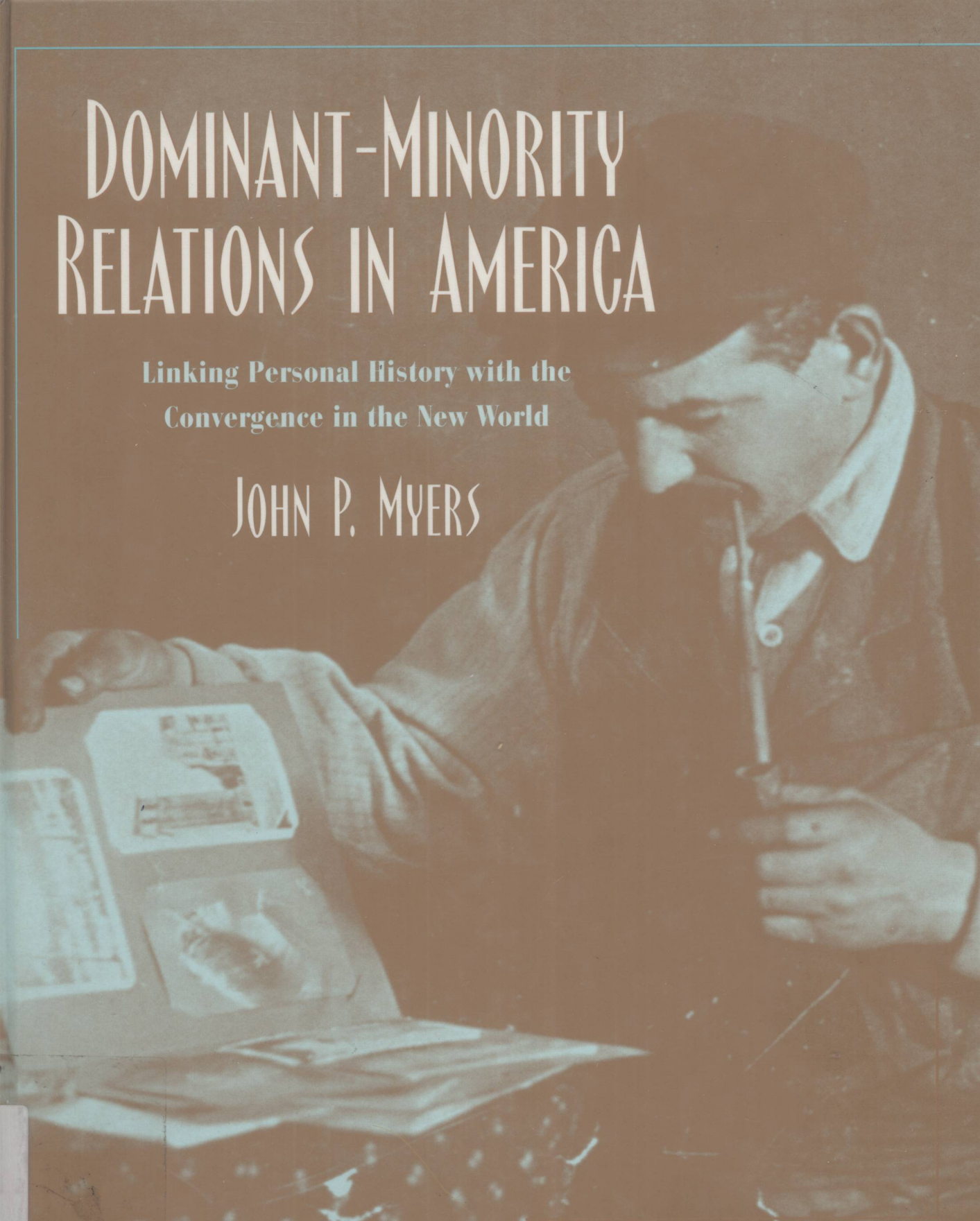


DOMINANT-MINORITY RELATIONS IN AMERICA

Linking Personal History with the
Convergence in the New World

JOHN P. MYERS



Dominant-Minority Relations in America



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Convergence in the New World

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Myers, John P. (John Paul), 1945–

Dominant-minority relations in America: linking personal history with the convergence in the New World / John P. Myers

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-205-29750-1 (casebound)

1. Minorities—United States—Social conditions.
2. Minorities—United States—History.
3. Ethnology—United States—History.
4. United States—Race relations.
5. United States—Ethnic relations.
6. Dominance (Psychology)—United States—History.
7. Acculturation—United States—History.
8. Group identity—United States—History.
9. Intergroup relations—United States—History.
10. Family—United States—History.
- I. Title

E184.A1 2002

305.8'00973—dc21

2002020073

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 RRD-VA 08 07 06 04 03 02

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Italian Americans: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity. By Alba, R., © 1985.

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Racial and Ethnic Relations, 6th ed., by Feagin & Feagin, © 1999.

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Andrew M. Greeley, *That Most Distressful Nation: The Taming of the American Irish*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books (Times Books), 1972.

David G. Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants*. © 1995 The Regents of the University of California Press. *World of Our Fathers*, copyright © 1976 by Irving Howe, reprinted by permission of Harcourt, Inc.

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Asian Americans: The Emerging Minority by Kitano, Harry H., © 1995. Reprinted by permission of Prentice-Hall, Inc., Upper Saddle River, N.J.

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S. Dale McLemore and Harriett D. Romo, *Racial and Ethnic Relations in America*, 5th ed. Copyright © 1998 by Allyn and Bacon. Reprinted/adapted with permission.

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*This book is dedicated to the Myers family:
Rosemary Howdershell, my wife;
John Louis and Rebecca Rose, my children;
and Thelma Krajeski and John Harrison, my parents;
as well as all those who preceded and accompanied
them as part of the great convergence of
so many groups in this country.*





Preface

For many years I have wanted to write a book on minority groups for undergraduate students. I enjoy teaching and learning about the seemingly endless number of groups in our society. The enlightening experience of reflecting on minority groups is especially satisfying when it is done with other people in a classroom setting.

Let me try to answer some questions you might have. What does the subtitle, “Convergence in the New World,” mean? Picture a land populated by many indigenous groups that flourished for thousands of years in what is now the United States.¹ Then, between 400 and 500 years ago, Europeans, Africans, and Asians started to converge on this (to them) New World. Envision the steady stream of new groups of people arriving from distant and diverse places. Know, too, that you and, most likely, members of your extended family are part of that convergence. It is important to see yourself as part of this ongoing process. We will study this continuing convergence of groups of people in our society with an eye on the roles played by you and your parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, and more distant ancestors.

The approach we will take is a unique one, and I believe it is beneficial for more than one reason. Three of the unique features of this book are:

- The study of white European groups that were formerly minority groups
- More emphasis on inclusion of the conflict perspective
- Using your own family history

It is important to look at past as well as present minority groups for many reasons. One is that it is essential to define ourselves individually and collectively. Who are we? What are we? We are in part the result of the sum total of our experiences and our ancestors’ experiences. We need to know our background: what *we* did and what *we* went through both as oppressors and as oppressed. So much social history has been lost or forgotten. There is much our grandparents did not tell us.

While many accounts of race and ethnicity may include the conflict perspective, the more positive aspects of dominant–minority relationships are usually what are emphasized. Many of the conflict accounts are relegated to other than mainstream literature. I believe, however, that initially virtually all dominant–minority relationships involved conflict to a large degree, that this aspect of our history has been obscured for many groups, and that many minority groups endured a great deal of violence or the threat of violence. Again, this is who we are.

Few of us are familiar with the details of the violent and oppressive tactics employed to keep African and Native Americans in a subordinate position. Andrew Greeley (1972) and Richard Gambino (1974) reluctantly agree that Irish and Italian Americans, respectively, do not know the history of the struggle of the groups from

which they are descended. They do not know what their grandparents and other ancestors endured to enable their grandchildren to be where they are today. One way to partially rectify this situation is to use your own family history.

For this reason, I have created a Family Background Project, in which you will locate and study your life and your extended family history as part of this expansive meeting of peoples. Of course, we will examine many of the traditional topics in the sociology of minority groups, but with the added goal of seeing how this information pertains to or connects with your personal history. The Family Background Project is introduced at the end of Part I.

There are additional reasons why the approach taken by this book is unique. First, the book starts off with a review of basic sociology. Second, the book distills much of the theory of sociology into a relevant and usable model of premises. We will apply this model to various minority groups at large and to students' personal histories. Furthermore, Chapter 5 summarizes the composition of the U.S. population in the past and the present and, most important, makes projections about the sizes and areas of residence of various groups in the future.

Why study the sociology of minority groups? Simply put, it is worthwhile. It is beneficial on both the individual and societal levels. Students will learn about sociology, theory, and group history, and it is hoped that they will discover more about their personal heritage and their family's social history. In addition, we all benefit by having more knowledgeable citizens who have a broadened understanding of other groups.

How important is the study of minority groups? In the United States, as in many other countries, intergroup social life is of the utmost importance. The recognition of racial and ethnic groups is an overriding theme in our culture. Furthermore, the norms concerning minority groups are clearly articulated, detailed, and defined by our culture—not in law but handed down from parent to child. Seeing and defining *our* society as being divided into groups is an ingrained part of our culture, right or wrong. Short of knowing someone's gender, it is most important for many of us to know "what" that person is.

Sociology provides a productive approach for analyzing this part of social life because the milieu of minority groups is social. Intergroup interaction in our society is socially determined to a large degree, although some persons believe that members of certain groups are biologically and/or genetically different—and that this difference determines their behavior. This notion is widely diffused and accepted by our culture and many other cultures as well. Our use of sociology will enable us to understand the deep cultural and social roots of intergroup social life.

The experience of studying minority groups is rewarding. Teaching a course that focuses on minority groups is always a learning experience because, whether they know it or not, students have been gathering data for this course throughout their lives as participant observers. We have a basis on which to build. The data students have gathered concerns their own group and other groups. Not only have they collected information on various racial and ethnic groups but, in all likelihood, they have also proposed theories or had theories strongly suggested to them that explain the array of so-called truths. Our extended family histories are, in very important ways,

part of what we are studying—part of the convergence. This subject has direct and immediate relevance to all of our lives.

This book is intended for undergraduate students. Should the student have studied sociology before? It would be helpful if students had completed some sociology course, but this is not necessary. Introductory sociology courses differ greatly from one another, and student retention of material learned even recently varies tremendously. Therefore, I assume that intelligent undergraduates who are interested in minority groups but have not taken a sociology course before can process this material.

What is the purpose of this book? To explore the complexity, diversity, and generalizations concerning dominant–minority relations in the United States. This will be done by studying the complex and diverse social history of various minority groups and by constructing and applying sociological theory to it. We will then apply these generalizations not only to minority groups but to personal experience, and will endeavor to re-envision our personal histories as part of an ongoing dominant–minority interaction.

Another aim is to provide a relatively brief overview of the subject. It is hoped that this book will better enable the student to learn to use the basic tools of sociology. The skills students will acquire can then be used to analyze past societal experiences, speculate about the future, and apply the tools to their own lives and those of their immediate family members.

I hope that this brief survey method will prove useful for students in their personal lives, as well as in their continuing professional and academic lives. I assume that most of the students using this book will probably never again get the chance to consider, study, and reflect on the subject in such a formal and extended way. It is also assumed that dominant–minority relations will be a topic of increasing importance to all individuals in our society, making this course a critical experience.

Will we look mostly at the United States? Yes. However, it is also important to see how other societies structure intergroup relationships and experiences. We will do this in one chapter and use cross-cultural examples throughout the book.

What is the order of presentation? We will start Part I by looking at what sociology is and why it is such an illuminating perspective from which to view minority groups. Next will be an introduction to the sociology of minority groups, which presents definitions of basic key terms, including *migration*, *ethnic group*, *race*, *minority group*, *dominant group*, *prejudice*, and *discrimination*. We will then look at some groups that are oppressed but are not racial or ethnic groups. This will be followed by a chapter on dominant–minority relations in other countries. We will then review the population data for the United States to gain an understanding of the number and percentage of various groups in our own country.

The heart of the book—Chapter 6, on sociological theory—follows. Here we will construct a sociological theory to explain dominant–minority relations. Students should then have most of the tools to apply this theory to their family histories as well.

At the end of Part I, the Family Background Project is described in detail. Students should not wait until they have completed Part I to read this information, nor should they wait to start the Family Background Project research.

The purpose of Part II, where we look at specific minority groups more closely, is to use our theory to compare and contrast group experiences. We have chosen to use *representative* groups from each time period in question. The word *representative* is emphasized because each group is unique; one group's experience—even in the same time period—does not uniformly reflect that of another group. However, all groups in the same time period faced some similar cultural, social, economic, and political conditions. Again, due to the limits of time, our discussion will be selective. While many groups will be mentioned and associated with each time period, only a few groups will be studied in detail.

Why study these particular groups? The reasons have to do with their time of immigration, size, impact, and uniqueness. There is no intention to reduce the importance of each group's experience. That is one of the reasons we will look at each student's own extended family history—to increase the array of groups covered in the course of this study.

One last question: What do we mean by minority group? **The basic definition of minority group we will be using is *an oppressed racial or ethnic group*.** We realize that race and ethnicity do not limit oppression. It is important that we examine other forms of oppression based on factors such as gender, sexual orientation, and other factors. We will do this in Chapter 3.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to many people for their help in producing this book. My parents secured a formal education for me as well as an informal one. They raised me in what we would call today a town with “great diversity”—a community where I had close personal contact with African, Jewish, Italian, Polish and many other Americans with varied heritages.

Bob Rommell and Arthur Shostak, undergraduate teachers at Drexel University, inspired me and enabled me to see further. Bob Rommell pushed me over the edge toward an academic life. His Behavior Science class was my best undergraduate experience. Arthur Shostak got me “out in the field” on my first research project: we surveyed white residents about their attitudes and practices toward African Americans. I was a student in his Minority Groups class when Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated. There was no turning back after that.

In graduate school at Fordham University, two Irish Americans served as my greatest teachers. Father Joseph Fitzpatrick became a friend and mentor. The results of his research on Puerto Rican Americans in New York City and in Puerto Rico are in many ways the core of my theoretical model. His recent death is a great loss for me and for sociology. John Martin forced me to re-envision the social world. My work with him on drug treatment and rehabilitation programs in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, remains one the highlights of my career.

Colleagues in my department have also been supportive and helpful throughout my three-decade career at Rowan University. Ted Tannenbaum, Jay Chaskes, Wil-

helmina Perry, and Flora Young were there from the beginning. They all contributed to my education in countless ways and helped shape this book either directly or indirectly. More recently, Mary Gallant, Jim Abbott, Yuhui Li, DeMond Miller, Tony Sommo, Allison Carter, and Harriet Hartman also lent encouragement. Colleague Mark Hutter is a veteran writer who had a real impact on this book and helped me navigate through the world of publishing. I owe him much.

I also owe a debt to those who helped with the clerical and editorial efforts. Cindy Carson read and edited the very first draft and made invaluable comments. Marianne McCulley also helped out with clerical work. Helen Greenberg was the copy editor for the final draft. I continue to be amazed at her ability to have such a comprehensive and insightful grasp of the material. Naren Gupte of P. M. Gordon Associates did a wonderful job working with the copy editor, the publisher, and me. He made many useful suggestions.

Rowan University, which was called Glassboro State College when I started in 1973, has also been very supportive. I received a sabbatical that allowed me to complete about half of the book. Dean Jay Harper awarded me released time that greatly facilitated the progress of the book. His predecessor, Dean Pearl Bartelt, also supported my work both as a dean and as a former colleague in the Department of Sociology. Former Dean Minna Dowkow was also a meaningful sponsor of my work. Former university president and now sociology colleague Herman James, and current president, Don Farish, as well as many in Rowan University's administration have been encouraging.

I wish to thank the following reviewers: Marvin Pippert, Ph.D., Roanoke College; Susan Fellows, Ph.D., CSUDH/LBCC; Roberta L. Coles, Ph.D., Marquette University; Barbara H. Chasin, Ph.D., Montclair State University; Thomas Shey, Ph.D., Chapman University; George Wilson, Ph.D., University of Miami; Luis Zanartu, Sacramento City College; and Rodney C. Kirk, Ph.D., Central Michigan University.

Allyn and Bacon has been a good publishing company. I am especially indebted to Sarah Kelbaugh, Jeff Lasser, Deborah Brown, and many others whose names I do not know.

Despite all the help I have received, any shortcomings that remain in this book are entirely my own.

NOTE

1. Although "the New World" may refer to many places in North, Central, and South America, we will be focusing mainly on the United States and the colonies that preceded its founding.



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part

I

Introduction to Sociology and the Sociology of Minority Groups

*P*art One is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is a review of basic sociology, with examples relating to minority groups. The second chapter focuses on minority groups, providing an introduction to the branch of sociology called the *sociology of minority groups*. Here we will discuss concepts that are fundamental to understanding minority groups from a sociological perspective. People who move from place to place—emigrants and immigrants—are discussed. Definitions of *ethnic group*, *race*, and *minority group*—which we delimit as oppressed racial and ethnic groups—and *dominant group* are developed. Prejudice, discrimination, and their causes are covered at length.

While the emphasis of the book is on minority groups defined by race and ethnicity, Chapter 3 shows how groups based on gender, sexual orientation, and other qualifiers are in many ways like racial and ethnic groups. Chapter 3 also discusses the intersection of race and ethnicity with gender and sexual orientation.

Although the book concentrates on the U.S. experience, Chapter 4 goes beyond U.S. borders and briefly examines South Africa, Northern Ireland, Germany, the island of Puerto Rico, and Vietnam. It becomes very clear that the United States is not alone in its prejudices and practices of discrimination.

Chapter 5 presents important demographic information regarding race and ethnicity. The U.S. Census data allow us to see the current situation and to look back in time as well. Our definition of minority groups (Chapter 2) will stress in that small numbers do not necessarily make a group a minority group; numbers,

proportions, and concentrations of groups usually play a meaningful role in dominant–minority interaction. As we project forward, we see that the numbers increasingly shift in favor of people of color. By the year 2050, the *minorities*—as we define them—will become the numerical majority.

Chapter 6 reviews sociological theory pertaining to minority groups. The goal of this chapter is to combine assimilation and conflict theories into one model consisting of several predictive statements. In Part II we apply this model first to various minority groups, starting with Native Americans in Chapter 7, African Americans in Chapter 8, and so on. Concomitantly, students are asked to use the model to analyze their own family histories.

Chapter 6 starts by clarifying the question about minority groups that we are seeking to answer. This question has to do not only with physical and cultural characteristics, but also with social structure. Next, the relationship between assimilation, pluralism, functionalism, and conflict will be discussed. Finally, a single field model will be presented.

At the end of Chapter 6, students will find the material on the Family Background Project. Here they will be asked to make plans to apply the theory to their extended family background and to a particular minority group. It is important to preview the Family Background Project as soon as possible.