

these terms are commonly used (and confused); and provides the definitions that are used in this book.

Chapter 3 then examines the two broad models of ethnic and racial identities that have organized a great deal of social scientific thinking in recent years, commonly known as the *primordialist* and *circumstantialist* accounts. We situate these schools of thought in the context of global change, discuss their strengths and weaknesses, and suggest that they may be less diametrically opposed to each other than is generally assumed.

Chapter 4 lays out the key elements of a constructionist conception of ethnicity and race. It uses pieces of both primordialist and circumstantialist perspectives to account for ethnic and racial power, persistence, and variation but adds to those perspectives a central concern with the ways that groups participate in the construction of their own (and others') identities.

In Chapter 5, we illustrate some constructions of ethnic and racial identities through a series of case studies, both historical and contemporary. The emphasis in these narratives is on the interplay between group characteristics and ideas, on one hand, and contextual factors, on the other, in the making and remaking of identity.

Chapters 6 and 7 take up the elements involved in the construction of ethnicity and race more systematically and in more detail. Chapter 6 examines some of the arenas of social life—the construction sites—where ethnic and racial identities are built and transformed and the ways that contextual factors shape those constructions. Chapter 7 examines the materials that groups bring to those sites and the ways group factors are used in the construction process.

Finally, Chapter 8 looks ahead, considering two apparently contradictory trends—mixing and multiplicity versus separation and consolidation—that give to ethnicity and race two very different faces as the 21st century progresses.

Note

1. Robert Park, although hardly a Marxist, shared the general view that economic relations were the ones that would endure. "Race conflicts in the modern world," he wrote, "will be more and more in the future confused with, and eventually superseded by, the conflicts of classes" (Park 1939:45).

2

Mapping the Terrain

Definitions

Before exploring ethnicity and race in detail, we need to clarify what it is we are talking about. We have made no attempt thus far to distinguish between ethnicity and race and have written as if the two were more or less interchangeable terms. They are not. They refer to distinct sets of phenomena that at times overlap. Some of the groups we think of as races are at the same time ethnic groups, and some of those we think of as ethnic groups may be or may at some point have been races, but the two are not the same.

Distinguishing between race and ethnicity, on the other hand, is not easy, but the task is worth spending some time on—not only to be clear about *what* we are analyzing but also because these definitional distinctions are linked to analytical distinctions that are keys to thinking sociologically about the range of racial and ethnic forms in the modern world. We also need to map the sometimes confusing terrain that includes both ethnicity and nationalism, which again sometimes overlap but are not the same thing.

We take up ethnicity in the first section of this chapter and race in the following section. The next section explores both the differences between ethnicity and race and their commonalities. Finally, we consider nationalism and its relationship to ethnicity.¹

The Definition of Ethnicity

Beginning in the 1960s, words such as *ethnic group*, *ethnic identity*, and *ethnicity* became increasingly commonplace both in academic analyses of social

phenomena and in the mass media. By the last decade of the century, the terms were firmly entrenched in the popular vocabulary. The *Los Angeles Times*, for example, published a story in 1992 on tribal conflict in Ethiopia, under the headline “Ethnic Pride Gets a Test in Africa” (Hiltzik 1992). A 1995 *New York Times* article on disputes among groups within some Middle Eastern states was headlined “Arabs, Too, Play the Ethnic Card” (Hedges 1995). Another story a week later in the same paper, discussing recent Irish immigrants’ dissatisfaction with St. Patrick’s Day celebrations in the United States, announced that “Ethnic Clichés Put Anger in Irish Eyes” (Clines 1995). Today, any Internet search will quickly yield literally millions of ethnically framed stories, events, and references from around the world; our last such search on “ethnicity” offered 136 million results.

Although most people who encounter such terms probably believe that they know, at least approximately, what they mean, words such as *ethnic*, *ethnic group*, and *ethnicity* are, in fact, slippery and difficult to define. The confusion has not been limited to readers of mass media; they are slippery terms in the academic lexicon as well.

The word *ethnic* has a long history. It is a derivative of the Greek word *ethnos*, meaning “nation.” The reference, however, is not to a political unity, but to the unity of persons of common blood or descent: a people. The adjectival form, *ethnikos*, eventually entered Latin as *ethnicus*, referring to “heathens,” those “others” who did not share the dominant faith. This is more or less the meaning that the word carried when it first found English usage around the 15th century. In English, *ethnic* referred to someone who was neither Christian nor Jew—in other words, a pagan or heathen. The matter of belief is less important in this usage than the drawing of a boundary. “Ethnic” clearly referred to others, to those who were not “us” (Just 1989; Oxford University Press 1993; Petersen 1981).

By the 20th century, the meaning of the word had changed again but had reasserted some of the original Greek conception. Gone, for the most part, was the specific reference to religion and with it the idea that only “others”—certainly not “us”—could be ethnics. Increasingly, *ethnicity* referred to a particular way of defining not only others but also ourselves, and this is how it entered sociology.

Sociological Definitions

The shift toward the subjective in the meaning of ethnicity is most readily apparent in a discussion of ethnic groups by the German sociologist Max Weber, the only one of the classical sociological theorists to offer an explicit definition. Weber (1968) devoted a chapter to the topic in his great work

Economy and Society, written early in the 20th century, in which he says, “We shall call ‘ethnic groups’ those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration” (p. 389). He goes on to say, “It does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists.” Several things are worth noting about Weber’s definition:

- At the foundation of ethnic attachments lies real or assumed common descent. Ethnic ties are blood ties.
- The fact of common descent is less important than belief in common descent. What matters is not whether a blood relationship actually exists, but whether it is believed to exist, “not *what is* but *what people perceive*” (Connor 1993:377). Ethnicity is a subjective matter; the crucial issue is how we see ourselves.
- The potential bases of this belief in common descent are multiple, varying from physical resemblance to shared cultural practices to a shared historical experience of intergroup interaction. Any of these, or some combination, might be the basis or justification of our assumption of common descent.
- An ethnic group exists wherever this distinctive connection—this belief in common descent—is part of the foundation of community, wherever it binds us to one another to some degree.

Weber’s emphasis on common descent is central to a number of subsequent definitions of ethnicity (for example, Alba 1990; Connor 1978, 1993; Horowitz 1985; Schermerhorn 1978; Shibutani and Kwan 1965). Much of sociology, however, particularly in the classroom, eventually abandoned Weber’s definition and came to equate ethnicity with shared culture. The core of the definition shifted from Weber’s concern with putative origins and shared history—for the most part, that is, with how the past shapes present self-concepts—to currently shared culture, to what group members now do. An ethnic group became a group of persons distinguished largely by common culture, typically including language, religion, or other patterns of behavior and belief. For example, one recent edition of a widely used textbook defines an ethnic group as “a group of people who are generally recognized by themselves and/or by others as a distinct group, with such recognition based on social or cultural characteristics” (Farley 2000:8). Another definition accepts either culture or national origin as the basis of ethnicity, defining an ethnic group as “a group socially distinguished or set apart, by others or by itself, primarily on the basis of cultural or national-origin characteristics” (Feagin and Feagin 2003:8). Combining shared history and shared present practices, a third definition argues that “when a subpopulation of individuals reveals,

or is perceived to reveal, shared historical experiences as well as unique organizational, behavioral, and cultural characteristics, it exhibits its ethnicity" (Aguirre and Turner 1995:2-3).

A moment's reflection will reveal the ambiguities that such specifications of ethnicity create. If all that is required to distinguish an ethnic group is some level of shared "social or cultural characteristics" or "historical experiences," then lawyers, military families, university students, hip-hop enthusiasts, the citizens of Switzerland, prison inmates, physicists, and numerous other groups potentially join Polish Americans, the Chinese minority in Malaysia, and the Kurds of Iraq, among others, in the pantheon of ethnic groups. Analytical precision and utility suffer as the concept of ethnicity slips away into the enormously diverse mosaic of self-conscious collectivities—sharing varying degrees of history and culture—that any society generates. This definition nevertheless has become common. Even the massive and hugely informative *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Thernstrom, Orlov, and Handlin 1981:vi) defines an ethnic group in effect as a group sharing cultural attributes. It then leaves out of its survey all sorts of groups that, if it takes its own definition seriously, ought to qualify.

Our concern about such definitions goes beyond their imprecision. One of the striking things about ethnicity in recent decades has been its survival, in some cases, despite rapidly declining cultural distinctions. This development is widely apparent in the United States. In Chapter 1, we mentioned Anny Bakalian's (1993) discussion of the path Armenian Americans have followed, "from being to feeling Armenian." Distinctive cultural practices have declined over time, but the identity—that sense of ethnic distinctiveness—has not. Similar processes can be found among other Americans of European descent as well, many of whom display few culturally distinct practices but proudly proclaim their ethnic identities (see, for example, Alba 1990; Gans 1979; Waters 1990). Much the same is happening elsewhere in the world. Thomas Fitzgerald (1998) wrote, for example, of some offspring of Cook Islander migrants to New Zealand who adhere to a Cook Islander identity but have dropped most of the culture of their parents. It also seems reasonable to wonder what role culture conceivably plays in the supposedly ethnic category *Asian American*, embracing immigrants from such culturally diverse places as India, Japan, Laos, and the Philippines. In what way is such a composite group ethnic? Once the supposedly primary definitional element—shared cultural characteristics—disappears, of what does its ethnicity consist?

The colloquial American understanding seems closer in some ways to the Weberian one than to some of the more recent academic usages. Although most Americans may consider various ethnic groups culturally distinct to

one degree or another, they generally seem to view the origins of these groups as what sets them most clearly apart and accounts for whatever distinctive cultural characteristics remain (cf. Hirschman, Alba, and Farley 2000). The classic case is immigrant groups. To say that you are Irish or Italian in the United States is to say that most importantly, your people came originally from Ireland or Italy. To many Americans, the fact that group members came originally from "there, not here," or at least not from where "we" came from, is ultimately the source of their distinctiveness, with homeland approximating Weber's concept of shared ancestry.

Ethnicity as a Distinctive Set of Claims

It is most unlikely that any one definition of ethnic group or ethnicity will satisfy all the specialists or fully escape the ambiguities that seem an inevitable part of the study of ethnicity. We nevertheless join those sociologists who have remained close to the Weberian tradition, and we follow Richard A. Schermerhorn's (1978) definition, which describes an ethnic group as "a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood" (p. 12). Among the examples Schermerhorn offers of such symbolic elements that may be viewed as emblematic of peoplehood are kinship patterns, geographical concentration, religious affiliation, language, and physical differences. The common history a group claims may be viewed the same way. For example, the historical experience of slavery plays a powerful symbolic role in many African Americans' conceptions of themselves.

Schermerhorn (1978) adds to this definition the criterion of self-consciousness. Ethnic groups are self-conscious populations; they see themselves as distinct.

Again, there are several points to be made about this definition:

- It involves three kinds of claims: a claim to kinship, broadly defined; a claim to a common history of some sort; and a claim that certain symbols capture the core of the group's identity.
- As in Weber's conception, these claims need not be founded in fact. The kinship claim, for example, has to do with either "real or putative" common ancestry.
- The extent of actual cultural distinctiveness is irrelevant. Contrary to many common definitions, not all ethnic groups are culture groups (and not all culture groups are ethnic groups). Although group members may draw attention to certain cultural features as "the epitome of their peoplehood," they are not necessarily practitioners of distinct cultures, and such features frequently have more symbolic power than practical effect on group behavior. In fact, the

cultural practices of an ethnic group may vary little from those prevalent in the society of which it is a part.

- An ethnic group is a subpopulation within a larger society.
- An ethnic identity is self-conscious.

We should point out that in practice, descent from a common homeland often serves as a broad assertion of common ancestry. It is doubtful, for example, that all those who came to the United States from Cuba actually claim to be descended from a common ancestor, but they do claim descent from a common homeland, which serves as a metaphor for kinship. Such metaphors are often explicit: People may speak, for example, of the fatherland, or of Mother Russia, or of the “children” of Africa. The idioms of kinship and homeland are often intertwined. In a sense, ethnicity is family writ very large, indeed. It typically involves the assertion of some ineffable bond among group members, a bond we think of as rooted ultimately in shared, distinctive origins (see Horowitz 1985, chap. 2).

This definition still casts the net fairly widely—variation in claim and assertion can be substantial—but it gives us a more distinctive universe of groups, and it classifies those groups according to the particular kinds of claims they make or the particular claims made about them. This last point is crucial. Although an ethnic identity is self-conscious, its self-consciousness often has its source in the labels used by outsiders. The identity that others assign to us can be a powerful force in shaping our own self-concepts. To say that ethnicity is subjective is not to say that it is unaffected by what others say or do. Others may assign an ethnic identity to us, but what they establish by doing so is an *ethnic category*. It is our own claim to that identity that makes us an ethnic group. The ethnic category may be externally defined, but the ethnic identity is internally asserted (Jenkins 1994). It should also be apparent from this definition that what is ethnic about an ethnic group is the fact that it identifies itself in a particular way. Members of some ethnic groups may share a great deal more than that particular way of identifying themselves, including extensive cultural practices; others may share little more than the identity claim that they make. Groups that share a great deal and groups that share very little clearly are different, but their claims make them equally ethnic. What matters is the mode or idiom of identification.

Finally, ethnicity is a matter of contrast, an inherently relational construct (Eder et al. 2002). To claim an ethnic identity (or to attempt to assign one to someone else) is to distinguish ourselves from others; it is to draw a boundary between “us” and “them” on the basis of the claim we make that

“we” share something that “they” do not. An ethnic group cannot exist in isolation. It has meaning only in a context that involves others—ultimately, in a collection of peoples of which it is only a part. An ethnic population, however, is not necessarily a minority population. An ethnic group may be politically or numerically dominant within a single state; it may dominate one state and at the same time be a minority in others. It is never conceptually an isolate.

Ethnicity, then, is identification in ethnic terms—that is, in the terms outlined above. An *ethnic identity* is an identity conceived in such terms. A population or social collectivity may be simply an *ethnic category*, assigned an ethnic identity by outsiders. But once that identity becomes subjective—that is, once that population sees itself in ethnic terms, perhaps in response to the identity outsiders assign to it—it becomes an *ethnic group*.

The Definition of Race

What about race? Are races ethnic groups? Consider African Americans. Certainly many people consider them a race or at least a part of one. How so? If they are a race, are they not an ethnic group? Could they be both?

Before we can answer these questions, we have to wrestle with the definition of a *race*. As with ethnicity, it is common in contemporary society to talk about races, race relations, and racial conflict as if we had a clear idea about what constitutes a race and where the boundary falls between one race and another. Race, however, is as slippery a concept as ethnic group, and its slipperiness has an even longer and more consequential history.

Race as Biology

In technical terms, a *race* can be thought of as a genetically distinct subpopulation of a given species. This statement is of little use in thinking about human races, however, for the genetic differences among human groups that we commonly view as races are inconsistent and typically insignificant. This has made it difficult to figure out what a race, conceived in terms of human biology, actually is. In fact, biologists, physical anthropologists, and other students of human physiology and genetics have long disagreed about which, if any, genetic differences mark the boundaries between races and about how many human races there are. For several centuries, scholars of one stripe or another from various countries tried to specify the number of races in the world:

Linnaeus had found four human races; Blumenbach had five; Cuvier had three; John Hunter had seven; Burke had sixty-three; Pickering had eleven; Virey had two "species," each containing three races; Haeckel had thirty-six; Huxley had four; Topinard had nineteen under three headings; Desmoulins had sixteen "species"; Deniker had seventeen races and thirty types. (Gossett 1963:82)

Clearly, consensus regarding the nature and number of human races has been elusive.

The federal government of the United States has been anything but consistent in its own classifications. In 1870, according to historian Paul Spickard (1992), the U.S. Bureau of the Census listed five races in the United States: "White, Colored (Blacks), Colored (Mulattoes), Chinese, and Indian. . . . In 1950, the census categories reflected a different social understanding: White, Black, and Other" (p. 18). By the 1990s, federal programs, responding more to the demands of various groups than to any biological theory, required various public and private entities to report racial data using, once again, five categories, but they were different from the 1870 categories: White, Black, Asian or Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Hispanic, with the last specified as an ethnic group, not a race. A new category was added when "Native Hawaiian" and "Pacific Islander" were pulled out of the Asian category just prior to the 2000 census, and before 9/11 there was talk of adding yet another, "Arab," to the scheme. Ultimately, the 2000 census produced a different innovation: Individuals could list multiple races. "'Mark one or more' converts six categories into sixty-three, which, when cross-tabulated by the ethnic category of Hispanic, generates . . . 126 categories of race-ethnicity" (Prewitt 2004: 152).

Other societies have made other choices. For a long time, the South African government recognized four races: White, African, Colored, and Asian. In many parts of Brazil, where there has been widespread mixing among Europeans, Africans, and the indigenous Indians, many people gave up on the notion of distinct races and instead established a set of informal and sometimes overlapping categories that recognize varying degrees of racial mixture, usually determined by an individual's appearance and ranging from the lightest complexions to the darkest. In the census, the Brazilian government counts by color using a tripartite classification: white, brown, and black (see Bailey and Telles 2006; Nobles 2002).

If biologically distinct human races do exist, it seems odd that there is so little agreement on what they are. Indeed, the persistence of the idea of biologically distinct human races owes more to popular culture and pseudoscience than to science, and the idea's pedigree is not scientific, but historical and political. It emerged originally in the extended encounter

between European and non-European peoples that began in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Discovering human beings in Asia, Africa, and the Americas who looked—and often acted—very different from themselves, Europeans drew upon the Spanish concept of "purity of blood," which sanctioned discrimination against converted Jews and concluded that often, superficial differences surely indicated more fundamental differences as well (Fredrickson 2002). This conclusion, which asserted their own inherent superiority, helped them justify their efforts to colonize, enslave, and sometimes exterminate many of the peoples they encountered. Europeans came to believe that races are, in fact, distinct and identifiable human (and some of them, in the extreme version, nonhuman) groups; that there are systematic, inherited, biological differences among races; and that the non-White races are innately inferior to Whites—that is, to Europeans (see also Jordan 1968).

Systematic physiological differences among many human groups are obvious. Skin color is only one example. Deciding which of these physiological differences should serve as racial markers is a complicated process. Racial boundaries turn out to be messy. For one thing, the distribution of human physical characteristics, aided by millennia of mixing among human communities, is persistently irregular. Blood types, hair textures, skin colors, and body forms vary, sometimes dramatically, not only between populations we often think of as racially distinct, but within them as well. In fact, the extent of genetic variation among individuals within supposed racial groups typically exceeds the variation between the groups. We can speak of a group of persons as having, on average, a greater frequency of some set of genes than some other group has, but those genes seldom will be limited to that group; the differences in frequency will be differences of degree.

It would be easier to know how to mark racial boundaries if the supposed physical differences among races were consistently apparent, but they seldom are. It would be easier, likewise, if some set of characteristic physical distinctions were correlated consistently with some set of characteristic abilities or behaviors, but science has been unable to link such physical differences persuasively to differences in ability or intelligence or very much else. In other words, the scientific arguments for any particular way of dividing up and identifying races of human beings are at best modest. As geneticist Richard Lewontin and his colleagues point out,

In practice, "racial" categories are established that correspond to major skin color groups, and all the borderline cases are distributed among these or made into new races according to the whim of the scientist. But . . . the differences

between major “racial” categories, no matter how defined, turn out to be small. Human “racial” differentiation is, indeed, only skin deep. (Lewontin, Rose, and Kamin 1984:126–27)

As a result, most contemporary scholars have dismissed the idea of race as a meaningful biological category that can be applied to separate groups of human beings (Gould 1981, 1994; King 1981; Lewontin et al. 1984; Smedley 1993).

The Social Construction of Race

Despite the lack of a biological basis for the conception of distinct human races, race still wields monumental power as a social category. In many societies, the idea of biologically distinct races remains a fixture in the popular mind, a basis of social action, a foundation of government policy, and often a justification for distinctive treatment of one group by another. Even some academics and intellectuals still accept racial categories as naturally given and delineated, appealing to genetics as an explanation of inequality (for example, Herrnstein and Murray 1994; see also the critique of their work in Fischer et al. 1996). Human beings—even the most rational and scientific of them—tend to assume racial categories and to take them seriously, but they do so for social, not biological, reasons.

Races, like ethnic groups, are not established by some set of natural forces, but are products of human perception and classification. In short, they are social constructs. As geneticist James King (1981) remarks, “Both what constitutes a race and how one recognizes a racial difference are culturally determined” (p. 156). We decide that certain physical characteristics—usually skin color but perhaps also hair type, stature, or other bodily features—will be primary markers of group boundaries. We invent categories of persons marked by those characteristics. The categories become socially significant to the extent that we use them to organize and interpret experience, to form social relations, and to organize individual and collective action. In other words, the categories become important only when we decide they have particular meanings and act on those meanings. The characteristics that are the basis of the categories, however, have no inherent significance. We give them meaning, and in the process we create races.

This is not to say that one cannot find consequential differences among human groups, only that such differences map poorly against common understandings of race. In fact, variations within racial groups tend to outweigh—in both number and significance—those that supposedly distinguish one racial group from another (Duster 2003). In recent years, as Ann

Morning (2005) reports, articles in a number of medical and scientific journals, including *Science*, the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Genome Biology*, and the *International Journal of Epidemiology*, have highlighted certain supposedly racial differences, such as the overrepresentation of spina bifida among Caucasians, especially the Welsh and the Irish; the disproportionate frequency of Tay-Sachs disease among Ashkenazi Jews; or the prevalence of sickle-cell anemia among African Americans. But, as Troy Duster (2003) demonstrates in *Backdoor to Eugenics*, even these patterns emerge from the ways we group people together, think about genetics, and determine public health priorities. Furthermore, they often give rise to generalizations and conclusions that go far beyond these narrow and exceptional medical conditions.

We can define a race, then, as a human group defined by itself or others as distinct by virtue of perceived common physical characteristics that are held to be inherent. A race is a group of human beings socially defined on the basis of physical characteristics. Determining which characteristics constitute the race—the selection of markers and therefore the construction of the racial category itself—is a choice human beings make, and it is the reason some social scientists put “race” in quotes. Neither the categories themselves nor the markers we choose are predetermined by biological factors.

These processes of selection and construction are seldom the work of a moment. Racial categories are historical products and are often contested. In one famous case from the early 1980s, a Louisiana woman went to court to dispute the state’s conclusion that she was Black, claiming a White racial identity. The state’s argument was that her ancestry was at least 1/32nd “Negro,” which according to state law meant she was Black (Dominguez 1986). The law had roots in the long history of Black-White relations in Louisiana and in the American South more generally, in slavery and its legacy, and in the enduring White effort to maintain the supposed “purity” of their race. It was a legal manifestation of what is known as *hypodescent*, or the “one-drop” rule, which in the United States holds that any degree of African ancestry at all is sufficient to classify a person as Black (see Davis 1991). This rule has a history. People have fought over it, and as the Louisiana case shows, it has been tested in the courts. It has been reserved largely for Blacks. Americans do not generally consider a person who is 1/32 Japanese or Dutch to be Japanese or Dutch, but “one drop” of Black blood has long been considered sufficient for racial categorization.

The woman in Louisiana lost her case (although the law was eventually changed), but her story underlines the point made by Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) in their pathbreaking study of race in the United States: Racial categories are not natural categories that human beings

discover; on the contrary, they are “created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” by human action and are, therefore, preeminently social products (p. 55). They change over time as people struggle to establish them, overcome them, assign other people to them, escape them, interpret them, and so on. The outcomes of those struggles often have enormous consequences for the individuals involved, but it is not biology that determines who will suffer and why. People determine what the categories will be, fill them up with human beings, and attach consequences to membership in those categories.

Ethnicity and Race

To pose again the question we raised some pages ago: Are races ethnic groups? The answer, which may not yet be obvious, is sometimes yes, sometimes no. Ethnicity and race are not the same, but they are not mutually exclusive categories, either. They sometimes overlap. In short, races may be but are not necessarily ethnic groups. In the following two subsections, we first explore the ways that ethnicity and race are different and then the things they have in common.

Differences between Ethnicity and Race

Most societies have treated groups defined in racial terms very differently from those defined ethnically, and the differences have been crucial. In the United States, for example, although some ethnic groups have been privileged over others at various times in history, *Whiteness*—a racial category—has been consistently privileged over *non-Whiteness*, with persons of color consigned to the margins of American society and culture. In different ways at different times, race has been institutionalized in the organization of the society and ideologized in its culture.

Race has been the most powerful and persistent group boundary in American history, distinguishing, to varying degrees, the experiences of those classified as non-White from those classified as White, often with devastating consequences. The racial boundary that White society has historically drawn around itself has excluded different groups at different times. Along with Blacks, Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans, both Jews and the Irish, among others, have been perceived as non-Whites at one time or another in the United States (Ignatiev 1995; Sacks 1994). Both groups struggled to alter the perception, knowing all too well the costs of being non-White in the eyes of Whites.

Designating a group of people as a distinct race has been sufficient in the United States to mark them off as more profoundly and distinctively “other”—more radically different from “us”—than those ethnic groups who have not had to carry the burden of racial distinction. Where racial designations have been used, ethnic distinctions within racial categories have tended to be overshadowed by the racial designations. All of the commonly designated racial groups in American life are multiethnic: for example, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and others among Latinos; West Indians and American-born Blacks, whose ethnicities operate at a less comprehensive level than the African American ethnicity they more generally share; various groups among Asian Americans; a multitude of culturally diverse peoples among American Indians; and various ethnicities of European descent among Whites. With the important exception of Whites, however, society at large generally has either ignored or minimized these identities throughout much of its history, emphasizing more comprehensive racial distinctions.² Furthermore, it has been far more reluctant to allow movement across racial boundaries than across ethnic ones. For example, “A Cambodian American does not have to remain Cambodian, as far as non-Asian Americans are concerned, but only with great difficulty can this Cambodian American cease to be Asian American” (Hollinger 1995:28). This does not mean these ethnicities are unimportant. They are of great importance to the groups involved and a key to understanding much of what goes on among and within those groups. It does illustrate, however, the particular power of race, which has been a foundational feature of American life in a way that ethnicity has not: the ultimate boundary between “us” and “them.” This pattern of racial categorization also illustrates the tendency in American life to recognize diversity among Whites but to ignore it among others.

Not all societies have experienced race in this same way. Relative to ethnicity, race has played an even greater and more obvious role in the organization of society and culture in South Africa, for example, than it has in the United States. Race was a fundamental organizing principle in most colonial societies around the world, remains a significant dimension of social organization in various societies of the Middle East and Latin America, and is of rapidly growing significance in much of contemporary Europe. In Canada, on the other hand, as the case of French-speaking residents of Quebec indicates, ethnicity has been fully as important a fault line as race. In Belgium, ethnicity has considerably overshadowed race as a dimension of social organization and politics.

Despite the varying prominence of racial categories across societies, race everywhere has taken on a distinctive set of meanings and uses. Some of

these are apparent in remarks made by a British gold and tin miner in colonial Malaya, in Southeast Asia, in the early part of the 1900s. Malaya was a British colony, populated by an ethnically diverse indigenous population known to the British as Malays, along with significant numbers of Chinese and Asian Indians (Tamils), brought in both before and during British colonial rule to meet growing labor needs. Writing of the situation in Malaya, the miner remarked,

From a labour point of view, there are practically three races, the Malays (including the Javanese), the Chinese, and the Tamils (who are generally known as Klings). By nature the Malay is an idler, the Chinaman is a thief, and the Kling is a drunkard, yet each in his own class of work is both cheap and efficient, when properly supervised. (quoted in Hirschman 1986:356–57)

A good deal of importance about race is apparent or hinted at in these remarks, and we can use them to further elaborate the differences between race and ethnicity. First, race typically has its origins in assignment, in the classifications that a dominant group imposes upon a less powerful collection of others. Ethnicity can have similar origins, but it frequently begins in the assertions of group members themselves. The ethnically diverse Malays did not see themselves originally as a single people, much less as a distinctive “race”; this conception seems to have been largely a European inspiration (Nagata 1981). There are exceptions to the rule of racial assignment. For example, some groups in the United States, Germany, and elsewhere have more and more forcefully asserted Whiteness as a self-conscious racial identity in recent years. Most racial categories, however, have been constructed first by those who wished to assign them to someone else; race has been first and foremost a way of describing “others,” of making clear that “they” are not “us.”

Second, race first took on its distinctive contemporary meanings and uses as part of a monumental historical meeting of peoples. It is a product of the global era, with roots in European colonialism in places such as Malaya and elsewhere in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Beginning late in the 15th century, in an enduring burst of expansive energy, certain European nations—in particular Spain, Portugal, England, France, and the Netherlands—sent explorers, exploiters, missionaries, and settlers across the world, most of which was previously unknown to them. Human beings have long noted the physical differences among themselves, but the magnitude of the differences that Europeans encountered over the next two centuries was unprecedented in their experience. Entire continents entered European consciousness for the first time, with populations that differed dramatically

both physically and culturally from the peoples of Europe. These differences prompted classifications that were unprecedented in their comprehensiveness, a grand division of the world between Europeans and racially—physically—distinct others.

Third, this meeting of peoples and the ideas that came out of it were aspects of power relations. The designation of race is, in and of itself, an assertion of the power to define one culture against the “other” and in doing so to create a rigid and presumably permanent social hierarchy (Fredrickson 2002). Europe exerted such power in its racial classification of the world’s peoples, inventing the contemporary idea of race in the process. Racial designation has also been linked to power in more material ways. It was not idle curiosity that drove Europe’s captains and missionaries across the globe, but a massive quest for wealth, political clout, and souls. They found justification for their activities in part in the idea of race, in the belief that human groups are inherently different and that those differences constitute “natural” physical and moral hierarchies that are replicated in social organization, with Caucasians in dominant social positions and various “others” ranging downward from there (Spickard 1992). “From a labour point of view,” wrote the miner in Malaya—the only point of view that mattered to colonialists—“there are practically three races,” and each of those three, “in its own class of work,” is cheap and efficient “when properly supervised” (quoted in Hirschman 1986: 356–57). The place these races occupied in the European conception is clear in these remarks: They are a resource to be exploited. Such beliefs both nourished and were nourished by colonialism, but they have been among the more durable products of human intellectual ingenuity, and not only in the hands of Europeans. From the slaughter of indigenous peoples in the Americas to the racial exclusionism of Japan, and from Europe’s exploitation of colonial labor to the extermination campaigns that Hutus and Tutsis have repeatedly waged against each other in Rwanda and Burundi, the domination of one group by another has turned repeatedly to race for its dubious legitimacy. Thus, race and power, historically and today, have been tightly intertwined. If we combine this point with the previous one about physical difference, we are brought to Paul Spickard’s (2005) pithy comment that “race is about power, and it is written on the body” (p. 2).

Fourth, as this history suggests, racial designation typically implies inferiority. Sometimes it is physical or biological inferiority, as in the notions—prevalent at certain times in various societies—that some races are inherently less intelligent than others or have attained only a lower stage of evolution. It is also, most importantly and almost invariably, an inferiority in moral worth. “By nature the Malay is an idler, the Chinaman is a thief,

and the Kling is a drunkard" (quoted in Hirschman 1986:357). The history of race is a history of moral judgments, a division of the world into more or less worthy categories of persons. The ways in which some persons fail to meet the standard of worthiness may vary, but the idea of failure is usually implicit in the racial designation. The primary exception is the designation *White*. This designation commonly occurs as the unspoken flip side of the assignment of some other group to a racial category. In assigning another group to a racial category, Whites inevitably—if only implicitly—assign themselves to a different racial category. Historically, the category White has been the moral opposite of *non-White* categories. There is nothing inherent in Whiteness that produces such a difference; other groups may make racial assignments that simultaneously define and positively value their own races. The simple fact is that in much of the world's recent history, Whites have been more likely than others to have the power to make racial assignments, to organize social life in racial terms, and to define and value the categories as they have seen fit.

Finally, there is a further implication: The unworthiness attached to race is inherent. The miner's characterization of Malaya's races claimed they were so "by nature."

Thus, in the modern European conception, Whites represented the norm, and others were just that—Other. The norm was taken for granted; "the white Western self as a racial being has for the most part remained unexamined and unnamed" (Frankenberg 1993:17). Its normality has been assumed. Otherness, thanks to the power that Europeans exercised, was racially marked and defined, which is characteristic of racial classification systems. "Others" are uncivilized or pagan or incapable; perhaps more physical and less intellectual or less cultured; and closer to nature, less fully realized in their humanness than those more fortunate in their racial makeup. Of course, in defining others, we implicitly define ourselves, if only through unspoken contrast. If "they" are evil, "we" must be good; if "they" are notable for their laziness or dim-wittedness or violence, it goes without saying that "we" are notable for the opposites. At the heart of racial identification lie the claims we wish to make about "them" and about how different "they" are from "us."

Ethnicity usually escapes these burdens, although it is by no means immune to them. Like race, ethnicity may be an assigned identity. That is, it may have its origins in the claims others make about us or we make about them. For example, Italian immigrants to the United States came not, in their own minds, as Italians, but as carriers of narrower regional identities: Neapolitans or Sicilians or Lucanians or something else. U.S. immigration officials and the larger public, however, saw them as *Italians* and so

classified them. Over time, Italian immigrants came to see themselves the same way and subsequently as Italian Americans (Alba 1985). At that point, they moved from an ethnic category (assigned an identity as Italian) to an ethnic group (asserting an identity as Italian American). Assignment thus may sow the seed of ethnicity by creating an ethnic category, but an ethnic group emerges only when that identity becomes part of the group's own self-concept.

Assignment, however, is not necessary to ethnicity, which often has its origins in assertion, in the claims groups make about themselves instead of the claims others make about them. The people known for a long time as Eskimos in Alaska and northern Canada have joined hands with others of the northernmost peoples around the globe and call themselves *Inuit*. They assert their own commonality, rooted in history, culture, and kinship, transcending national borders. As this case suggests, ethnicity's primary concern is as often identifying ourselves as it is identifying and classifying others (Eder et al. 2002; Nagel 1994).

In fact, this process of self-construction—"self" in this case referring to the collective or group—is not only a common characteristic of ethnicity but also part of what makes some races at one and the same time ethnic groups. Ethnic and racial categories may be delineated first by others, but when groups begin to fill those categories with their own content, telling their own histories in their own ways and putting forth their own claims to what their identities signify, then they are engaged in a classical process of constructing ethnicity. When a racial group sets out to construct its own version of its identity, it makes itself both a race and an ethnic group at once.

Such typically ethnic activities are usually bound up in social interests and power relations. Ethnicity, like race, is often linked to power and wealth. Subsequent chapters will show that the origins of both ethnic and racial identities are frequently to be found in conflicts of various kinds, in struggles over scarce resources such as land or jobs or status or power. Ethnic identities also emerge or become important sometimes in an effort—unattached to concrete material interests or assertions of power—simply to make sense of the differences among persons in complex situations. They may also emerge during people's search for identities that can provide them with meaning, that can make them feel a part of some manageable community of sentiment and cultural heritage. The links between ethnicity and power, therefore, are more context dependent than are those between power and race. Power is almost invariably an aspect of race; it may or may not be an aspect of ethnicity.

As for moral worth, ethnicity certainly makes such claims often enough. For example, the historian George Fredrickson (2002) suggests that virulent

forms of racism, such as the German anti-Semitism that led to the Holocaust, are essentially an aggressive and exclusionary form of the self-assertion of a collective identity based upon presumed kinship that we have referred to here as ethnicity. Such cases show that ethnicity can be as destructive in its claims of differential worth as any racial designation, but this kind of malignancy is less common to ethnic identification. *Ethnocentrism*—a belief in the normality and superiority of one's own people and their ways of doing things—is a common aspect of ethnic identity, but ethnocentrism is generally focused inward and is less virulent than the assumption of inherent, biologically based inferiority and superiority typically attached to race and racism. This difference may be one reason why the older and broader usage of the term *race* in the social sciences, as in Robert Park's use of the term to refer to Slavs or Portuguese or Jews or Puerto Ricans as well as Africans or Asians, was gradually displaced by *ethnic group*, which carries less implication than race does of some essential, unchangeable difference and of rigidity in the stratification of groups.

Commonalities of Ethnicity and Race

If these two forms of collective identity, race and ethnicity, are so different, why do we link them in this book? In fact, they share a great deal. For one thing, common usage—both among scholars and in the society at large—tends to link them and often to confuse them. For example, some students of U.S. immigration have had a highly charged debate over which of the two terms is the more appropriate analytical category for immigrant populations (see, for example, Foner 2000; Gjerde 1999; Portes 1997; Sanchez 1999). Race and ethnicity are indeed linked, but they should not be confused.

Second, both ethnicity and race are products of interaction between diverse populations. Such situations pose certain questions for the populations involved, questions that typically include the conceptual (What are the important differences between “us” and “them,” and what is the significance of this interaction?); the material (What are the implications of this encounter for the welfare of the group, and how can it be turned to our material advantage?); and the political (How can we control the situation in which we find ourselves?). Both ethnicity and race are products of the efforts groups make to effectively answer these questions.

Third, both ethnicity and race are commonly held to be “natural” categories, based on common descent or origin, on one hand, and on systematic physical differences, on the other. In fact, both are elastic. Both depend far more on the claims people make about one another or themselves than

on any physical or genealogical differences. We say “held to be” natural because although characteristics such as kinship or physiology appear to be natural or inherent, their uses in defining groups are fundamentally arbitrary. How many generations back must we go to find a connection before descent ceases to be “common”? To what does “common origin” refer—the same county or province? The same country? The same region of the world? How much physical diversity can one race contain before the category ceases to make any sense at all?

The answers people make to these questions in any particular situation are social conventions, driven by culture and social circumstance, not by any inherent attribute of the groups involved. They may refer to classes of “natural” characteristics—blood ties or biology or place of origin—but the specific identities they describe—Kurd or Afrikaner or Croat or Mexican American or Black—are not in any meaningful sense “natural,” for the boundaries that mark them are arbitrarily chosen. Both ethnicity and race, in other words, are social constructions.

Fourth, and most important, race and ethnicity often overlap. Ethnicity refers to perceived common ancestry, the perception of a shared history of some sort, and shared symbols of peoplehood. Race refers to a group of human beings socially defined on the basis of physical characteristics. A human group might well meet both sets of criteria at once. The identification of common physical characteristics often also involves a claim to some form of shared ancestry; groups making such a claim typically assert a distinctive history as well and may signify their peoplehood in culturally distinctive ways. Likewise, numerous ethnic groups have been described at times as physically distinct and explicitly as races: as short, dark, swarthy, stupid-looking, primitive, noble, animal-like, and so on. At such times, they fit the definition of racial groups. Definitionally, in other words, there is nothing that says that a race cannot be an ethnic group, or vice versa.

What is more, a group may move from one category to another over time. To the English of the 18th and much of the 19th centuries, the Irish, although the same color as the English, were a distinctly inferior race. A Cambridge University historian of the period (quoted in Hechter 1975) captured the assigned racial inferiority of the Irish perfectly, writing of his visit to Ireland:

I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. . . . I believe there are not only many more of them than of old, but they are happier, better, more comfortably fed and lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours. (P. xvi)

The racial status of early Irish immigrants to the United States was a matter of debate. "In the early years, Irish were frequently referred to as 'niggers turned inside out'; the Negroes, for their part, were sometimes called 'smoked Irish,' an appellation they must have found no more flattering than it was intended to be" (Ignatiev 1995:41). In the United States today, the Irish are no longer assigned a distinct racial identity, but are clustered with other European Americans in the racial category, White. At the same time, in standard ethnic fashion, they have laid claim to an Irish American identity that fits easily within the definition of ethnicity.

The Irish were not the only group of people whose racial status changed over time. Different portions of U.S. society have viewed Jews, Italians, and Latinos as both White and non-White at different times (Frankenberg 1993; Sacks 1994). Certainly Jewish and Italian Americans are generally viewed today as ethnic groups; Latinos straddle the divide, being both a race, in some common understandings, and an ethnic group.

American Blacks also fit both definitions. They are held by others and often by themselves to be members of a distinct race, identified primarily by skin color and other bodily features. At the same time, they have also become an ethnic group, a self-conscious population that defines itself partly in terms of common descent (Africa as homeland), a distinctive history (slavery in particular), and a broad set of cultural symbols (from language to expressive culture) that are held to capture much of the essence of their peoplehood. When they lay claim to an identity of their own making and meaning and when they act on the basis of that identity, they are acting as an ethnic group.

The case of African Americans draws attention to two different but similar processes: racialization and ethnicization. *Racialization* is the process by which groups of persons come to be classified as races.³ Put more precisely, it is the process by which certain bodily features or assumed biological characteristics are used systematically to mark certain persons for differential status or treatment. U.S. society has racialized African Americans, American Indians, Asians, Latinos, and an assortment of others at one time or another; South African society has racialized Blacks, Coloureds, and Asian Indians; other societies have done similar things. Each case has a history that traces the establishment of the category, the assignment of certain persons to it, the development of codes of behavior for dealing with those persons, and a set of statuses assigned to them. Throughout much of the history of the American South since slavery, for example, Blacks continued to be assigned low status in the social order and were systematically disadvantaged in jobs, social resources, and politics. A code of racial etiquette directed Whites to treat Blacks as inferiors and

directed Blacks to act deferentially toward Whites. All of these are aspects of racialization.

Less obvious is the less explicit racialization of Whites. In establishing the category non-White, U.S. society also established—at least implicitly—the category White, assigned certain persons to it, and assigned a distinct set of statuses to that category and its occupants. At first, prior to the founding of the United States, the English, Dutch, and a few others were virtually alone in the category, but as other peoples came to America, the dominant society included many of them in the category White. Some European groups, such as the Irish, Italians, and some Jews, were not classified as Whites at first, but that changed. Even some Hispanics were classified as Whites for a time.

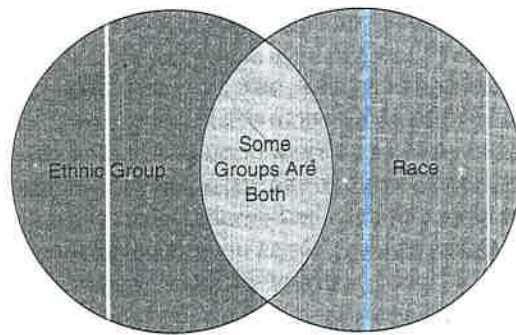
Ethnicization is the making of an ethnic group. It is the process by which a group of persons comes to see itself as a distinct group linked by bonds of kinship or their equivalents, by a shared history, and by cultural symbols that represent, in Schermerhorn's terms, the "epitome" of their peoplehood. It is a coming to consciousness of particular kinds of bonds: the making of a people.

Racialization and ethnicization yield different products, but they are similar in that they both organize society into distinctive kinds of groups. They are also at times related. It is in part the racialization of Blacks in the United States that led to their ethnicization: By categorizing them as different and treating them as such, U.S. society—and White Americans in particular—laid the foundations for a sense of peoplehood that cut across the diverse origins of the African American population and led eventually to Blacks' assertions of a distinct identity. Not all cases of racialization lead to ethnicization, and not all ethnic groups originate in racialization, but the two processes are often linked, and the products they yield may overlap.

Figure 2.1 depicts this overlap. It indicates that some groups may be ethnic groups, best described by the list on the left, and others may be races, best described by the list on the right. Some may fit both descriptions, being races and ethnic groups at once.

Nationalism and Belonging

One other term needs our attention before we leave definitions behind: *nationalism*. We often think of race and ethnicity as referring to subnational affiliations that take shape within and are played out against the boundaries of the modern nation-state (cf. Spickard 2005), although the growth of diasporic and transnational identities in recent decades has complicated that



- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity is based on putative common descent, claims of shared history, and symbols of peoplehood | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity is based on perceived physical differences |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity may originate in either assignment by others or assertion by selves | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity typically originates in assignment by others |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity may or may not reflect power relations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity typically reflects power relations |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity may or may not imply inherent differences in worth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity implies inherent differences in worth |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity usually constructed by both selves and others | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity is constructed by others (at point of self-construction, group becomes ethnic group as well as race) |

Figure 2.1 Definitional Distinctions

assumption. In any case, nationalism itself is a form of collective identification and belonging, one that actually shares a great deal with ethnicity.

Nationalism or nationness, writes Edward LiPuma (1997:36), “is a genre of claims, understandings, and grounds for recognizing, promoting, and legitimizing peoplehood, identity, and sovereignty.” At the core of nationalism lie three themes: autonomy, unity, and identity (Hutchinson and Smith 1994:4–5). Nationalism typically involves the effort by a people to determine their own destiny and free themselves from external constraint, to overcome internal divisions and unite, and to express their sense of themselves and their cultural heritage. The first of these themes, autonomy, most clearly distinguishes nationalism from ethnicity. “A crucial difference between ethnicities and nations,” writes Craig Calhoun (1993), “is that the latter are envisioned as intrinsically political communities, as sources of sovereignty, while this is not central to the definition of ethnicities”

(p. 229). Nationalism is, most importantly, a political sentiment and movement. But its claims are typically based on assertions of peoplehood and common cultural heritage and on an appeal to the past, to blood ties, and to shared understandings and practices that supposedly set the group apart from other groups. These identity claims link nationalism and ethnicity together. Ethnic groups—either established or emergent—who seek distinct corporate rights for the group as a whole within an encompassing state or who seek a substantial degree of political autonomy (which may or may not include independent statehood) are claiming status as nations, and their efforts can be described rightly as nationalist (Brass 1991). This apartness justifies, in the nationalist vision, the claim to self-determination. The separatist movement in the Canadian province of Quebec, for example, which seeks to establish Quebec as a separate state, sees itself as the protector of a society and people with a very different heritage from that of English-speaking Canadians and therefore with the right to determine their own future.

The linking of ethnicity and statehood has amply demonstrated its dangers. As we argued in Chapter 1, the organization of power along lines of presumed blood relationships lay at the heart of some of the 20th century’s most gruesome and destructive conflicts. But not all nationalism is based on preexisting ethnic ties. Some nationalist movements try to create or enhance common identities where they did not exist before or were of little prominence in people’s lives, and do so without reference to shared blood, although they may invoke kinship as a metaphor. Much of the task of nation builders is to forge links across cultural and identity boundaries. France, whose identity as a nation we today take for granted, is the product of a long historical effort to build a sense of common fate and common culture among diverse people over a vast expanse who had little sense of being part of a French nation and whose identities were more likely to be tied to villages or other localities (Bell 2001; Weber 1979).

Just as striking is the case of the United States, which has engaged in more than two centuries of effort to construct a surprisingly widespread sense of peoplehood among an ethnically and racially diverse population. Some have argued that ethnic ties have been replaced, in the American case and various others, by political commitments. In what has come to be called “civic nationalism” (Ignatieff 1993; Kohn 1944, 1994), Americans form “a community of equal, rights-bearing citizens united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values” (Ignatieff 1993:5). The political culture of the nation becomes its source of solidarity. Such, at least, is the civic ideal. But while American civic nationalism has achieved a remarkable degree of success, it is by no means fully accomplished. It has

stumbled repeatedly over its reluctance to include various non-White populations in the peoplehood it imagines and over its insistence that they accept a European heritage as their own. The question “Who truly belongs to the nation?” is a particularly loaded question in a society as diverse as the United States, where rich histories of political liberalism and immigration repeatedly rub up against a reality in which some racial and cultural heritages are granted pride of place. This struggle between civic and racial nationalisms, argues historian Gary Gerstle (2001), was one of the striking characteristics of 20th-century America, and it has not gone away.

This struggle is also by no means limited to the United States. No matter how open, accessible, and principled they appear, civic forms of nationalism almost inevitably privilege—or come to privilege—certain cultural or ethnic forms and practices, even certain ancestries, over others (see Janmaat 2006). They do so not least in their efforts to establish a common set of understandings capable of sustaining national identity and commitment. Whose understandings, which pieces of which cultural heritages, and whose political culture will become the core set of ideas within the nationalism that is being built? Add to that the institutional apparatus, concentration of resources, and claims to sovereignty and self-determination that set nationalism apart from ethnicity, and it isn’t hard to see how identities shaped around nations, however civic in conception, sometimes take on ethnocentric, xenophobic, or racialized characteristics.⁴ Indeed, some scholars have argued that the modern concept of nation—so intimately bound up with colonialism, imperialism, and slavery—emerged hand-in-hand with the idea of race, implicitly positioning civilized nations against uncivilized, undifferentiated “Others” (Goldberg 2002; Mills 1997; Stoler 2002; see also Manzo 1996; Marx 1998).

What links nationalism, even in its supposedly civic form, to ethnicity (or race) is, first, the assertion of a common identity based on a cultural core capable of constituting peoplehood and, second, the dynamics of social construction that are part and parcel of the nationalist enterprise. What distinguishes it from ethnicity is its political agenda and institutional apparatus.

Conclusion

Ethnicity and race are the main subjects of this book; however, our interest in race is largely, although not entirely, in seeing races as ethnic groups—that is, as self-conscious collective actors in social life and social relations. The reason for this focus is embedded in our own constructionist perspective on these topics, which is laid out in detail in Chapter 4. We are concerned generally

with the ways that historical events, social relationships, and human action come together to create or construct identities that have substantive consequences in people’s lives and with how those identities are reproduced, maintained, and transformed. Our primary concern, in other words, is with transformations in consciousness, culture, and social structure and with how those transformations occur in history and through social interactions.

This preoccupation points us toward an analytical perspective rooted in ethnicity. Stuart Hall (1992), who has offered some of the most interesting scholarly analyses of race and ethnicity, argues that collective identity and experience are not givens, but “are constructed historically, culturally, politically—and the concept which refers to this is ‘ethnicity.’ The term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity” (p. 257). Race, in its colloquial usage at least, implies a naturalness that is difficult to overcome. Of course, it is just this presumed naturalness or taken-for-grantedness that allows race, in particular, to play such a powerful role in legitimating and rationalizing social hierarchies and inequalities.

Ethnicity, on the other hand, more readily conveys something variable and changing and, in its emphasis on self-consciousness, emphasizes the participation of groups in the construction, reproduction, and transformation of their own identities. Our interest in how groups make themselves—out of the resources they have available to them and in dialogue with how other people perceive them—therefore inclines us to place ethnicity at the center of our inquiry. The danger in doing so is that the emphasis on agency and choice that typically accompanies the study of ethnicity can blind us to the structural constraints—the power inequalities and social hierarchies—that play so critical a role in the study of race and profoundly shape the construction of all identities. In short, an ethnic perspective alone will surely be inadequate to the analytical task.

These issues urge us to move from simply defining ethnicity and race to a search for tools that can help us understand them. The next two chapters offer an analytical framework designed to embrace both concepts and to account for their continuing power.⁵

Notes

1. A full genealogical study of the popular and scholarly uses of these terms has yet to be written (but for a start, in the American case, see Hattam 2004). However, at least in American history and culture, the language of race long predominated, providing a common lexicon of social differentiation. When ethnic terms began to

emerge in the early part of the 20th century, as Roediger (2002) points out, they did so largely in discussions of nationality and immigration—and race.

2. There are exceptions to this. For example, popular perception sometimes focuses on differences—and their effects—within the Black population of the United States, in particular between West Indian immigrants and their descendants, on one hand, and American Blacks, on the other. See the discussions in Foner (1987), Gladwell (1996), Kasinitz (1992), St. Louis (2005), and Waters (1999).

3. Racialization is also used to talk about how certain topics and issues, such as crime and welfare, become associated with specific racial groups and stereotypes. See, for example, Gilens (1996) and Mendelberg (2001).

4. Nadya Nedelsky (2003) examines the tension between civic intent and the treatment of minorities in a fascinating study of the postcommunist Czech Republic. While continuing discrimination against some minority populations indicates a failure to realize the Republic's ambitions, she argues (among other things) that an explicitly civic constitutional framework "provides the basis for demands that the government and citizenry respect and protect civic equality" (p. 107).

5. Readers familiar with Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States* (1994) will have noted that we depart significantly from their conception of ethnicity, which they limit theoretically and empirically to a concern with assimilation and to the experience of the United States. Although we have learned much from their powerful treatment of race, we find their discussion of ethnicity narrow, leaving out as it does a vast sociological and anthropological literature that considers ethnic phenomena not only in the United States, but around the world; pursues very different theoretical agendas, including concerns with collective identity and action; and makes no assumption that assimilation is a necessary or even common aspect of ethnic processes.

3

Fixed or Fluid?

Alternative Views of Ethnicity and Race

On April 6, 1994, an airplane carrying the president of the small central African country of Rwanda was shot down by unknown persons as it attempted to land at the airport in Kigali, Rwanda's capital. The president, who was a Hutu, a member of the majority ethnic population of the country, died. That night, within hours of the crash, Hutus across the country commenced the systematic killing of members of Rwanda's Tutsi minority. Early reports were sketchy, but over the next few days the extraordinary magnitude of the continuing massacre became clear as news bulletins trickled out. Television film showed tens of thousands of Tutsis fleeing across the Kagera River into Tanzania, mounds of dead bodies—many decapitated—in the streets of Kigali and elsewhere, and the stunned horror in the faces of the survivors. In the 100 days following April 6, half a million people—some estimates say twice that number—"were hacked, shot, clubbed and burned to death" (Keane 1995:29). It was as concentrated a paroxysm of genocidal violence as the world has ever seen.

The massacres of 1994 were not the first time interethnic warfare had ravaged Rwanda. A German colony late in the 19th century and then a Belgian one after World War I, Rwanda had gained its independence in 1961 after 2 years of ethnic violence. In 1959, the Tutsi monarch who had reigned under Belgian governance died, and the Hutu majority rose in

Paul Spickard

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