

THE PERENNIAL STRUGGLE

Race, Ethnicity, and Minority Group Politics in the United States



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PREFACE

The struggle among ethnic groups is a highly persistent and nearly worldwide phenomenon. Its resurgence in recent years to the forefront of world concerns is evidenced by such recent events as the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, culminating in the tragedy of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Kosovo; the civil war in Rwanda, resulting in the genocidal slaughter of thousands of innocent Tutsi civilians and the mass exodus of millions of refugees; the announcement of a cease fire by the Irish Republican Army after three decades of bloody terrorism on both sides of the conflict; and the rapid breakup of the former Soviet Union into various republics, often driven by a sense of ethnic pride and a yearning for national identity and autonomy, as in Chechnya. Turkey has struggled for years with its Kurdish separatist movement, and India with Kashmir rebels seeking independence; Liberia has had a seven-year war with deep ethnic overtones. All these ethnic conflicts have resulted in a cumulative death toll of several millions. One can truly characterize the conflictual relationships between ethnic minority groups and a majority society as a “perennial struggle.”

In the United States we see both the persistence and the renewed strength of minority group politics. Continual examples of hate crimes demonstrate that racism is far from over in the United States. Yet the Black and Hispanic Congressional Caucuses have increased in size and have played key roles in molding a critical compromise in recent immigration policy reforms, in the Haitian refugee policy of the Bush and Clinton Administrations, and in recent compromises made in welfare reform, to cite but a few examples of its importance.

The Perennial Struggle is about race and ethnic relations and how they play out in minority group politics in the United States. Understanding these relationships is critical to understanding American politics generally. Understanding these relationships is key to a grasp of American society generally, because of the rich diversity of our racial and ethnic composition. The United States is a *nation of nations*; it receives more immigrants to its shores than does the rest of the world combined.

Some years ago historian Oscar Handlin (1951) wrote a Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Uprooted*. In it Handlin related that he had started out to write a history of

the immigrants to America, but soon discovered that the immigrants *were* American history! To paraphrase his observation, the perennial struggle of minority groups in America is enduring; it displays a richness of styles, methods, and techniques. Ethnic politics can no longer be understood as just the old-style urban political machine.

In the past several decades much has appeared in books, periodicals, newspapers, and the mass media—both television and the cinema—about ethnic groups and their problems. The recent civil rights movements of blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, the elderly, women, and gay Americans have impressed upon American society an acute awareness of the presence of many minority groups—of their discontent with their status and of their struggle to cope with and overcome, or at least mitigate, the effects of that status.

Early works by social scientists raised expectations of more or less complete assimilation as the processes of industrialization and urbanization reduced the salience of ethnicity. The explosive decades of the 1960s and 1970s laid to rest the myth of the “melting pot” nature of American society. Recent scholarly examinations of ethnic relations have largely rejected such expectations. New studies have demonstrated the richness and complexity of racial and ethnic relations with majority society and have underscored the persistence of those relations and their relevance for political, social, and economic behavior.

As various minority groups developed into interest groups struggling to get “their fair share of the pie,” it has become increasingly evident that the perspectives of all the social science disciplines need to be applied to the study of ethnic relations. The perspectives of the anthropologist, the historian, the political scientist, the sociologist, the social psychologist, and the economist all add to our theoretical knowledge of the ethnic question. Integration of these perspectives is essential to better understand the rich complexity of race and ethnic relations—how public policy may limit minority group conflict, and how better to promote a healthy pluralism in our society. Such broader and deeper understanding may help limit minority group conflict, either among minority groups or between them and the majority society.

Many colleges and universities are themselves struggling with issues of diversity. They have integrated the various perspectives of the social science disciplines into courses such as Race and Racism, Roots of American Racism, or Minority Group Politics in the United States. If American society is to avoid the woes of a Bosnia, Kosovo, Northern Ireland, or Rwanda, or even to prevent the development of separatist movements as in French-speaking Canada, we need to better understand the perennial struggle of ethnic relations and its impact on politics and policy. We need to understand the history, contribution, and special problems of minority groups in American society. In short, we need to understand the how and the why of their perennial struggle.

This book, then, has several goals. It uses historical examples to illustrate how the United States came to its rich mixture of minority subcultures, how race and ethnicity interact with class status to form persistent patterns. It applies the insights of the various social sciences to an analysis of racial and ethnic relations to clarify their similarities and differences. It examines social mobility in the United States, developing a systems model of assimilation to view the wide variety of factors that influence the

rate, degree, and type of assimilation of various minority groups struggling within our society. It also examines why some groups reject assimilation or are largely excluded from such assimilation by the majority. Using the examples of a rich array of group experiences, it develops a typology of the strategies employed by minority groups to cope with their status—from assimilation to separatism to radicalism. It distinguishes two tactical approaches to each of the strategies employed by minority groups. It examines various public policy areas, describing how policy is used by the majority to channel access and routes of assimilation of the various minority groups. The book also describes how public policy can be used by minority groups to change their role and status in the majority culture, or at least to mitigate some of the vexing problems they face as a result of their minority status. It shows how groups seek to change or use immigration policy to influence the relations of the United States with their countries of origin.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

This book is intended to serve as a core text in such courses as Race and Racism, Ethnic Politics, or Minority Group Politics. Hopefully, it loses none of the richness of insight the various social science perspectives offer to the study of ethnic and racial relations, while integrating those perspectives into a consistent viewpoint that a core textbook can bring to such a rich and complex area of study.

Chapter One concerns the language of race and ethnic relations. It discusses the basic concepts of the struggle between minority and majority groups and provides definitions for all the key terms or concepts used in the study of racial and ethnic relations.

Chapter Two presents various theories about race relations and then develops a typology of strategies that minority groups use in their perennial struggle with majority society. It outlines three major strategies and two tactical approaches to each strategy and presents a systems dynamic model of the assimilation process.

Chapter Three then examines in detail the strategy of economic accommodation. It reviews the experience of many minority groups who have adopted this strategy to cope with their minority status. It looks at national-origin minority groups and subgroups of Hispanic, Asian, and African Americans who adopted economic accommodation in one or another of its tactical approaches as the best method to survive and prosper.

Chapter Four continues the discussion of the strategy of accommodation, focusing on the use of the political route. It discusses Irish Americans, Italian Americans, Greek Americans, Slavic Americans, Jewish Americans, and African Americans and how they used politics to pursue their perennial struggle.

Chapter Five examines the strategy of separatism, with a review of several groups practicing the tactic of physical separatism to isolate themselves from the majority culture. It examines the Amish and Mennonites, the Mormons, Native Americans, and those African Americans who followed Marcus Garvey and his “Back to Africa Movement.”

Chapter Six then looks at separatism from the perspective of the psychological tactic to achieve isolation from the majority culture. It examines the Black Muslims and Hasidic Jews and how they used this tactical approach to separatism.

Chapter Seven examines the strategies of old-style radicalism. It covers the “isms” of socialism, communism, fascism, and nazism and shows how these political ideologies sought to enroll minority group members in an effort to radically reform American society, its values, and its politics. It explains how each attempted, with little success, to gain the adherence of racial and ethnic minorities to their ideological and political cause.

Chapter Eight discusses the politics of new-style radicalism—the civil rights movements from W. E. B. DuBois to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., from Black Power to Brown and Red Power. It looks at their use of nonviolent protest to drastically alter United States society.

Chapter Nine looks at the use of public policy to place groups into minority status, and how such groups seek to alter public policy to change their status and roles in society. It examines the major arenas of conflict between majority society and minorities: education, employment, immigration, housing, law enforcement, and political participation.

To enhance its educational value as a core textbook for a highly complex and controversial subject area, this book uses various pedagogical devices that enrich the discussion, provide special or extra insight, and make the study and review of the material more “user friendly.” Each chapter has a summary, a glossary of the key terms introduced in the chapter, photographs, graphs, figures, and even some cartoons to illustrate and enlighten various topics in each chapter. Review Questions are listed at the end of each chapter to provide a special means of study. Finally, each chapter closes with a list of Suggested Readings and a Case Study. There is an extensive bibliography at the back of the book and both an author and subject index to facilitate the reader’s access to the material.

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Michael C. LeMay

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THE LANGUAGE OF THE STRUGGLE

The Basic Concepts of Majority/Minority Relations

When embarking on any field of study, a fundamental task with which one must begin is the development and refinement of the key concepts to be used. This task is all the more problematic and important when the key concepts are emotionally charged and when common vernacular and scholarly discussion use different definitions of those key concepts. In a diverse society such as the United States, we are all members of either a majority or minority group, and that affiliation shapes the emotionally charged attitudes we have toward the basic concepts central to this book—concepts such as majority and minority group, ethnicity, prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, racism, assimilation, and pluralism, to name but a few. A common understanding of each basic concept and analytical distinctions about the manner in which it is used is essential to grasp subjects as complex and rich as racial and ethnic relations and minority group politics in the United States.

A clear focus on these basic concepts is necessary to understand American politics because much of the practical political behavior of the American system reflects prejudice and discrimination and minority groups' reactions to them. As well, a great deal of American political behavior reflects the majority's attempts to deal with the presence of so many and varied groups.

WE/THEY AND GROUP IDENTITY

In 1963, sociologist Peter Rose first published his ground-breaking book on race relations entitled *They and We*. Now in its fourth edition, Rose's book explicates the concept of *ethnocentrism* (the belief that one's own group is unique and right), wherein a people exaggerate and intensify everything in their own folkways that is peculiar to them and that sets them apart from others. He quotes a Rudyard Kipling verse that captures the essence of such ethnocentric thinking:

All good people agree,
 And all good people say,
 All nice people like Us, are We
 And everyone else is They.

Individuals within any group vary in the extent to which they identify with that group. For some members, and for certain types of groups, belonging to the group becomes central to their own identity. For others, their social and patterned behavior and most of their internalized norms and values are deeply dependent upon the group. Still others may be but tangentially involved with a group, and internalize that connection only weakly.

Joseph Fichter (1954) developed a typology for his study of members of a parish that can be usefully adapted to almost any minority group. It helps us to understand the individual's relation both to the group and its members (the "we") and to those outside the group (the "they"). Fichter's distinctions help us grasp the dynamics of intergroup relations and why some groups vary in the degree of intensity of their members' group-relatedness. This, in turn, helps us to understand the rate at which members of a group shed a sense of "we-ness" and merge into a group of "theys."

Fichter categorizes four types of persons in terms of their group-relatedness: nuclear, modal, marginal, and dormant. A *nuclear member* of a group is one whose self-identity is totally involved in the group. Such an individual exhibits all the norms, values, and physical or cultural traits associated with that group. For the sake of an example, if we applied this concept to a national-origins group, say, Italian Americans, our nuclear member might be a 72-year-old Italian grandmother who immigrated to the United States at age 16. Though widowed for many years now, she still dresses in all black every day. She attends mass daily, praying the rosary often. She speaks Italian almost exclusively, her English being very broken and with a heavy Italian accent. She lives in an Italian-American neighborhood, say, in South Boston, above a little Italian delicatessen that she and her late husband operated for some 30 years. All of her friends are Italian American. Her social life revolves totally around her parish and her family. Her married children still come over virtually every Sunday for a big family meal. She eats Italian food three times a day, every day. One could pick her up and deposit her into some village in Italy and she would hardly notice except for the absence of her family and friends. She is, in short, more Italian than American.

The *modal type* is one who accepts most of the norms and values of the group and who manifests nearly all of the physical or cultural traits of the group. For our hypothetical case, it might be the 55-year-old son of the Italian grandmother. He speaks Italian fluently, but having been born in the United States, he also speaks English as a native language and with no accent. He married an Italian-American woman from the neighborhood, a childhood sweetheart. He owns and operates an Italian-American restaurant, where he and his wife and several of his nine children and other relatives all work. He is a practicing Catholic, attending mass on Sunday and all holy days. He eats Italian-style food at least once a day. His social life, too, revolves largely around his family and friends, except for two close non-Italian-American buddies with whom he served in the U.S. army and who have remained close ever since. His

clothing and physical features are such that even a total stranger seeing him would likely guess him to be an Italian American. You could pick him up and drop him in Italy and he would survive and adjust fairly well. He is, in short, very "*Italian American*." He thinks of himself in precisely those terms.

The *marginal type* manifests only a few traits and internalizes only some of the norms and values of the group. Such a person might be the 30-year-old grandson of our Italian immigrant. He has left home and the neighborhood to attend a university, majoring in business administration. He recently joined a major corporation as an assistant personnel manager and is working at a branch office located in a small mid-western town that has few Italian Americans. He married a non-Catholic and non-Italian woman (of Norwegian American background). He no longer practices Catholicism regularly, attending church only a few times a year (at Christmas and Easter and for weddings and funerals). He occasionally attends his wife's Lutheran church services. But when he does, he harbors guilty feelings about that fact. He speaks a little Italian with a heavy American accent. He reads the language poorly, and now that he has so little chance to use it, he is fast becoming rusty in Italian. His new wife cannot cook very well, and certainly cannot cook traditional Italian dishes. He eats Italian food only occasionally, when out at a restaurant or when visiting his family in Boston. He dresses like all the other rising young executives of the company. A stranger meeting him might guess him to be of Italian American heritage, judging from his features, but not necessarily so. In order to rise more readily in the corporation, he legally changed his name from Antonio Marconi to Tony Marks. If asked to do so, he describes himself as "an American of Italian descent."

Tony's daughter, who will grow up with a non-Italian-sounding name and acquire yet another name upon marriage, and who will be raised in a non-Italian environment, exemplifies the *dormant type*. She exhibits few if any of the physical characteristics typical of the group and internalizes in a latent manner only some of the norms and values of the group. By adulthood, she will be a person who will speak about as much Italian as the typical American, that is, only a few words picked up from the popular culture. She will not practice Catholicism and will rarely attend the service of any denomination. She also will marry a non-Catholic, let us say of German-American heritage. She can neither read, write, speak, nor really understand Italian. She knows, of course, that her grandparents on her father's side are Italian Americans and that her paternal great-grandmother was an immigrant from Italy. She loves her grandparents dearly, even though she only met them on a few occasions for a week or so when she was younger and went on family vacations to visit her father's family back east. She has some emotional ties, as a result, however, and they are strong if largely subconscious. Given the right stimulus, they do surface. She does, for example, react strongly to any "dumb Italian" or "cowardly Italian" jokes. If asked to do so, she would describe herself as "an American of Norwegian and Italian descent."

Although these examples employ a generational gap to illustrate the differing degrees or types of group-relatedness, the reader should understand that such a time continuum is not essential. A person could be an immigrant stepping off the ship and be, psychologically speaking, a marginal type. The type of group-relatedness depends on a person's internalized self-identity with the relevant group. A third-generation

Greek American might behave as a modal or a nuclear type. Religious groups often provide good examples of this effect. Adult converts to a religious denomination often behave in a more modal or even nuclear way than one born and raised in a given denomination.

Majority Group

For our purposes here, the **majority group** in any society is defined as one that is superordinate in a superordinate/subordinate relationship. It need not be a numerical majority; it simply must have sufficient power to determine the values and norms of society to set public policy. Such a group, by definition, is the “discriminator” rather than the subject of discrimination.

In American society, that group is the WASP—the White/Anglo-Saxon/Protestant majority. They emerged out of the colonial era as the dominant group along the Atlantic seaboard as the “host” or “native” group of the United States. They replaced the Native American and surpassed in influence all other West European immigrant groups. English language and customs, and their ideas regarding commerce, law, government, and religion came to predominate. By 1815, Anglo conformity had become dominant and unchallenged.

The emergence of Anglo conformity came during a time when intellectual credence, based on biblical and pseudo-scientific support, was increasingly given to the concept of *white supremacy*—that is, to the belief that the military and economic success of the whites were the result of biologically inherited differences among racial groups. Anglo conformity held that the more nearly a person approximated the Anglo-American model, the more nearly “American” that person was judged to be. Immigrant groups were seen as more or less desirable according to how closely they resembled the Anglo-American pattern, how rapidly they departed from their own cultural patterns, and how successfully they became socially invisible within the newly emerging WASP-American society.

Any group that was either unwilling or unable to fit into the developing American majority pattern was viewed as a “problem” group. Either a group’s clannish refusal to accept the “superior” ways of life of the majority, or its possession of some undesirable physical trait that made it difficult or impossible to become “WASP-like,” was sufficient to brand such a group in some way deficient, and the group was subjected to discrimination.

Minority Group

Common usage of language emphasizes the numerical aspect of minority. Webster defines minority, for instance, as “the smaller in number of two groups constituting the whole,” or “a group having less than the number of votes necessary for control.” Here, minority is a political concept referring to a *power relationship*. It is a group on the subordinate end of a superordinate/subordinate relationship, viewed as differing from others in some characteristic and subjected to differential treatment. Thus, until 1994, the blacks of South Africa were the minority even though they made up roughly

80 percent of the population. Women are a minority in the United States, although they constitute just over 52 percent of the population.

The concept of minority is a power status concept. Relationships between dominant and minority groups are not determined by numbers but rather by the distribution of power. The minority's presence in a society implies the existence of a corresponding dominant group with higher social status and greater privileges. The minority is excluded from full participation in the life of society. **Minority groups** may be described as subordinate groups in a social/political hierarchy with inferior power and less secure access to resources than has the majority (Kottak and Kozaitis 1999).

Self-image is an important distinction in understanding American minority group politics since many "groups" did not become such with a self-conscious group identity until they arrived in the United States and found themselves being treated differentially. The Irish immigrant arriving in 1848 from Dublin, for example, likely thought of himself as a "Dubliner." After being treated in the United States in an unequal manner, being refused jobs on the basis of "No Irish Need Apply" signs, the immigrant began to think of himself as an "Irishman" or as "Irish American." His group identity was in response to the discriminatory treatment.

Thus, the majority "creates" the minority group *as a group* by seeing all persons evidencing a certain characteristic as being "different" from them and subjecting that person to negative differential treatment on the basis of that perceived difference. What characteristic is singled out as constituting a significant "difference" varies from society to society and even from time to time or place to place within a society. In the United States there have been various characteristics upon which minority status has been based.

The concept of group is not a simple one. When does a collection of individuals constitute a group? A *group* consists of persons of varying status whose behavior is determined by the expectations of its members. As long as all individuals follow the expected pattern of behavior, the group is at equilibrium. If individuals are forced or allowed to deviate from their accustomed pattern, equilibrium is destroyed, and the group no longer exists as a group.

We can distinguish various types of groups. **Ethnic groups** are *primary groups*, those characterized by intimate face-to-face association and cooperation. A primary group involves a mutual identification for which "we" is the natural expression. The very essence of a primary group is that sense of "we-ness" that develops among its members.

Groups may be seen from an internal versus external perspective. The external tradition is more commonly employed by sociologists. This perspective views groups as a whole and stresses the relationship to other groups in society. But we can also view groups, as does Gordon Allport (1958), from an internal perspective. Groups are assemblages of individuals. This view stresses factors of solidarity and anomie; the pressures and positive or negative rewards that induce individuals to comply with the group's wishes, to form social relationships that strengthen group solidarity. The forces of anomie are those factors that induce individuals to avoid social contact and to behave independently of one another. Groups are collections of people with significantly interdependent relations.