theoretical perspectives of race and ethnic relations, (2) the post–civil rights sociological controversies concerning the changing significance of race and ethnicity, (3) the current state of knowledge on racial and ethnic inequality, (4) how sociology has brought its understanding of race relations to the public, and (5) the prospects for future research in racial and ethnic relations.

CLASSICAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF RACE AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

Among the earliest generations of sociologists, the interests in racial and ethnic relations were initially influenced by cultural discourses focused on explaining the "race problem" or "Negro problem" that preceded the development of a scientific sociology (McKee 1993:95). From the end of the Civil War to the turn of the century, the race problem in the United States centered on explaining the lower status and morality of Blacks in the South who had come out of slavery and Reconstruction and remained largely subordinated and impoverished. Early sociologists drew from social Darwinism and biogenetic assumptions of human society to argue a natural inequality of the races (Lyman 1972). In defining different human populations as races, it was fallaciously assumed that these races (1) represented natural and separate divisions within the human species based on visible physical differences and (2) were biologically distinctive and homogeneous populations that were unambiguous, clearly demarcated, and uninfluenced by migration. The social construction of race was both a classification and ideological system that rationalized European attitudes and actions toward conquered and enslaved groups such as Indians and Africans and justified the inequalities in status, power, and privilege between dominant and subordinate groups.

Accompanying the development of a scientific sociology, classical sociologists refocused the discourse by emphasizing the historical and sociological contexts of race relations based on cultural contacts and group competition. Robert Park's (1930) initial conception of race relations as a "cycle," set within the contexts of an urban and secular society, hypothesized that global and cross-national movements of populations produced contacts between racially different groups on a frontier that were followed by processes of competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation. During the stages of competition and conflict, struggles between racial groups for resources resulted in prejudice, antagonisms, race consciousness, and the eventual development of a social order with dominant and subordinate groups. The antagonistic cooperation and "bridge building" in accommodation would eventually be followed by assimilation processes "by which people of diverse racial origins and different cultural heritages occupy a common territory, achieve a cultural solidarity sufficient at least to sustain a natural existence" (p. 281). According to Park ([1939] 1950), the concept of race relations came to refer to all relationships which are capable of producing race conflict and race consciousness and which determine the relative status of groups in the community. The term *race relations* eventually came to refer to the social processes and social structures arising from the contacts and interaction of people with varied social characteristics.

Park's framing of a race relations cycle identified important concepts such as racial frontiers, racial conflict, subordinate and dominant groups, racial antagonisms, assimilation, and prejudice. The inevitability of assimilation was relatively untested in the race relations scholarship until generations later. His conceptualization of the processes in the cycle contained in its logic assumptions of a greater significance of "racial differences" in its earlier stages and a "declining significance of race" in the latter stages.

The expectations of assimilation in race relations were challenged in part by caste and class perspectives. During the 1930s, social anthropologists such as William Lloyd Warner, John Dollard, and Allison Davis popularized a conceptual scheme for analyzing race relations in the southern region of the United States, which viewed Black-White relations as organized by a color caste system that shaped economic and political relations as well as family and kinship structures (Warner 1936; Dollard 1937; Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1941). In caste and class perspectives, American race relations were viewed as an intractable system of formal and informal racial control and subordination that were characterized by different black and white caste systems with separate class systems in each caste. Within each of the two castes, social classes existed in which social status was based on income, education, and family background and reflected in distinctive life styles. Caste and class comprised a sociocultural system that functioned to distribute power and privilege unevenly and punished individuals who questioned the system by word or actions.

Although the institutional, organizational, and quality-of-life conditions were unequal between the races, the caste and class system functioned as a stable social order to provide economic, political, cultural, psychological, and emotional advantages to both Blacks and Whites. Unlike assimilation conceptions, the contacts between different groups were not competitive nor would these lead to racial conflict.

The refocusing of race relations into race and ethnic relations accompanied the entry of the concept of minority. Although minority had been used by some classical sociologists such as Robert Park and Louis Wirth, it was not central in defining or analyzing race relations. During the 1930s, the pairing of racial and ethnic groups grew out of sociological textbooks such as Donald Young's *American Minority Peoples* (1932). Young objected to the earlier literature that had created the impression that "Negro-white relations are one thing, while Jewish-Gentile, Oriental-white, and other race relations are vastly different from each other" and emphasized that "the problems and principles of race relations are remarkably similar, regardless of what groups are involved; and that only by an integrated study of all minority groups can a real understanding and sociological analysis of the involved social phenomena be achieved" (Young 1932:xii–xiii). The concept of minority was introduced to apply to groups distinguished by

biological, language, and alien cultural traits. The conceptual category of minority in these textbooks suggested the theoretical similarities of racial, religious, and nationality groups. Although race was beginning to be broadened into racial and ethnic relations, this discourse did not represent the consensus or conventional wisdom in sociology.

The concept of minority was inspired by the experiences of Eastern European ethnic groups that made up parts of the growing immigration to the United States through 1924. In Eastern Europe, minority had been used to refer to suppressed racial and national groups that were accorded equal rights, and these rights were protected by proportional representation. Among early generations of sociologists, nationalities were defined as racial groups that had attained social consciousness, race pride, and moral independence. Louis Wirth's (1928) reference to the ghetto as "one historical form dealing with a dissenting minority in a large population" (pp. 4–5) was based on the experiences of European Jews. In the United States, the concept was initially applied to areas of first settlement of immigrants (ethnic ghettos), areas of ethnic groups new to the city, and the racially segregated communities of Black Americans in northern cities.

During the post–World War II years, the sociology of race relations was enlarged by the growing presence of liberal practitioners in human relations who were committed to the possibilities of social intervention in race relations. Drawing from the pragmatic, interventionist, and social reform experiences of New Deal programs and the social planning values, many sociologists came to view the earlier conceptions of an objective study of race relations detached from political intervention as limiting. These sociologists did not view race relations as intractable, slow to change, or singularly affected by the relationships between majority and minority groups. Instead, they came to view race relations as a social problem that might be influenced by applied sociological research and the increased introduction of sociological knowledge on race relations into public policy. Following the lead of the Carnegie Corporation, important foundations such as the Marshall Field Foundation, the Phelps Stokes Fund, and the Rockefeller Foundation became involved in funding scholarships and educational projects that emphasized the reduction of prejudice through education, reducing hostilities between racial groups, and identifying strategies for controlling discrimination.

By the 1940s and 1950s, sociologists paid increasing attention to the conceptual and analytical distinction between prejudice and discrimination, which had not been earlier articulated. While prejudice referred to the negative and faulty attitudes associated with groups, discrimination referred to the patterned behaviors and actions that differentiate and subordinate groups. In Park's earlier concepts, there was no clear distinction between prejudice and discrimination. Instead, the path to assimilation grew out of racial groups that had acquired group consciousness, race pride, and solidarity through racial conflict.

An American Dilemma (Myrdal 1944) represents the most comprehensive and influential statement of race relations during the post–World War II years. While refocusing race relations from "race and cultural contacts" and minority groups to the Negro problem, race prejudice was identified as "the whole complex of valuations and beliefs which are behind discriminatory behavior on the part of White Americans" (p. 52). The significance of race in American culture and social structure was highlighted as a moral contradiction between theory and practice in the hearts, minds, and consciences of White Americans that was reflected in the conflict between universal values of the American Creed—the doctrine embodied in the Constitution and Bill of Rights, high Christian precepts, and the Golden Rule—and the particular discriminatory practices in race relations that resulted from regional doctrines, local customs, conformity pressures, and individual prejudices (Myrdal 1944).

Myrdal also identified a "vicious cycle" where each of the major social institutions through discriminatory practices contributed to the discrimination and exclusion of Black Americans in other institutions and organized life. Conversely, once social change in race relations was initiated with social reforms in discrimination laws and practices and the reeducation of prejudiced beliefs and attitudes, the cumulative effects led to a "virtuous cycle," which began to reverse historic discrimination and improve the quality of life. By emphasizing cumulative causation, the continuities rather than discontinuities between prejudice, discrimination, and the social status of racial minority groups were underscored. Over time, its ideas of optimism, progress, and integration resonated with federally initiated executive orders, legislative reforms, and Supreme Court interpretations such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

The post–World War II focus on prejudice and discrimination was further reflected in leading theoretical arguments. Robert Merton's (1949) essay "Discrimination and the American Creed" offered a logical set of combinations of prejudice and discrimination that had empirical referents and identified both continuities and discontinuities. In his conceptual and analytical distinction of the unprejudiced nondiscriminator ("all weather liberal"), the "unprejudiced discriminator," "fair weather liberal," the "prejudiced nondiscriminator," "timid bigot," and "prejudiced discriminator" ("active bigot"), he emphasized more complexities between prejudice and discrimination. Merton emphasized that individual discrimination did not lead directly to prejudice and vice versa. In his discussion, most persons conformed to norms, laws, and institutionalized practices even when that behavior came into conflict with their own attitudes (Merton 1949). Consequently, effecting social change in discrimination did not require that attitudes be changed first. Sociological proposals for reform in race relations were usually premised on affecting discriminatory behaviors because racial attitudes were slower and more resilient to change. *The More Perfect*

Union (MacIver 1948) redefined the problem of control-ling discrimination as a necessary strategy in developing larger objectives of national unity. Discrimination and seg-regation not only contradicted American moral values but also contradicted economic efficiency values in terms of high costs, duplication, and wastes. As a strategy, the nation's struggle against discrimination was centered on increasing opportunity in institutional areas of the econ-omy, politics, and education and also identified the impor-tance of innovation by the leadership of corporations, churches, and trade unions.

The focus of classical theorizing on race relations dur-ing the first half of the twentieth century was largely influ-enced by the color line or the relationships between White and Black Americans. Although the examination of immi-grant and ethnic groups had always been an important focus in sociology, this topic was not initially conceptual-ized as race relations.

Distinctions between racial and ethnic groups were usu-ally made clear. Black Americans, in terms of historical, social, and cultural conditions, were usually viewed as a unique case.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, the "lib-eral expectancy" paradigm of increasing integration and assimilation, based on the experiences of immigrant and ethnic groups in the North, came to represent the dominant line of interpretation among sociologists for analyzing racial and ethnic relations. Accordingly, optimism and progress are expected to characterize race relations over the long run as the historic inequalities of race are dimin-ished. Not only are most European ethnic groups viewed as substantially assimilated, but the middle classes of racial minority groups are analyzed as becoming increas-ingly integrated and assimilated. In Milton Gordon's (1964) paradigm, the experiences of different ethnic groups might be analyzed by stages of cultural, structural, identificational, civic, marital, attitude-receptional, and behavioral-receptional assimilation.

By contrast, the "conservative expectancy" or "caste and class" paradigm, based on the color line experiences between Blacks and Whites in the rural South, has been reflected to a lesser degree in leading sociological interpre-tations of race relations with the exception of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders observation that "America is moving toward two nations, one black, one white, separate and unequal" (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968) and Andrew Hacker's (1992) *Two Nations.* The conservative expectancy views the objective social facts bearing on race relations as more intractable and slower to change than the theories and perceptions that are more influenced by public policy con-troversies and cultural beliefs. It predicts important conti-nuities of the southern rural color line race relations in the contemporary cities and metropolitan areas of the North.

During recent years, many sociologists in analyzing racial and ethnic relations have continued to view the expe-riences of Black Americans in terms of the history of slavery and continuing institutional discrimination as unique and qualitatively different from immigrant and minority groups.

POST–CIVIL RIGHTS SOCIOLOGICAL CONTROVERSIES IN RACIAL AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

Since the late 1960s, one important theoretical develop-ment has been to shift the object of analysis toward issues of social inequality and mobility that have brought racial and ethnic relations into a closer convergence with para-digms of social stratification. Theorizing and research in stratification have usually been more national (or societal) in scope and less directly concerned with many of the urban and community relationships such as race and cul-tural contacts, assimilation, and segregation that character-ized classical discussions. The increasing concern with social class, and race-class intersections, has been influ-enced by stratification interests. Another development informing post–civil rights theorizing has been the emer-gence of power conflict perspectives that have questioned the adequacy of assimilation (social order) theories. Instead of identifying the primacy of assimilation processes across racial and ethnic groups, these have emphasized the salience of institutional and organizational processes in structuring racial inequality. Power conflict discourses reintroduced Oliver Cromwell Cox's criticisms of classical assimilation and caste perspectives and the crucial intersection between capitalism and race relations (Cox 1948). Accompanying the growth of industrial capi-talism, employers make use of ideologies of racism to segregate, divide, exploit, and control Black and White workers. Ideologies of racial superiority/inferiority, antag-onism, and hatred function to hinder contact and constrain strong labor organizations between racial groups (pp. 485–88). Power conflict perspectives such as Van den Berghe's (1967) have noted that the development of racism and economic exploitation within modernizing industrial societies functioned to justify the contradictions between principles of freedom and equality and practices of slave labor and colonialism. Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) introduced the concept of institutional racism to identify the complex intersection between institutional actions, cul-tural beliefs, and policies that contribute to the subordina-tion of Blacks.

Power conflict perspectives, such as internal colonial-ism, distinguish between minorities who are "conquered peoples" (colonized minorities) and those who are not (immigrant minorities). While colonized minorities are characterized by histories of conquest, forced and restricted movement, unfree and slave labor, and systematically harsh treatment with respect to group culture and social organiza-tion, immigrant minorities are characterized by histories of voluntary movement, free labor, and less intense group cultural and social organization conflicts. The concept is

useful in distinguishing Native, African, Mexican, and Puerto Rican Americans (colonized minorities) from European, Asian, and other Latin Americans (immigrant minorities) (Blauner 1972). The concept of "racial formation" recognizes the role of the government in creating racial and ethnic definitions and institutionalizing discrimination (Omi and Winant 1986). Contemporaneously, the government has continued to socially define race and institutionalize discrimination through weakened enforcement of civil rights, voter dilution, and disenfranchisement in minority districts, "driving while black" practices among law enforcement officials, and the enactment of sentencing legislation that disproportionately targets the users of crack cocaine as distinct from users of pure cocaine.

The post–civil rights sociological theories are based on different perspectives of the changing nature of racial and ethnic stratification in the United States, the role of the economy and public policy, and the macrosociological and microsociological variables identified. With respect to the principal object of analysis, these derive from different sociological prisms of what has occurred and is likely to occur in the future. These models may be defined as follows: (1) the "declining significance of race" model, (2) the "continuing significance of race" model, and (3) the "increasing significance of ethnicity" model.

The "declining significance of race" model argues that as a consequence of a growing post–civil rights economy, the increasing integration of minorities in the corporate and governmental sectors of the economy, public policies of nondiscrimination, and more favorable attitudes among White Americans toward principles of equality and affirmative action, the effects of racial discrimination and segregation on the lives of racial and ethnic minorities are decreasing in significance. While civil rights policies have decreased the significance of historic discrimination, economics and class factors more than race factors are hypothesized as accounting for current racial and ethnic inequalities. William Julius Wilson's contemporary classics *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978), *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), and *When Work Disappears* (1996) have best exemplified these arguments. In disaggregating the effects of changing race relations across class lines, Wilson has hypothesized different outcomes for the new black middle class, who has become increasingly integrated, and the black underclass, who has experienced increasing social dislocation and joblessness.

In this paradigm, macroeconomic change factors, such as corporate growth, central-city plant closings, the decline of high wage, unionized manufacturing employment, the growth of low-wage service employment, and spatial mismatches between suburban employers and prospective central-city employees, are more primary in structuring opportunity rather than direct discrimination. Simultaneously, the differences across racial and ethnic groups in their acquisition of microlevel human capital characteristics such as increased education, training, and employment and social capital characteristics such as social networks, organizational experiences, and work behaviors are relevant to their status in the racial and ethnic hierarchy. The most impoverished minority groups who remain behind are characterized by economic dislocations, "concentration effects," and "social isolation." "Declining significance of race" models interpret indirect discrimination in labor markets and housing and statistical discrimination as more important in inequality than direct discrimination. Historic discrimination, the "legacy of slavery," and the effects of past discrimination are acknowledged, while continuing discrimination is understated.

The "continuing significance of race" model argues that despite a growing economy, nondiscrimination and affirmative action policies, and increasingly favorable attitudes toward equality, recent post–civil rights trends in economic inequality have been accompanied by the persistence of racial and ethnic inequality in the lives of people of color. Drawing from "caste and class" and power conflict perspectives of racial stratification, these emphasize continuing segregation, institutional discrimination, and labor market segmentation (Hacker 1992; Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Omi and Winant 1986). These underscore that contemporary practices of institutional discrimination in the economy, politics, housing, education, and other areas of organized life continue to invidiously differentiate and lessen the life chances of racial minorities. Simultaneously, these emphasize that majority group White American attitudes and beliefs are ambivalent about the implementation of existing programs to bring about equality, view inequality as more individually rather than structurally caused, and commonly hold on to ethnic and racial stereotypes.

The increased visibility of a "new ethnicity" among third and fourth generations of ethnic groups, which were expected to become assimilated, was a cause for some sociologists to argue a resurgence of ethnicity, the limitations of assimilation, and the "end of the melting pot" (Glazer and Moynihan 1970; Greeley 1974). Not only had full assimilation not occurred for most ethnic groups, but its likelihood of occurring in the near future was questioned. In the "salad bowl," a more pluralistic interpretation of the transition to assimilation emerged that recognized ethnic groups becoming increasingly acculturated and structurally assimilated to the dominant society while retaining dimensions of ethnic group culture, identity, institutions, and organizations. The ethnic paradigm emphasized the immigrant analogy in accounting for the differences between ethnic and racial minorities, the primacy of the ethnic in racial and ethnic relations (or ethnic studies), and the salience of cultural factors in ethnic group adaptation and assimilation. Racial groups such as American Indians, African Americans, and Asian Americans were subsumed under broadened concepts of ethnic group. Race was included as an additional ethnic factor alongside language, religion, and nationality or redefined as an outcome of culture and self-definition. These discourses assumed that the histories of people

defined as racial minorities were essentially similar to the experiences of European ethnic groups who experienced significant economic integration and assimilation in American society.

THE CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE ON RACIAL AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

Sociological research provides a basis for validating the competing theoretical perspectives while highlighting the distinction between empirical generalizations and social facts in contrast to the public policy discourses and cultural beliefs that may often confound what is known. Empirical sociological research knowledge may be distinguished by different approaches. While macrosociological research is focused on the "big questions" of how structural and institutional processes continue to be relevant to racial and ethnic inequality, microsociological research is focused on making sense of the cognitive, affective, and predisposition to action dimensions of racial attitudes, social distance, and ethnic identification.

Macrosociological Research

During the post–civil rights years, race has continued to structure the life chances of different groups. Despite important civil rights reforms such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, the Civil Rights Act of 1965, the Fair Housing Act 1968, and affirmative action, race continues to socially structure U.S. metropolitan areas, housing, education, the workforce, and other social institutions and organizations. Racial segregation remains as a social structure, practice, and symbol of racial and ethnic inequality. Patterns of segregation and desegregation experienced by racial and ethnic groups symbolize the status of these different groups in the social hierarchy and their access to the opportunities and resources connected to the American Dream.

Sociologists use the "segregation index" (or index of dissimilarity) to measure the degree of segregation, ranging from 0 for full integration and 100 for complete segregation. Values above 60 reflect high levels of segregation. During the twentieth century, the urbanization of Black Americans has been accompanied by high levels of racial segregation indicative of restricted socioeconomic opportunity and housing discrimination. Historic trends that accompanied the "Great Migration" through the post–World War II migration indicate progressively higher levels of segregation experienced by Blacks in cities between 1900 and 1970 (Taeuber and Taeuber 1965; Lieberson 1980; Massey and Denton 1993; Massey 2001). Since 1970, relatively small but steady decreases in Black segregation have occurred in the metropolitan areas with the largest Black populations. In 2000, the average Black-White segregation index in U.S. metropolitan areas was

65, and in the Northeast and Midwest it was 74 (Iceland, Weinberg, and Steinmetz 2002). Southern and western metropolitan areas, which initially had lower segregation levels, experienced relatively larger decreases.

Massey and Denton have conceptualized Black segregation as a multidimensional construct based on five dimensions of spatial variability—evenness, isolation, clustering, concentration, and clustering. Based on their criteria of index scores of at least 60 on four of the five dimensions, twenty metropolitan areas were identified as "hypersegregated" that contained roughly 11 million Black Americans (1990) and constituted 36 percent of the entire U.S. Black population. These levels of segregation approach the degree of Black-White segregation in South Africa under apartheid.

Hispanic segregation in metropolitan areas increased amidst relatively moderate levels of segregation (average scores ranging from 46 to 55 between 1970 and 1990). Hispanics who identify themselves as Black or racially mixed on the census have indices higher than 60, while those who identify as White have an index in the low to moderate range (Denton and Massey 1989:803). The greatest increases in Hispanic segregation were associated with metropolitan areas that experienced large Hispanic migration and population growth. Metropolitan areas with smaller Hispanic population growth experienced slower segregation growth.

Simultaneously, Asian segregation in metropolitan areas has been relatively lower than both Black and Hispanic levels (averaging 36 to 44 between 1970 and 1990). The growth of Asian segregation has accompanied the most rapid Asian migration and population growth (Massey 2001:407–409).

Historic patterns of European ethnic group segregation have usually been much lower than patterns of Black and Hispanic segregation and trends indicate more integration. Comparisons of segregation trends between Blacks and South/Central/Eastern European ethnic groups between 1890 and 1930 indicate that despite higher initial levels of isolation than Blacks, European ethnic groups experienced substantially more integration (Lieberson 1980).

During the post–civil rights years, the persistence of high levels of residential segregation was associated with high levels of racial segregation in schools. Although decreases in segregation accompanied judicially enforced desegregation between 1968 and 1980, during the 1980s and 1990s increasing segregation accompanied the government inaction and deregulation of mechanisms to desegregate schools. Levels of schooling segregation have been higher in the Northeast and Midwest than in the South and West (Orfield 2001). Racial minorities who attend segregated urban schools are less likely to take college preparatory courses and to attend college than those in more integrated and suburban schools. Teacher assignment practices are likely to reinforce inequality by assigning the least proficient teachers to the least desirable schools, which are often in minority neighborhoods. Yet even in more

integrated schools, minorities experience disadvantages in terms of tracking and lower expectations by teachers.

During the post–civil rights years, continued improvements were made in completing high school across racial groups, which reflected in a narrowing of the racial gap. Although actual and percentage levels of college graduation increased for all groups during the 1990s, there has been a growing racial gap in the college graduation rate between Whites and Blacks and between non-Hispanic Whites and Hispanics (Blank 2001:25–26). Asian American college graduation has been substantially higher and increasing more rapidly than other groups (Kerbo 2006). Accompanying the growth of informational technology, there is a growing "digital divide" reflected in computer access and use across racial groups. While public access to computers through schools and libraries are almost universal, Black and Hispanic children are much less likely than White children to own or use computers at home.

Continuing racial segregation and discrimination has also affected the accumulation of wealth, earned incomes, and employment chances across racial groups. Oliver and Shapiro (1995) indicate that racial differences in wealth, which reflect inequality that is passed on intergenerationally, and current asset ownership are more extreme than income differences. Wealth differences reflect differences in home ownership, which are not merely the result of income differences but rather a product of the historical legacy of residential segregation, Federal Housing Authority (FHA) and Veterans Administration (VA) policies, and redlining. Blacks at similar income levels as Whites are rejected for home loans 60 percent more, Blacks pay more in mortgage interest rates than White families, and the valuing of homes and equity is color coded by segregation (Oliver and Shapiro 1995).

During the late 1960s through the early 1970s, the increasing returns to education received by highly educated Blacks recently entering the labor force translated into a convergence of income with similarly educated Whites (Featherman and Hauser 1976). The near parity of wages earned by Black college-educated graduates reversed during the 1980s and eventually came full circle in 1994 (Smith 2001:63). From 1972 to 1995, the overall ratio of Black/White household income remained between 57 and 60 percent and improved to 66.3 percent between 1995 and 2000 (Kerbo 2006, table 11–1).

Segregation in labor markets, which are associated with different formal and informal social networks, is reflected in higher chances of unemployment and joblessness among racial minorities. Unemployment rates for both Blacks and Hispanics have remained roughly twice the White unemployment rate, and recent trends indicate that among college-educated graduates, the Black rate increased to 2.5 times the White rate (Wilson, Tienda, and Wu 1995). Joblessness among racial minorities may be partly enabled by selective recruitment strategies such as the referrals of employees, avoiding placing ads in city and ethnic newspapers, and passing over applicants from the public schools, welfare programs, and state employment service programs (Wilson 1996).

High levels of Black segregation in U.S. metropolitan areas are not empirically explained by the class differences between Black and White Americans. When disaggregated by income or occupation, Blacks of higher status are as equally segregated from Whites of higher status as the Black poor are segregated from the White poor (Farley 1977). The high levels of segregation are also not accounted for by Blacks' preferences to live in predominantly Black neighborhoods since most Blacks "express support for the ideal of integration." High levels of segregation are explained by a complex of institutional discrimination practices that exist despite the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Housing audit studies, which measure the differences in treatment of potential Black and White homeowners and renters, indicate that Blacks are shown substantially fewer properties and are more likely to experience steering practices (Yinger 1998).

Sociologists have challenged the prediction of the resurgence of ethnicity. Stephen Steinberg argues that "cultural pluralism principles symbolic of resurgent ethnicity have been on the ascendancy precisely at a time when ethnic differences have been on the wane" (Steinberg 1989:254). Particularly important in explaining the status differences between ethnic groups is the intersection between social structure (class) and culture. Ethnic groups that were in the economically advanced sectors in their countries of origin had distinct historic advantages and chances of mobility over ethnic groups that were in more economically backward sectors (agriculture) (Steinberg 1989). Relatedly, Gans (1979) emphasizes that recent generations of ethnic groups express their identities through ethnic symbols that capture an identification with the old country, ethnic holidays, rites of passage, and political issues in contrast to earlier generations, who experienced ethnic identities through dense interactions within ethnic group institutions, organizations, and cultures in ethnic ghettos. In contrast to the more substantive ethnicity that was associated with the working classes, symbolic ethnicity is most likely to occur among those who have left the immigrant ghettos—the middle classes.

Microsociological Research

According to "liberal expectancy" hypotheses, racial prejudices and antagonisms are predicted to decease as a function of individuals increased social and economic integration into the society. Trend studies of racial attitudes in public opinion studies have documented a predominant trend toward positive change in the goals of integration and equal opportunity among White Americans (Schuman et al. 1997; Bobo 2001). With respect to endorsing principles of racial equality and integration, there has been a steady and dramatic movement supporting the more public and impersonal areas of jobs, employment, and schools. By contrast, more private and personal areas of racial

equality, such as housing and racially mixed marriages, while experiencing change are characterized by more resistance and lag. Despite dramatic improvements in attitudes favorable to principles of integration and equality, racial attitudes in public opinion studies indicate a difficulty in translating these into concrete support for social policies that enable integration and equal treatment. The racial differences in the conceptions of integration indicate that most White Americans prefer to live in overwhelming White neighborhoods with a small number of Blacks, and Blacks prefer integrated neighborhoods with substantial numbers of Blacks (Bobo 2001:273).

Public opinion studies emphasize that both Blacks and Whites support compensatory programs that aim to equip minorities to be more effective competitors or that engage in special outreach and recruitment efforts. Policies that call for the more explicit racial preferences are unpopular and are resisted by both groups. Blacks and Whites support affirmative action-type policies, when these are aimed at improving training, competitive resources, and preferences for minorities in hiring and promotion. While a majority of Whites support the more compensatory types of policies, fewer support preferential policies.

Important disagreements concerning the prevalence of current discrimination exist between racial groups in opinion surveys. Where a majority of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians perceive a prevalence of discrimination and see it as more institutional in character, a majority of Whites are more likely to view discrimination as a historical legacy of the past or as isolate discrimination that is declining in significance. White Americans' perceptions and beliefs concerning racial economic inequality that emphasize individualistic explanations (Blacks "should try harder," "should get ahead without special favors," and "fall behind because they lack motivation") are higher than structural explanations ("Blacks don't have the same chance for education" and "discrimination") (Kluegal and Smith 1986; Kluegal 1990). Contemporary racial attitudes have replaced the traditional anti-Black prejudice (or overt racism) during the post–civil rights years. While traditional racism was explicit in emphasizing innate biological differences between the races and the importance of maintaining racial segregation, contemporary racism is based more on cultural and political values. Objections to policies such as busing, affirmative action, and race-targeted programs among White Americans have more to do with broad American values, such as fairness, justice, individualism, and traditional conservatism, than with racism and prejudice (Kluegal and Smith 1986; Kluegal 1990; Schuman et al. 1997). This indirection in racial attitudes has been termed *symbolic racism* and *laissez-faire racism.*

While objective social indicators point to continuing structural sources of inequality, discrimination, and segregation, these are not necessarily reflected in the subjective indicators of racial attitudes. Recent macroeconomic changes and changing intergroup relations are often in contradiction with the dominant cultural beliefs.

BRINGING SOCIOLOGY INTO THE PUBLIC'S UNDERSTANDING OF RACE AND ETHNICITY

Sociology's involvement in discussions of race and ethnic relations has grown primarily from scientific concerns and secondarily from practical concerns. As an emerging social science, sociology's entry into discussions of race relations grew out of a need to place the question of race into its larger historic, cultural, and social structural contexts. By emphasizing the importance of the social environment and socialization in the social construction of race, sociologists challenged earlier dominant American cultural beliefs in the general public. Sociologists increasingly identified the variability of behaviors across and within racial groups and connected these with factors such as migration, demographic structure, social organization, class and status, and culture. Sociologists identified the roles of life chances and opportunity. Sociologists and other social scientists increasingly questioned and discredited the "natural" and innate explanations of intelligence, athletic performance, and social inequality.

Practical concerns driving interests in race and ethnic relations have grown out of "race problems" that demanded the understanding that sociological knowledge and research might play in social reform, social planning, and public policy. In addressing these, sociologists have conducted special studies and collaborated with public, private, and nonprofit agencies in formulating objectives and plans. Sociologists have acted as interpreters of contemporary social problems and social trends while often being consulted as experts.

Sociologists and other social scientists have a continuing track record of collaborating with public, private, and nonprofit agencies in formulating objectives and plans in areas such as desegregation. Research and expert testimony by the social psychologist Kenneth Clark, dealing with the adverse consequences of segregation on the self-concept of black children, represented a portion of the evidence used by the NAACP in the litigation of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Sociologists predicted a gradual and uneven acceptance of school desegregation that would occur first in the Appalachians, Upper South, and Middle South and later in the Black Belt areas. The acceptance of desegregation was hypothesized as being correlated inversely with the percentage of Blacks in the population and the degree of prejudice in communities (Pettigrew and Back 1967:700). Sociologists, such as Reynolds Farley, have provided demographic research on current and projected metropolitan segregation patterns to enable civil rights organizations and courts to develop desegregation and busing programs.

Sociologists have brought sociological concepts, hypotheses, and empirical generalizations into the public understanding of changing race relations. During the post–civil rights years, the goals of controlling discrimination in institutional areas, such as the schools, the workplace, and the military, became the conventional

wisdom that was both reflected and challenged in influential research and public policy. In response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, James Coleman was commissioned by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to direct a survey focused on explaining the lack of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions in the United States. The chief findings in the report validated the then conventional wisdom of desegregation indicating that (1) most children attended schools with students of the same race, (2) schools attended by Whites had advantages in physical resources over those attended by Blacks, and (3) an academic achievement gap among Black children grew larger with each passing year. Simultaneously, the Coleman report challenged conventional beliefs concerning desegregation with other findings that emphasized that the effects of family background were greater than the quality-of-school effects in academic achievement, and the next important factors related to academic achievement were the social composition of the school and the student's sense of control of his environment (Coleman 1966). Although providing evidence to support policies of racial integration, subsequent research by Coleman emphasized the limitations of public schools in furthering desegregation and equality (Coleman, Kelly, and Moore 1975). Consequently, the concept of equality of opportunity in national discussions became increasingly distinguished by "equality of access" and "equality of outcomes."

The military has experienced significantly more racial integration than other civilian institutions with respect to minority access, promotions, and leadership. Sociologists studying race relations in the military have identified the army's organizational goals of accomplishing missions, maintaining an absolute commitment to nondiscrimination, promoting uncompromising standards of performance, and articulating opportunity channels as relevant to integration (Moskos and Butler 1996).

In response to the increasing racial polarization around issues of race relations during the post–civil rights years, William Julius Wilson in *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987) and *When Work Disappears* (1996) introduces two sets of public policy approaches relevant to changing race relations: (1) universal policies and (2) race-specific policies. Universal policies emphasize broader policies, such as macroeconomic growth, higher wages, quality public education, health care, and child care, that benefit groups across the racial and class divide. Race-specific policies emphasize programs, such as civil rights and affirmative action, which have experienced greater ambivalence and resistance among the White American majority.

In a recent Supreme Court case on affirmative action, *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), the American Sociological Association, the Law and Society Association, the Society for the Study of Social Problems, the Association of Black Sociologists, and Sociologists for Women in Society filed a friend of the court brief in support of the respondents (University of Michigan) arguing that universities have a compelling interest in considering the life experience of growing up Black, Latino, or Native American in making admissions decisions and that race may be considered in university admissions when it is narrowly tailored and considered as one among many life experiences of individual applicants.

Sociologists have also been important critics in sociological controversies of race relations that have relevance for public policy. Following the publication of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's (1965) *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,* sociologists were among its strongest critics (Rainwater 1967). While the report was designed to rally support for increased manpower programs in the Department of Labor that would benefit the most disadvantaged, the descriptions and analyses of social problems had implications that were easily misinterpreted and misused by public officials. As such, these had the potential of derailing equality and opportunity policies and programs. Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's (1994) *The Bell Curve* resurrected long-discredited arguments of intelligence as IQ and "substantially heritable" to explain social inequality and rationalize practices such as the removal by adoption of at-risk youth, choice programs such as vouchers and tax credits within the public schools, and reallocating some federal funds focused from the disadvantaged to programs for the gifted. Critics emphasized that the research evidence confused statistical conditions of correlation with causation, did not systematically account for rival explanations, introduced cultural superstitions about race as scientific facts, reduced intelligence to a single measure, and classified intelligence as a group phenomenon (Fraser 1995; Jacoby and Glauberman 1995; Willie 1995; Wilson 1995). Sociologists usually interpret social inequality as the product of historical and contemporary social, economic, political, and educational circumstances rather than as the consequence of biological inheritance.

Despite traditional American cultural beliefs and superstitions, a majority of social scientists and natural scientists at the beginning of the twenty-first century are coming to recognize race as a social construction rather than as a scientific fact. The American Anthropological Association in its "Statement on Race" emphasized that "Evidence from the analysis of genetics (e.g., DNA) indicates that most physical variation, about 94 percent, lies within so-called racial groups, and conventional geographic "racial" groupings differ from one another in only about 6 percent of their genes. This means there is greater variation within racial groups than between them (American Anthropological Association 1998:1). Related research from the Human Genome Project has underscored that the genes accounting for skin complexion, hair texture, and eye color account for less than 4 percent of the human genes.

The recognition of race as a social construction has been accompanied by proposals to eliminate racial categories for the purposes of collecting public data. By continuing the collection of official racial statistics, some argue that there is the social reproduction of racist thinking

and the probable perpetuation of racial discrimination. By contrast, the American Sociological Association has argued that the measurement of differential experiences, treatment, and outcomes across racial categories is necessary to track disparities and to inform policy making to achieve greater social justice, and this has greater merit than discontinuing the concept of race altogether or not measuring the social consequences of race (American Sociological Association 2002:1–2).

THE PROSPECTS OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC RELATIONS IN SOCIOLOGY DURING THE 21ST CENTURY

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the older conception of race as a biological scientific fact in sociology has been replaced by a newer conception that race and ethnicity are social constructions of reality. The social definition of race has developed from the convergence of scientific facts and political actions. In their continuing attempt to explain human variation, sociologists, other social scientists, and natural scientists have accumulated a body of scientific facts that emphasize that (1) there is a unity and common inheritance among all humanity, (2) greater variation exists within racial groups than between racial groups, and (3) there are no biologically distinctive and homogeneous racial groups. Although there is a consensus concerning the social definition of race, there is much less agreement concerning what are the most salient factors explaining racial and ethnic inequality in the United States and the possibilities of economic growth, public policy, and social action in changing these conditions. Underlying the political action components are values, ideologies, and cultural beliefs that are often in tension with scientific facts. Public policy and cultural discourses remain important in the sociological analysis of race and ethnicity but may also contribute to the reproduction of cultural beliefs, superstitions, myths, misinformation, and stereotypes.

There are many signs that racial and ethnic relations will continue to constitute an important sociological area of interest. Not only will theoretical, research, and teaching concerns inside academic sociology drive these interests but so will public policy controversies and struggles for social justice outside of sociology. Societies, such as the United States, South Africa, and Brazil, that dominated cross-national discussions of race relations in the twentieth century will continue to be important social laboratories. Advanced industrial societies such as Great Britain, France, and Germany, which are experiencing the tensions of economic reorganization, immigration, and ethnic conflicts, will increasingly inform the theorizing on assimilation, economic integration, and segregation. Within other Caribbean, Central American, and South American societies are possible clues concerning the emerging forms of "Latinization" in social consciousness and solidarity

that are coming to compete with and supplant the older Black-White color line in the United States.

Globalization trends, which are increasingly integrated into economic, political, educational, and legal institutions in much broader national and cross-national contexts, have the possibilities of connecting racial and ethnic relations into larger struggles of human rights. Simultaneously, globalization in terms of communications has regressive possibilities of socially reproducing and exporting stereotypes, beliefs, and symbols of racial subordination.

The recent demographic growth of ethnic and racial minority groups such as Hispanic, African, Asian, and Native Americans has led to some projections that the United States may become a nation primarily made up of racial and ethnic minorities before the middle of the twenty-first century. In some states such as California and New York and in several major cities, the possible future of an increasingly diverse multiethnic America has already occurred.

How this multiracial demographic growth translates into increasingly differentiated systems of stratification and intense intergroup patterns of competition and conflict, as opposed to multiracial political coalitions and organized struggles for social justice against racism, is an important question that has implications for reexamining the processes of assimilation and racial and ethnic stratification, and broadening the empirical research and sociological theories in the area. Simultaneously, it is not certain whether new forms of color and status consciousness, including multiple-race identification and categories, will replace the dominant Black-White classification or merely augment it in the near future.

The disconnect between what is believed and practiced by people in public and private encounters will continue to demand understanding and explanation by sociologists studying public opinion. Greater optimism concerning principles of integration and equality, as opposed to support for policies enabling desegregation and affirmative action, are associated with both moral ideals and economic uncertainties. The traditional support for segregation has been increasingly replaced by stronger principles of freedom of choice and individualism. As the United States continues to experience the social dislocations of globalization, economic reorganization, and multiethnic population growth in the twenty-first century, sociologists will be asked to identify to what degree a more universal, democratic, and social rights model of American society is emerging as opposed to a more local, fragmented, and contentious model in which race is a wedge issue.

The racial divide that increasingly intersects with growing trends of social class and income inequality and acts as a wedge on democracy will represent a most challenging problem for sociological theory, research, policy, and social justice. Sociologists will continue to address many of these questions through traditional academic research and simultaneously be challenged to play an increased role in consciousness raising and public policy.