RACISM

AN AMERICAN CAULDRON

Christopher
Bates
Doob

SECOND EDITION

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Once again, to Carby

Racism: An American Cauldron, Second Edition.

Preface

In the brief span since the first edition of this book was published, great tumult has occurred on our planet. Sometimes exhilarating and often frightening, these changes, both at home and abroad, have often centered on race and ethnicity and have involved different groups' drives for freedom, equality, and opportunity as well as efforts to thwart these drives.

The tumultuous nature of American racism is apparent in the book's title. The cauldron imagery is also consistent with the conflict perspective provided by the internal-colonialist theory introduced in the opening chapter and used throughout the text.

The central issue here is racism as suffered by large racial minorities in this society—African Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, Japanese Americans, and Chinese Americans—as well as by the majority group it also ensnares. The book avoids lengthy and often discursive material about individual racial minority groups in order to hold readers' attention. In particular, I have provided studies and illustrations that demonstrate why institutional racism persists and how it affects people's lives. The use of internal colonialism helps keep students focused, guiding their analysis of material. I chose this theory because its application can make students keenly aware of the nature of racism and, in particular, of its economic and political sources.

The opening chapter presents basic concepts and analyzes the significance of racism in American society. Chapter 2 examines theories of racism; Chapter 3 introduces the largest American racial minorities. Chapters 4 through 8 explore minorities' exposure to racism in politics, the criminal-justice system, violent situations, work, housing, education, the family, and the mass media. Chapter 9 analyzes racism in South Africa and Brazil; the final chapter discusses possible solutions to racism.

I have focused on producing a readable book. Vignettes introduce each chapter and inserted sections offer narratives of specific incidents or experiences to keep the presentation interesting and informative. However, the book also provides a substantial body of factual information, including historical sources, recent studies, and up-to-date statistical information.

Certain changes are apparent in this edition. It contains over 225 recent sources, thus offering a substantial body of new substantive material for a fairly short text. In addition, there are prominent new sections—including an analysis of the transformation of a Ku Klux Klan member, a discussion about Indian-owned casinos, a discourse about women of color, and an extensive updating on race-related issues in South Africa.

A number of individuals have played critical roles in this book's development. The following colleagues in sociology have given invaluable analysis on the second edition. The reviewers were: Alvaro Nieves, Wheaton College; Donna J. Hess, South Dakota State University; and William A. Schwab, University of Arkansas.

As acquisitions editor at HarperCollins, Alan McClare has continued to provide a firm but gentle guiding hand.

Once again Teresa Carballel's wise, humane commentary helped keep the project progressing smoothly and efficiently.

Recognizing how interesting and valuable readers' input can be, I encourage any instructor or student with a comment or question about this book to write me at the address below. I promise to answer all letters.

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Chapter

1

Significance of Race and Racism

A light breeze stirred the assemblage of cypress, cedars, eucalyptus, and Monterey pines that stood in green relief against the sharp blue sky. In the ample space between trees were many sets of sturdy wooden ladders, slides, stairs, and platforms, with the general impression produced that trees and children's things were organically blended.

But attractive as it was, the physical environment was much less striking than the children who ranged between infancy and about 12, spoke various languages, and represented a diversity of racial types. Smiles, laughter, and pleasure dominated the scene as children and parents enjoyed the idyllic setting. Was it the family version of the Garden of Eden, or, perhaps more appropriate for this generation of children, a moment from "Sesame Street?" Actually it was a real place—the children's playground in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park.

At the edge of the playground was a pavilion where refreshments could be bought. Suddenly about a dozen eight- or nine-year-old African American boys

approached the pavilion. They started to line up, then broke out of line, and one reached into a relish container on a shelf next to the refreshment window, grabbed a handful of relish, and threw it pointblank at a companion's head. The victim retaliated, and several other boys joined in. A shout from inside the window, and the boys quickly moved away from the refreshment area. A middle-aged white woman turned to her grandson and said deliberately, "Those are bad boys, Freddy, very bad boys. I want you to stay away from the likes of them." She looked at the relish container and ruefully shook her head.

Meanwhile a white man walked over to where the boys were now sitting. "That's no way to act," he said. "Food's to be eaten, not thrown." He started to walk away, then turned back to the boys and asked, "Have you kids got money for lunch?" The boys stared blankly at the man, and as his eyes traveled down the row, each, in turn, shook his head. The man looked at the list of items sold, shrugged his shoulders to suggest that buying lunch for the entire group was too expensive, and then bought each boy a ticket for the nearby carousel.

This situation seems to epitomize the overall racial picture in this country. There are moving illustrations of racial cooperation and harmony; support exists from political and economic leaders as well as the majority of Americans for improving interracial relations. On the other hand, lurking in the shadows, often unobserved, especially by white Americans, is the ever-present reality of poverty and racism. Most Americans don't consider themselves racists and do not believe that they encourage it, but under pressure, like the grandmother, they often reject members of different races if they feel turmoil and violence about to descend. Many Americans manage to either keep racial issues out of their lives or to interact interracially under easy conditions, such as in the children's playground at Golden Gate Park.

Before we leave that scene, one more point about it should be emphasized. Qualities about that situation were peculiar to the modern era. A century, even a half-century ago, such a rich racial assortment of children would not have occurred. In parts of the country, segregation laws would have prohibited children of different races sharing the same facilities; in other areas, perhaps in San Francisco, informal standards maintained by both whites and racial minorities would have discouraged such a sharing.

This book focuses on racism among large American racial minorities—African Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, and Native Americans.* By 1990 nearly one in four Americans had African, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American ancestry, a sharp increase from 1980 when the proportion was about one in five (Barringer, 1991). By 2010 about 38 percent of children under 18—nearly two in five—will belong to racial minorities (Schwartz and Exter, 1993:101).

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*Currently several racial groups are referred to by more than a single term. My response to this ambiguity is to interchange the terms "blacks" and "African Americans," "Chicanos" and "Mexican Americans," and "Indians" and "Native Americans."

In this book we need concepts to analyze our modern world of racial diversity. One of these concepts is "norms." A **norm** is a standard of desirable behavior. Norms are rules that people are expected to follow in relations with each other. Norms not only provide guidelines for appropriate behavior in a given situation but also supply people with expectations of how others will respond.

Throughout this book we see that norms determine people's outlooks and behavior in interracial situations. Parents belonging to different racial groups are more likely to bring their children to a racially integrated playground than they would to a playground where local residents would oppose their presence. The vast majority of the time nearly all of us follow the prevailing normative structure: We are creatures of current social custom.

ANALYSIS OF RACISM

Studying a sociological topic like racism requires an approach similar to building or bridge construction; in both cases tools are necessary. As befits an intellectual exercise, the tools used here are not material but analytic, sociological concepts that define certain key issues that will frequently arise throughout this work. In the pages ahead, we examine two sets of concepts—majority group, minority group, prejudice, and discrimination and then race, racism, and related concepts.

Majority Group, Minority Group, Prejudice, and Discrimination

A **majority group** is a category of people within a society who possess distinct physical or cultural characteristics and maintain superior power and resources. In contrast, a **minority group** is any category of people with recognizable racial or ethnic traits that place it in a position of restricted power and inferior status so that its members suffer limited opportunities and rewards. Minority-group members are inevitably aware of their common oppression, and this awareness helps create a sense of belonging to the group. It is important to understand that majority or minority status has no intrinsic relationship to group size. For instance, sometimes a minority group has been many times larger than the dominant group in the society. Such a situation existed when the European countries established colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. In other cases—African Americans in the United States, for instance—the minority group is smaller in numbers than the dominant group. Minority status is the result of a subordinate position in society, not of the size of its membership.

Prejudice is a highly negative judgment toward a minority group, focusing on one or more characteristics that are supposedly uniformly shared by all group members. If a person rigidly believes that all members of a racial or ethnic group are innately lazy, stupid, stubborn, or violent, then that person is prejudiced toward the group in question. Racial, ethnic, and religious prejudice are the most prominently discussed types; in general, prejudice is not easily reversible. The fact that prejudice is not easily reversible distinguishes it from a "misconception," where

someone supports an incorrect conclusion about a group but is willing, when confronted with facts, to change his or her opinion. While prejudice involves a negative judgment toward a minority group, discrimination focuses on the limitations imposed on a group. **Discrimination** is the behavior by which one group prevents or restricts a minority group's access to scarce resources.

The basic position throughout this book is that while discrimination and prejudice influence each other, discrimination has had a greater impact in the social world. Historically the majority group has discriminated against racial minorities for their own political, economic, and social advantage. Prejudice has been a rationalization for this exploitation. In fact, researchers have found that discrimination can occur without prejudice (Campbell and Pettigrew, 1959), and prejudice is neither necessary nor sufficient to produce discrimination (Kutner, Wilkins, and Yarrow, 1952; Warner and DeFleur, 1969). Since discrimination involves behavior and prejudice does not, the priority given discrimination is consistent with the attention to be paid to norms in this book. Norms regulate behavior, including behavior which relates to the topic of discrimination.

Racism involves both discrimination and prejudice as the following analysis indicates.

Race, Racism, and Related Concepts

In the previous section, we saw that a given group's access to power has played a significant role in race relations. That pattern is also apparent in the present discussion.

We begin with the distinction between social and biological definitions of race. *Social races* are categories of people that the majority group designates as sharing membership that endures throughout the lifespan and conveys certain rights and obligations. At first glance this might seem like a straightforward description, but it involves practical difficulties. While sometimes members of a given social race might appear racially similar, in other cases they do not. So under the latter condition how is membership in a social race established? Generally there has been one way—descent: Regardless of racial appearance, individuals belong to a social race if they are at least partially descended from individuals who are confirmed members. But what if the particular society, such as Brazil, does not use descent as a basis for establishing membership in a social group, or what if an individual comes from mixed parentage? Then social-group membership is difficult or impossible to establish convincingly (Harris, 1968).

Biological definitions of race have been equally confusing. While many criteria, including skin color, hair and eye color, hair texture, nasal index (the relationship between the nose's length and width), lip form, head shape, and genetic distribution, have been used to distinguish racial types, none of the criteria taken singly have been able to establish distinct racial groups. For instance, skin color, widely considered the most obvious criterion for distinguishing races, is not an obvious indicator when analyzed thoroughly: There are wide variations within what are designated the major racial divisions of human beings, and considerable overlap among these racial divisions also exists (Molnar, 1975; Montagu, 1974).

Over the past several centuries, however, the danger of imprecision did not discourage efforts to develop racial classifications. In 1735 Carl von Linne produced an analysis of human varieties in which American Indians (Native Americans) were summarized as reddish in color, with thick black hair and a personality that was considered "persevering, content, free;" Europeans were described as "light, active, ingenious" and "covered with tailored clothes"; Asians were labelled "severe, miserly, haughty"; and Africans as "crafty, lazy, negligent, anointed with oil" and "governed by whim" (Count, 1950:359).

This scheme was influential, and yet a rival outlook also developed during that era. The eighteenth century was a period in which leading scholars believed that the influence of education and the natural environment could exert a powerful impact on human beings. A prominent European belief held that the great apes were actually human beings whose progress had been blocked by an unfavorable environment. In the United States, Samuel Stanhope Smith argued that dark skin color was a physical phenomenon like freckles and that with sufficient exposure to the sun, whites could become blacks. Smith contended that the reverse process occurred in the celebrated case of Henry Moss, a Virginia slave who appeared to have lost skin pigmentation after moving from the South to the North.

By the early nineteenth century, however, leading thinkers rejected the conclusion that short-term environmental factors affected people's racial type. Because of a growing understanding of geology, scholars began to realize that the human species had evolved over a much vaster length of time than previously recognized, and thus while scientists still accepted the idea that savages could become English gentry, whites or Caucasoids were considered thousands of years more advanced than the other races (Harris, 1968). By the middle and late nineteenth century, prominent leaders supported social Darwinism, which, as we see in Chapter 3, claimed that a white elite's uncompromising pursuit of their self-interest would promote the most universally beneficial social evolution.

Whether social or biological criteria are used, the designation of people's racial membership is an imprecise process. Most frequently **race** refers to a classification of people into categories falsely claimed to be derived from a distinct set of biological traits. Racial classification proves useful to the majority group, which is able to use its power both to subbordinate minority groups and to establish claims of their inferiority. Some recent historical investigations continue to examine the process by which racial classification occurs. In particular, experts are analyzing the steps by which whites' sense of racial superiority developed and thrived during colonization (Wade, 1993).

Racism is the belief contending that actual or alleged differences between different racial groups assert the superiority of one racial group. A racist outlook opposes a belief in racial equality, which contends that if the members of different racial groups are given equal opportunity to develop their talents, then a similar distribution of talent will appear in each group (Hacker, 1992:24–25).

Two types of racism exist: There is individual racism and institutionalized racism. **Individual racism** is an action performed by one person or a group that produces racial abuse—for example, verbal or physical mistreatment. Frequently this type of racism is intentional, but it need not be. One might argue, for instance,

that individual racism occurs when a white customer seeking information approaches a group of five store employees and addresses the only white member, assuming that this individual is better informed than the others.

Currently individual racism remains fairly common. In lengthy interviews with 37 middle-class blacks, 24 respondents reported incidents in the previous two years concerning individual racism in workplaces, schools, restaurants, and retail stores, and 15 research subjects revealed incidents of street discrimination (Feagin, 1991).

While individual racism is surely less common than in the past, the fact that it is unusual implies that the impact of particular incidents can be shocking. Consider this response to a questionnaire item in which a student asked her respondents whether or not they had ever been the victims of racism. A 20-year-old black woman replied:

> I was at the corner of a street getting ready to cross when about five white males ran the red light, drove as close to the curb as possible, and screamed in my face, "Run the nigger over!" I jumped back to avoid getting hit and looked in bewilderment searching for this "nigger." That was my first racist experience, and the first time I had ever been called a "nigger." I became overwhelmed with hate, anger, and fear. (Cloud, 1994)

Unlike individual racism, institutional racism is not an immediate action but the legacy of past racist behavioral pattern. Specifically **institutional racism** involves discriminatory racial practices built into such prominent structures as the political, economic, and education systems. The idea of institutional racism is distinctly sociological, emphasizing that social structures establish norms guiding people's behavior. By accepting the norms maintained in racist structures, individuals invariably perpetuate discriminatory conditions. Institutional racism is the prime factor maintaining racism.

It seems useful to examine institutional racism in detail since many people find this important concept difficult to grasp, not realizing that within many structures of American society—for instance, schools, work organizations, the criminal-justice system, government agencies—the impact of institutional racism has dramatically limited many citizens' chances for success.

Inner-city schools with students that tend to belong to racial minorities often suffer institutional racism. Local and national spending for these schools tends to be modest. Court orders requiring legislators to equalize tax allotments in neighboring school districts are likely to encounter footdragging from the representatives of wealthier districts reluctant to lose their funding advantage. In April 1994 28 states were involved in court battles over school finance.

The most celebrated case started in March 1968. At that time Demetrio P. Rodriguez, a Mexican American man whose five children attended a poorly funded school in San Antonio, Texas, filed a suit citing the funding disparities between rich and poor districts. Over a 13-year period, the Texas legislature developed five new funding plans. Four were challenged and later scrapped, either criticized by poor districts because they did not appropriate enough money or opposed by wealthy districts because they had to give up too much of their funding; the fifth plan seems no more promising than its predecessors. In spite of the long fight,

Rodriguez and many other proponents of funding equalization have remained active. Rodriguez explained, "I keep fighting because I want my grandchildren to have what I and my children never had" (Celis, 1994:31).

Like Rodriguez many people realize that the limited educational opportunity produced by institutional racism impacts deeply on children's lives. Different groups associated with poorly funded schools—administrators, teachers, parents, and the students themselves—go through educational motions but recognize that inner-city students are casualties of society, with bleak futures. A writer summarizing the feelings of a mother sending her children to an inner-city school whose students were 98 percent African American observed that the woman felt that such schools "were hardly schools at all, . . . more like warehouses where the kids were stored for a few years, sorted, labeled, and packed for shipment to the menial, low-paying jobs at which they would be doomed to labor the rest of their lives" (Lukas, 1985:104). Institutional racism, in short, involves a discriminatory legacy of structures and practices carried over from eras when racist actions were widely and openly supported.

Institutional racism can spread from one institutional structure to another—for instance from the educational to the economic area. Minority-group members attending the kind of ineffective schools just described are less likely than whites, who generally attend better schools, to have educational credentials making them eligible for many jobs. Thus minority-group children can grow up victimized by limited access to schools, jobs, and other important facilities. Institutional racism is impersonal, lacking the dramatic, newsworthy quality of individual racism, but it nonetheless is potent and destructive.

While institutional racism is more concerned with discrimination than with prejudice, other important concepts are focused on the meaning and significance of prejudice. A **stereotype** is an exaggerated, oversimplified image, maintained by prejudiced people, of the characteristics of the group members against whom they are prejudiced. In an early study of stereotypes, blacks were considered superstitious, lazy, happy-go-lucky, ignorant, and musical while Jews were designated shrewd, industrious, grasping, mercenary, intelligent, and ambitious (Katz and Braly, 1933). In a recent investigation, sociologist Mitchell Duneier concluded that blacks males have often been stereotyped as wasteful, pretentious, lazy, uncommunicative, impatient, flashy, irresponsible, and exploitative of women. His research on working-class black men who met regularly in a Chicago restaurant demonstrated that the men, who tended to scrupulously subscribe to a demanding moral code, did not remotely approximate this stereotype (Duneier, 1994).

Individuals maintaining stereotypes often find that their oversimplified conclusions offer a more orderly, straightforward analysis of a minority group than a nonstereotyped evaluation would provide. Furthermore stereotypes help to either confirm that a downtrodden group should remain in its lowly position or encourage members of the dominant group to push down minority-group individuals who are starting to achieve some economic and political success (Simpson and Yinger, 1985:100–101).

One of the disturbing, potentially tragic qualities of stereotypes is their self-fulfilling nature. A **self-fulfilling prophecy** is an incorrect definition of a situation

that comes to pass because people accept the incorrect definition and act on it to make it become true. For instance, if white teachers believe that minority children are superstitious, lazy, happy-go-lucky, and ignorant, then they are unlikely to make a serious effort to help them learn. The students, in turn, will recognize the teachers' disinterest or contempt and will probably exert little effort in school. The teachers see "confirmation" of what they already "know"—that their minority students are inferior. In reality what the teachers confirm is the process performed by the self-fulfilling prophecy. This concept vividly illustrates how prejudice serves as a rationalization for discriminatory behavior.

One more issue to consider is whether minority-group members' stereotyping can be considered racist. To begin, minority-group members sometimes develop stereotypes that assert their own superiority. For instance, Leonard Jeffries, a political scientist at the City University of New York, described whites as "ice people," who are materialistic, greedy, and driven to domination while blacks are characterized as "sun people," who are kind, caring, and communally oriented (Hacker, 1992:28–29). These descriptions qualify as stereotypes, but it is debatable that they are racist. Many analysts of race and racism believe that behavior only qualifies as racist if it has the capacity to hurt the members of another racial group, and minority-group members' stereotypes generally lack the power to inflict such damage.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES

Although such prominent social theorists as Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber differed on many issues, they agreed that ethnicity and race were relatively unimportant concepts. Analyzing the development of industrialization, they felt that both the social bonds and conflicts created by people's ethnic or racial status were characteristics of preindustrial times and would disappear in the industrial world, where discriminatory tendencies associated with those narrow, prejudice-laden ties would give way to more rational relationships that would transcend ethnicity and race and help accomplish the practical goals of modern life (Bell-Fialkoff, 1994; Blauner, 1972:3–4).

The tendency to dismiss or deemphasize the importance of race and racism is not limited to the past. In *The Declining Significance of Race*, William Julius Wilson (1978) concluded that while modern American capitalism has maintained an underclass of poor people, many of whom are black, the process producing that result has been largely color blind (Wilson, 1978; Wilson, 1987).

According to Wilson, there have been three stages of American race relations between blacks and whites. The first stage was blatantly racist, with African Americans exploited as slave workers on plantations and farms. The second stage occurred with the emancipation of slaves; during the next half-century, industrial expansion was accompanied by both class conflict and racial oppression. The third stage currently exists and involves the transition from racial inequalities to class inequalities.

Wilson concluded that for modern African Americans barriers no longer concern legalized racial inequality. The passage of equal-employment and affirmative-action legislation has made it possible for blacks with appropriate educational and training credentials to get good jobs and move comfortably into the middle class. In contrast, African Americans, other racial minorities, and, in fact, whites who do not have the credentials making them eligible to move into the industrial and government sectors find job possibilities increasingly limited. Wilson contended that affirmative-action programs, set up with the best of intentions, have increased opportunities for privileged African Americans but have not improved chances for poor blacks, thus producing growing economic class divisions among blacks (Wilson, 1978:19).

Wilson's conclusion that a variety of current economic factors diminish opportunities for poor people, regardless of color, is widely supported. However, two limitations to his central conclusion about the declining significance of race seem apparent, one involving the continuing objective significance of racism and the other its current subjective importance.

First, evidence indicates the extensive persistence of racism in both individual and institutional form. In the chapters on politics and the criminal-justice system, work and housing, education, the family, and mass media, there are studies showing that while racism might often be more subtle than in the past, it remains alive and healthy. Particularly significant is the continuation of institutional racism. Racist policies established in the past produce increasingly destructive impacts for minority-group members even though government officials and business leaders are no longer openly promoting those policies. For instance, once ghettoes inhabited by racial minorities are established, they continue to grow in size, providing highly restrictive educational and occupational opportunities for the steadily expanding residential body (Rusk, 1993:47).

Second, there is the subjective dimension of racism. Political scientist Andrew Hacker suggested the significance of this issue while discussing blacks' representation in the mass media. He wrote, "When black Americans go to movies, turn on television, or simply scan the comic strips, it seems as if their nation hardly knows or cares they exist" (Hacker, 1992:22). A recent study found that blacks are more inclined than whites to see black-white relations as problematic. Compared to whites, blacks perceive both more widespread black hostility toward whites and also more white hostility toward blacks (Sigelman and Welch, 1993). Another investigation compared blacks and whites of similar socioeconomic status in their reports of psychological well-being and quality of life over a 14-year time span from 1972 to 1985, with differences between whites and blacks on these reported feelings remaining stable for the time period. The overall result was that blacks had lower life satisfaction, less general happiness, less trust in people, less marital happiness, and lower self-rated physical health than whites. The researchers concluded that being black means "a less positive life experience than being white" (Thomas and Hughes, 1986:839). A recent study compared mean-income figures for black and white males ranging in age from their 20s to their 60s and covering the years from 1940 to 1990. With the exception of males aged 20 to 29 during the 1970s, white-male income was always more than black-male income. The greatest