CONTEMPORARY ETHNIC FAMILIES *in the* UNITED STATES

Characteristics, Variations, and Dynamics

Nijole V. Benokraitis

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Preface

The proportion of ethnic minority families in the United States is growing at a breathtaking pace. By 2025, according to Census Bureau projections, 62 percent of the U.S. population will be white, down from 76 percent in 1990 and 86 percent in 1950 (see Reading 1). The increasing cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity of U.S. families is generating much interest among scholars, journalists, politicians, and students. During the mid-1980s, "Racial and Ethnic Relations" courses often were canceled because of low enrollments, but a decade later, classes were overflowing. During end-of-semester course evaluations, moreover, a number of students offered (unsolicited) comments like "I never realized I stereotyped until I took this course" or "This course should be required for *all* University of Baltimore students because we don't know very much about our classmates and coworkers."

Such remarks were gratifying, of course, but despite many students' enthusiastic reactions, I felt frustrated when choosing textbooks—for several reasons. First, although there are several excellent race and ethnic textbooks on the market, they typically offer scope rather than depth because it's nearly impossible to provide both.

Second, when I searched for edited volumes that would provide the depth I wanted, I discovered several shortcomings. The books typically devoted much space to European American families, but I wanted more coverage of ethnic minority families. The books tended to focus on low-socioeconomic households—especially those in black and Latino communities—but I was interested in increasing students' awareness of healthful family processes across and within ethnic households, whether poor, middle-class, or affluent. And all of the anthologies failed to recognize what I call the "heterogeneity of diversity" of U.S. families. For example, in 1990 Chinese, Filipinos, and Japanese ranked as the largest Asian American groups, but Southeast Asians, Indians, Koreans, and Pakistanis have been registering much faster growth. Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans have been the dominant groups among Latinos, but their growth rate, too, is being outpaced by immigration from Central and South American countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Brazil. Similarly, we rarely read or hear about the influx of Middle Eastern or Caribbean families. Ignoring many of the relatively small ethnic groups gives a skewed picture of diversity and increases the invisibility of significant numbers of U.S. households.

Third, many of the edited volumes focus on demographic characteristics, migration patterns, and the history of the immigrants' country of origin. I wanted students to learn more about *families* and *family processes*—how ethnic families interact on a daily basis, cope with difficulties, and adjust to a new environment. Selections that emphasize historical backgrounds do not capture recent intergenerational changes.

Fourth, I found that many of the anthologies contained articles based on 1970s and 1980s data. Although there is nothing wrong with using older selections when necessary, ethnic families changed considerably—demographically and culturally—during the 1990s.

Purpose of the Book

Contemporary Ethnic Families in the United States will broaden students' awareness of the increasing heterogeneity of diversity in U.S. society. This anthology provides representative articles about African Americans; families with Latino roots (including Mexican Americans, Central Americans, and Latin Americans); Caribbean families; families from East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia; and families from the Mideast. I would have liked to include selections about many of the subgroups within each major ethnic group (such as Laotian Americans for Southeast Asian families) and for each of the topics I cover. But substantive articles are not available for all of the subgroups, and there are length limits for every textbook. Despite those constraints, the selections here are more representative of the diversity of ethnic families in the United States than the selections that any other reader offers. In addition, the chapter introductions present material on smaller ethnic groups that are not covered in the articles.

Criteria for Selecting the Readings

My selection criteria included the following: (1) readability, or articles written in a clear and nontechnical manner; (2) a balance of selections that examine both large and small immigrant populations; (3) a mixture of national-level surveys as well as in-depth analyses based on small, exploratory studies; (4) a variety of research approaches to show students the many ways in which social scientists collect data; (5) selections that use the most recent data; and (6) articles that describe how ethnic families change over time as they interact with the dominant culture. These criteria reflect reviewers' suggestions to choose articles that compare ethnic families but also to include non-Latin white families. As one reviewer noted, "Students look for themselves in texts like these and enjoy recognizing their own families."

Some publishers now offer series of volumes that highlight specific ethnic families, such as Filipino Americans, Cuban Americans, and Taiwanese Americans. In addition, periodicals on ethnic groups have recently mushroomed—for example, *Amerasia Journal, American Indian Quarterly, Journal of Comparative Family Studies, Journal of Black Studies, Hispanic Journal of Behavior Sciences,* and *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. In some cases, though they were relatively rare, there were several equally enticing candidates for inclusion here. In these situations, I picked a selection in which the author discussed the research in a way that I felt would offer students the greatest insights in understanding what ethnic families experience on a daily basis.

I do not assume that students are familiar with sophisticated statistical techniques. I made a concerted attempt, therefore, to avoid using articles that are highly quantitative and "number crunching." My goal is to provide scholarly and thought-provoking materials that are interesting, conceptually accessible, and free of unnecessary jargon.

Topics and Organization

Contemporary Ethnic Families in the United States focuses on nine important topics: (1) socialization and family values; (2) gender roles; (3) cohabitation, marriage, and inter-

marriage; (4) parenting; (5) work experiences, discrimination, and family life; (6) the impact of social class; (7) violence and other family crises; (8) marital conflict, divorce, and remarriage; and (9) grandparenting, aging, and family caregiving. These topics are among the most important issues that many marriage and family courses cover. Whenever possible, I chose selections that examine the intersection of social class, age, gender roles, and intragroup variations within ethnic families.

Usually, each chapter begins with a general or comparative article that discusses two or more ethnic families. In Chapter 1 on socialization and family values, for example, the first reading describes socialization practices and concerns in black, American Indian, Asian American, and Latino families. This selection is followed by an examination of black family values (Reading 3), Filipino American culture and socialization (Reading 4), Taiwanese American family values (Reading 5), and American Indian grandmothers' transmission of cultural beliefs and practices to their daughters and granddaughters (Reading 6).

In some chapters, the articles are organized around the life course. Chapter 3, for instance, begins with a discussion of the merits and disadvantages of cohabitation versus marriage from the perspective of a black married couple. "She" thinks black men fear marriage; "he" argues that many black men avoid commitment ("the big C") because they think Ms. Right might be just around the corner (Reading 12). We then look at marriage—arranged, semi-arranged, and based on love—among Asian Indian partners (Reading 13), examine changes in marital satisfaction in three generations of Mexican Americans (Reading 14), and consider two articles on the benefits and difficulties of intermarriage in Chinese American, Korean American, and Turkish American marriages (Readings 15 and 16). The life cycle perspective is also used in analyzing marital conflict, divorce, and remarriage (Chapter 8) and grandparenting, aging, and family caregiving (Chapter 9).

A third organizing principle considers some of the problems that immigrant families face, how they deal with everyday stresses and cope with ethnic identity issues in a new environment. In Chapter 7 on violence and other family crises, for example, the selections compare the risk-taking behavior of American Indian, black, and white adolescents (Reading 32) and explain why Asian Indian adolescents sometimes turn to drugs in an effort to cope with identity problems and intergenerational conflict (Reading 33). The authors of Reading 34 argue that black women, Latinas, and white girls, as well as young women, may develop self-destructive eating problems to survive in a society fraught with sexism and racism. Family problems aren't limited to adolescence, however. Domestic violence is widespread in black, Asian American, and Latino communities (Reading 35). The violence manifests itself, moreover, in the mistreatment of some elderly, such as Vietnamese Americans (Reading 36).

Teaching and Learning Features

Contemporary Ethnic Families in the United States offers four tools to facilitate both teaching and learning. First, chapter introductions suggest some of the similarities, differences, and overlap (when it occurs) across the various ethnic families. They also include supporting or supplementary information that (1) updates data cited in some of the readings, (2) integrates recent empirical findings, and (3) incorporates relevant or well-known studies that enhance students' understanding of the selections.

Second, brief headnotes highlight the key issues that students should keep in mind while reading a selection or a set of selections. In many instances, the introductions "bridge" or contrast the experiences of ethnic families. These bridges encourage students to think about all the readings in a chapter rather than seeing each reading as describing an isolated occurrence in a particular ethnic family.

Third, three "Think about It" questions follow each reading. Some of these questions simply "test" students' understanding of the material. Most, however, invite students to compare and contrast the experiences of ethnic families, to organize their reading, and to consider the issues thoughtfully. The questions should stimulate critical thinking and provide catalysts for class discussion.

Fourth, the "Internet Resources" section identifies Web sites that students can use for their research, class discussions, course projects, or intellectual enhancement. Because URLs come and go, I recommend only the sites that I think will continue into the future. They represent well-established organizations or devoted homepage "owners," were constructed four or five years ago, are frequently updated, and probably won't disappear in the cyberspace cemetery after this book is published.

Because *Contemporary Ethnic Families in the United States* is a one-of-a-kind anthology, I expect that it will be useful for a variety of courses to supplement textbooks in "Sociology of the Family," "Marriage and Family," race/ethnic courses, women's studies, social work, and American studies programs. As I noted earlier, this reader will add depth to survey courses and enhance students' understanding of a variety of ethnic families. Faculty who are using a textbook (including my *Marriages and Families: Changes, Choices, and Constraints*) might also consider using this anthology to supplement students' readings.

A Note about Language

Both faculty and students might sometimes be put off by the contributors' language—such as using *Hispanic* rather than *Latino, Indo-Asian* rather than *Asian Indian* or vice versa, *Pilipino* rather than *Filipino,* or *Oriental* rather than *Asian.* Because this book is an edited volume and the articles come from numerous sources, readers might also notice differences in spelling and writing styles. Articles and books published in Canada or Great Britain, for example, often use different spellings of a word (such as "labour" instead of "labor"). Some contemporary writers still use "his," "him," or "he" instead of less exclusionary pronouns that include women. I decided not to edit such language usage because, after all, how we write is data. Finally, some social scientists feel that using *they* and *one* instead of *we* and *our* objectifies immigrants, excludes racial and ethnic groups from "mainstream" (whatever that means) analyses, and treats people as outsiders. I don't feel comfortable, however, in using *we* and *our* because I think it's presumptuous to speak for any group or to assume that I can identify with the experiences of specific communities.

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I look forward to, and will respond to, comments on this book. I can be contacted at

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1 The Changing Ethnic Profile of U.S. Families in the Twenty-First Century

Nijole V. Benokraitis

The rapid shift in the racial and ethnic composition of the U.S. population is transforming families. As the number and variety of immigrants increase, the way we relate to each other may become both more interesting and more complex. As the selections in this book show, ethnic families from a certain region (such as Southeast Asia, the Mideast, or Central America) may share similar histories, traditions, immigration experiences, and religious or cultural values that shape family life. There is also a rich diversity *within* ethnic groups. As I note in the preface to this collection, it is important to recognize the "heterogeneity of diversity" of U.S. families. Ignoring many of the smaller ethnic groups or assuming, for example, that Asian American families are "the same" gives a skewed picture of diversity and decreases the visibility of a significant number of U.S. households. Later selections provide an up close and personal introduction to the increasingly heterogeneous diversity of contemporary ethnic families. Here, in contrast, I present a broad overview of the range of ethnic family characteristics—the size and growth of minority groups, countries of origin, and the effect of immigration laws, place and length of residence, family structure and living arrangements, and socioeconomic status. I conclude with a brief discussion of whether the United States is becoming a melting pot or, rather, a tossed salad.

Before we begin, several caveats are in order. First, the U.S. Census Bureau has used different categories of race and ethnicity over the years. The 1970 census, for example, was the first to collect data on Hispanic origin. In the 1980 and 1990 censuses, information was collected on whites and four racial and ethnic minorities—African Americans, Hispanics, Asians and Pacific Islanders, and American Indians (including Alaska Natives). The 2000 census ushered in more changes: respondents could identify themselves as members of more than one race, as either Hispanic or non-Hispanic, and as members of a specific ethnic group. Until the 2000 census data are available, however, we must rely on the Census Bureau's standard categories for classifying ethnic and racial groups.

A second limitation is that Census Bureau categories such as "Hispanic" and "Asian and Pacific Islander" typically encompass very heterogeneous groups. Hispanic Americans, for example, include persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Salvadoran descent—people who have different cultural backgrounds, migration patterns, and reasons for immigrating to the United States or elsewhere.[1] Hispanics, according to U.S. government