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1 LOOKING AT RACE AND ETHNICITY—AND POWER

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LEARNING QUESTIONS

- **1.1** What is race and how does it influence people's experiences today?
- **1.2** How are racial categories tied to power, and how have they changed in meaning over time?
- **1.3** What is intersectionality, and how does it help us understand the ways people experience racial inequality?
- **1.4** What are the sociological definitions of race, ethnicity, prejudice, discrimination, ethnocentrism, and racism?
- **1.5** How might you best handle the challenges that come with a course about race and ethnicity?

INTRODUCTION

Has anyone ever advised you to steer clear of certain topics at a dinner party? If so, what did they tell you not to talk about? Politics? Religion? How much money someone has? Their embarrassing family secrets?

If you search "topics to avoid in polite conversation" on the Internet, race is not likely to come up in your results. Why is that? Race is among topics people avoid in "polite conversation," especially in interracial (i.e., cross-race) settings. Why is talk about race so taboo we can't even be honest about the fact that many people avoid talking about it?

In this chapter, you take a first step toward unpacking the complex history of race that helps explain why so many people don't talk about it—particularly with people who do not share their race or ethnicity. We explore how race as a concept is rooted in the development of racial slavery in America, myths about its biological origins, and its ties to power. We examine its socially constructed nature and the importance of thinking about it intersectionally. Finally, we discuss how you can best prepare yourself to engage fully in a course on race and ethnicity.

WHAT ARE RACE AND ETHNICITY? WHY DO THEY MATTER?

We all know what "race" refers to, right? Ask most people, and they will probably refer to skin color or a handful of labeled human groups: White, Black, Asian, or Latinx,[1] for example. The belief that humans can be sorted into separate groups based on visible markers such as skin color, hair type, and facial features illustrates one basic assumption about race: that it is biological. After all, we classify people based on what we see. But have you ever heard someone accuse a White person of "acting Black"? Or thought someone was White, only to learn later they identify as Latinx, Asian, Black, Pacific Islander, American Indian, or mixed race? These kinds of experiences reveal race is **socially constructed** or created by human beings in their interactions with one another.

Race is a system of organizing people into groups *perceived* to be distinct because of physical appearance (not genetic makeup). We tend to categorize people into racial groups based on their skin tone, facial features, and other physical cues. Our categorizations may not match how people racially identify themselves.

Ethnicity is not the same as race, though the two are often conflated. **Ethnicity** is shared cultural heritage, including, but not limited to, a person's birthplace or country of origin, familial ties and lineage, religion, language, and other social practices. People of different ethnicities can fall in the same racial category. For example, a Nigerian person who recently immigrated to the United States and a Black American person whose family has been in the United States for generations are ethnically distinct but share the racial classification of Black in America.

Race as a Concept Rooted in North American Racial Slavery and Colonialism

Race is so central to the American experience that people easily assume humans have always viewed one another as belonging to different racial groups. However, race as a concept is relatively recent in human history. It emerged alongside the birth of science as a means of knowing the world and solidified in connection with the development of a system of racial slavery in the United States. **Racial slavery** was a unique form of enslavement forcing lifelong servitude onto one group of people based on new ideas about race and racial categories. In other words, race and racism's emergence was not just about people (later labeled as White) coming into contact with foreign "others." Power, economics, ideology, and a constellation of other social and historical factors fed the development of race. Most importantly, race-based worldviews solidified because of colonizers' desire to control a captive labor force.

Colonialism is a tactic of expanding one nation into another geographic area through violent social control practices. Control generally takes one of two forms: co-option of a segment of the colonized space's preexisting social hierarchy (i.e., getting some people in the colonized country to go along with the takeover because they can profit from it) and/or slaughter and expulsion of Indigenous populations coupled with repopulation by immigration from the colonizing country (i.e., killing or relocating residents and moving your own people in) (Allen 2012). Colonialist practices often work to weaken or destabilize a target population's culture (social practices, languages, traditions, customs) and identities in order to maintain power and erode their social status.

Consider This

How do you identify ethnically? Do you engage in practices tied to your ethnicity? If yes, what are they? If no, why do you think that is? Can you link your ethnic practices to the history of race in the United States?

Biological/Social Data on Race

A popular misconception about race is that it is biological. Scholars across multiple fields, however, have carefully documented how race is *not* a biological reality. For example, genes that produce skin color and other attributes we associate with race are just a small fraction of the genes in our bodies. We know there are more biological differences between people in the *same* racial category than there are differences across racial categories. Powerful groups constructed the concept of race and racial superiority to justify racist practices, such as racial slavery.

Even today, the repercussions of this creation are very real. For example, we know race impacts health outcomes, stress levels, access to health care, maternal and fetal mortality rates, criminal justice system experiences, education, employment opportunities, and income and wealth disparities. Race affects identity and our social networks and relationships. Race influences these aspects of human life in ways that accumulate disadvantages for people in marginalized racial status positions and advantages to those in dominant racial status positions.

The effects of race, however, are not uniform. How you experience it depends on your social class, country of origin, residence, ethnicity, embodiment, sexuality, and many other aspects of social identity and status. For example, as Chapter 3 explores, race is not understood the same way in different global settings. Also, its meaning and systems of categorization (i.e., who counts as White, Black, and more) have shifted over time.

Combating high maternal and fetal mortality rates is a complex task. Black woman–centered Black-owned businesses work to address the social problem through education, advocacy, and personalized birth services.

Ariel Skelley via Getty Images

DOING SOCIOLOGY 1.1: LETTER TO YOUR RACE(S)*

Learning Objective 1.1: What is race and how does it influence people's experiences today?

In this exercise, you will think about the impact race has on your life and experiences.

Write a one-page letter to your race(s) as if it were a person. If you could talk to it, what would you tell it? If it were a person, what would you ask it? How would you let it know how it has affected your life? How does the history of slavery in the United States affect what you would say to your race? Note that you are not writing a letter to all the people in your racial category (e.g., "Dear White people"). Instead, you are writing to your racial category, with all its social constructions, as if it were a single person (e.g., "Dear Whiteness"; "Dear Latinx-ness"; "Dear Blackness").

*This assignment is modeled after Dr. Dana Berkowitz's "Dear Gender Letter" activity at Louisiana State University. Her assignment and our recrafted version of it were inspired by the 2017 "Dear Masculinity" campaign undergraduate student Eneale Pickett started at University of Wisconsin–Madison, represented in KC Councilor's art in *Male Femininities* (Berkowitz, Windsor, and Han 2023).

Instructor's Note: You may ask students to write their letter as homework and then share it (in full, or just highlights) with other students in class in small groups. If your class is online, you may ask students to read or summarize it in an online video discussion forum or written discussion forum.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What is the difference between race and ethnicity?
2. What are the two primary means of maintaining colonial social control?
3. What is the relationship between biology and racial categories?
4. What are two ways race impacts people's lives today?
5. What does it mean to say race is socially constructed?

The Catholic Church helped set moral foundations for slavery. Pope Nicholas V (pictured here) issued a Papal Bull in 1455 giving the Portuguese king permission to "invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue" all "enemies of Christ" in colonial territories, to seize their property and possessions, and to "reduce their persons to perpetual slavery" (Davenport 1917).

Chris Hellier/Alamy Stock Photo

HOW IS POWER RELATED TO RACE? DOMINANT AND SUBORDINATE GROUPS

One of the primary reasons race plays such an important role in society is its connection to power relations. **Power** is the possession of authority to exert your will over individuals, groups, or systems. The way we see race today emerged from a context where one group (later seen as "White") was conquering and extracting resources from other groups of people across the globe (Allen 2012; Smedley 2011). Those with power used race as a tool to dominate vulnerable populations.

Power, Dominance, and the Construction of Race

As early as the 1500s, European men were writing in the new tradition of a "scientific method." They typically used secondhand data sources such as missionary, colonizer, or traders' diaries—all of which were tainted by European cultural biases and judgments. Nonetheless, authors used that data to sort humans into ranked groups. At first, and for nearly 200 years, they did so in ways that acknowledged a common human ancestry. If and when they used the term *race*, it typically referred to familial or generational lines or to types of people belonging to the same species (Smedley 2011). It was not until westward expansion intensified the slaughter of Indigenous populations and a system of racial slavery emerged in European colonies that the idea of multiple human origins and distinct races fully crystallized into a dominant worldview. This was no accident. Seeing some people as less human than others was critical to preserving White Americans' claims to moral authority while enslaving, stealing from, murdering, and brutalizing other people.

Racial classification systems in this pseudo-scientific literature grouped humans into categories based broadly on phenotypic markers such as skin color, hair texture, and skull shape. Europeans maintained influence over science as a discipline, which began associating physical differences with assumed behavioral and psychological differences such as group ethics (or lack thereof). Methods and data used by writers on the subject were flawed and, in some cases *made up*, but still justified the enslavement of African people for hundreds of years and the near elimination of American Indian populations.

Europeans further sustained their power over ways of understanding human groups by writing the history of their colonization efforts in ways that erased dominated populations' narratives or framed them as morally depraved and developmentally stunted. These efforts are a good example of Karl Marx's classic argument: people who control the means of production (the economy) also control the ruling ideas (Marx and Engels 1932).

The "Indian Mounds" at Louisiana State University (LSU), dating back 9,200 years, are the oldest humanmade structures still in existence in the Americas (and older than the Great Wall of China, Stonehenge, and the Egyptian Pyramids). LSU sits on traditional territories of the Bayogoula and Chahta Yakni peoples.

Source: Kathleen Korgen

Consider This

How many classes in high school taught you about Indigenous, Black, Asian, or Latinx American history? Do you know how many of the texts you read were written by authors from those backgrounds? How many were written by White people? What difference might this make for how you understand "American history"?

The Relationship of Other Racial Categories to Whiteness

One way power manifests in racial categorizations is largely invisible. Whiteness is often seen as a neutral reference category: the basis for what counts as generically "human." For example, it is easier for White people to see themselves as humans or Americans without qualifiers. People of color do not have this luxury. Their race is so visible in daily experiences that they are more likely to have a strongly defined racial identity. Whiteness also occupies a position of centrality when it comes to mainstream cultural images. When someone mentions Santa Claus, for example, most people immediately picture a White man with a large belly and snow-white beard. If a particular Santa is phenotypically different from that, you often hear people refer to him as "Black Santa" or "Asian Santa," while White Santa is just "Santa."

Whiteness is slippery in this way; it is often difficult to describe what exactly counts as Whiteness because it operates invisibly. The invisibility of Whiteness teaches us about the power it holds; oftentimes, we can only define Whiteness by characterizing what it is *not*. Whiteness, then, becomes a reference category for other racial groups, further contributing to its exertion of power.

DOING SOCIOLOGY 1.2: RACIAL DYNAMICS AND CULTURAL SYMBOLS

Learning Objective 1.2: How are racial categories tied to power, and how have they changed in meaning over time?

This exercise helps uncover how racial categories and power dynamics are reflected through cultural symbols.

Write answers to the following questions:

1. Think of a cultural symbol that resonates with you or is prevalent in your culture (e.g., a national emblem, a popular figure in media, or a traditional artifact). In one or two sentences, describe how it has influenced your perception of your identity or culture.
2. Think about how this symbol is commonly portrayed. Jot down a few notes on its typical representations in media or popular culture.
3. Reflect on how this symbol might be perceived differently by people from various racial or ethnic backgrounds. How might these different perspectives lead to different understandings or meanings of the symbol?
4. Think about how the portrayals you've considered relate to power and racial dynamics. What does this say about societal norms and values? What might be the impact of normalizing certain perspectives (especially Whiteness) on individuals from various racial groups. How might this influence their daily experiences and societal integration?

Instructor's Note: This activity can be done during class if students work in small groups and at least one person has access to a laptop or phone with web connection. It can also be done as a homework assignment and brought back to class to share and discuss in small groups or as a full class. In online classes, students can share the cultural symbols from their search and some reflection in an online video or written discussion forum.

Beyond the White/Black Dichotomy

Many people think about race in terms of White and Black while other people of color, such as Asian and Latinx Americans, experience race by occupying something called the "racial middle" (O'Brien 2008). This term challenges us to think about race beyond a Black/White dichotomy. It gets us to think about how groups like Asian, Latinx, and Native Americans are sometimes viewed in comparison to White or Black people. For example, as Chapter 9 discusses, Asian Americans are often viewed as a "model minority" or "honorary Whites." American Indians, on the other hand, are frequently left out of sociological research altogether—an alarming fact, considering how they also face racism in the United States. Moreover, when researchers do include them, they often do so in ways that homogenize the group rather than acknowledging how categories like "Native American" are made up of a tremendous variety of nations and cultural traditions, such as Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota, Diné/Navajo, and Houma.

Examples of How Racial Categorizations Have Changed Over Time

The United States Census provides a good illustration of how racial categories have changed over time. From 1790 to 1950, census workers called enumerators recorded people's race for them, according to bureau directions. From 1960 onward, people could self-select one racial identification. Beginning in the year 2000, people could check multiple racial categories. This means a person could be racially classified very differently, depending on census year.

Here are some examples to illustrate how census racial categories have historically shifted (Parker et al. 2015):

- First, Black people were only counted as enslaved peoples, but in 1820, the census added a "free colored persons" category.
- "Mulatto" was a racial category from 1850 to 1890 and 1910 to 1920.
- Native American populations were not in the census until 1860—and then enumerators only counted those assimilated into White society.
- Asian categories did not appear until 1860, when the census added "Chinese."
- In 1970, the census instructed mixed-race people to choose one race or be automatically counted as their father's race.

- In 1980 and 1990, if those same people chose multiple categories, the census typically assigned them to their mother's race.
- Before 1960, census workers filled out census forms for people. In doing so, they categorized people who were White and another race as members of the non-White race.

As the last example illustrates, one theme in racial categorization is competition over who is counted and treated as White—because the social context is one where White people have historically had more rights and privileges than other people. Census rules therefore limited who counted as White (Parker et al. 2015). You may already be familiar with the "one drop rule," a law mandating people with any amount of non-White blood in their lineage be legally classified and treated as a person of color. The last example in the list describes how the census once followed that rule.

Whiteness carrying social and legal benefits is a powerful force that has influenced race relations since colonial times. It is one of the reasons Irish people, for example, who came to the United States with a long history of being colonized and oppressed by the British, quickly "came to insist on their own Whiteness and on White supremacy" (Roediger 2007:137) rather than fighting for racial equality alongside Black people. You will learn more about this in Chapter 7.

Resistance to Race-Based Systems of Inequality

From the beginning, people disadvantaged by a racial classification system doling out unequal life chances have resisted. The threat of violent resistance to institutionalized racial inequality has always loomed large for those benefiting from that inequality. White enslavers, for example, intensely feared insurrections by enslaved peoples. Revolts by enslaved peoples took place throughout the South, with some of the most significant occurring in Louisiana, South Carolina, and Virginia.

In the largest rebellion by enslaved peoples ever to occur in the South, more than 500 enslaved people from three Louisiana parishes came together to march toward New Orleans in January 1811. Armed and formidable in numbers, the rebels caused substantial damage to plantations they crossed. Just days after the revolt began, however, resisters were met by federal troops, and many of their leaders were put to death. Some were beheaded. White authorities placed their heads on stakes around the property of plantations where resisters came from, to serve as a constant reminder of rebellion's consequences. This uprising is recognized today in artwork by Woodrow Nash at the Whitney Plantation Museum in Wallace, Louisiana. It is part of an optional portion of the tour for visitors, because it is so graphic in nature.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s is probably the most widely known example of Black people's efforts to challenge racism in the United States. Many people are familiar with leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. A long list of lesser-known moments and activists, however, remains largely invisible to the public. Sociologist in Action Dr. Castel Sweet works to raise awareness about them in her work.

SOCIOLOGISTS IN ACTION

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR TOWN–CAMPUS COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

Dr. Castel Sweet

I chose to study sociology to better understand social systems and how they impact people. My studies and community engagement as a graduate student exposed me to the influential role higher education institutions have in local communities and how they can help create an inclusive society.

Following the functionalist theoretical perspective of Robert Merton and many other sociologists, I view communities as complex systems comprising distinctive parts and functions that should work together for the greater good. I use my understanding of social systems to encourage collaborations between colleges and universities and their surrounding communities.

In my current work at the University of Mississippi, I organize dialogue-based immersion experiences with students, faculty, and community residents. We visit places of historical and cultural significance to build and strengthen relationships between the campus and community. For example, one immersion included a two-day experience hearing from local voices and visiting historical sites connected to the death of Emmett Till to reflect on the legacy of racialized violence and injustice. We also toured the Equal Justice Initiative's Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice to learn about current efforts to confront racial and economic injustice and to collectively imagine what we can do to help address these issues.

Source: Castel Sweet

I structure these experiences so that all participants—who come from very diverse racial backgrounds and educational experiences—engage as equal contributors of knowledge. Participants say that sharing these experiences with an intergenerational and interracial group proved invaluable in helping them develop a more thorough and intimate knowledge of the sites we visited and the social justice efforts we discussed. They emphasize the irreplaceable sense of belonging and inclusion felt from participating in a shared experience where all knowledges and perspectives are valued and respected in ways that reinforce the unique contribution we each make to promote collective solidarity.

Being able to engage in respectful dialogue across different perspectives and ideologies provides an opportunity for trust to be built among participants. The trust that is cultivated then leads to the cultivation of bridging and bonding social capital, as theorized by Robert Putnam, in ways that strengthen the fabric of the community to address its social concerns more effectively in pursuit of justice for all.

Castel V. Sweet is the director of the Center for Community Engagement and assistant professor of practice at the University of Mississippi.

Discussion Question

How might such immersion trips enable more effective racial justice efforts than could be achieved by either academics or community members separately?

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What were two fundamental flaws of early "scientific" publications on race?
2. What does it mean to say people who control the means of production also control the ruling ideas? How does this apply to race?
3. What is one way Whiteness operates as an invisible norm or standard?
4. What does the U.S. census reveal about how racial categories have shifted over time?
5. What are some ways people work to resist racial oppression, both historically and today?

MORE THAN A MEMBER OF A RACIAL GROUP: INTERSECTIONALITY

Recognizing intersectionality is a key tool of modern resistance to racial and other forms of oppression. Coined in 1991 by lawyer and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw, **intersectionality** refers to how the social categories we belong to—such as social class, gender, and race—are interconnected and work together to reinforce our advantages or disadvantages in society. This helps us see, for example, that all women's experiences are not the same and vary according to their other social positions such as race, citizenship status, or class.

Dr. Maretta McDonald (left) and Heeya Datta (right), two women who were LSU PhD students in 2020, had varying experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Left, ©Sadie O'Keefe; right, ©Jishnu Datta

Contrasting the experiences of two women who were LSU graduate students during the COVID-19 crisis reveals how women's experiences vary by race, citizenship, and other status positions. Dr. Maretta McDonald, a Black U.S. citizen who was a working-class doctoral candidate at the time, worried about COVID exposure for herself and her loved ones, due to the disproportionate infection and death rates among Black Americans (Russell and Karlin 2020). Heeya Datta, an Indian woman who was a doctoral student on a student visa, did not have family members at higher comparative risk but feared deportation when the Trump administration announced it would force international students whose degree programs were entirely online in fall 2020 to leave the United States (a decision that was later revoked) (Anderson and Svrluga 2020).

Intersectional Approaches to Activism

History provides examples of activists who approached their work with an intersectional perspective even before the term was coined. Journalist Ida B. Wells took an intersectional approach when documenting cases of thousands of Black men lynched in her lifetime in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Wells advocated for Black people's lives by writing about how race, gender, and power worked to create this horrific reality. As she wrote in *Lynch Law*, "[Rape] is only punished when White women accuse Black men, which accusation is never proven. The same crime committed by Negroes against Negroes, or by White men against Black women is ignored even in the law courts" (1893:2). Gender and racial stereotypes worked together to portray White (but not Black) women as helpless victims and Black (but not White) men as violent sexual predators. Her brave and tireless journalistic work helped people understand these patterns.

Ida B. Wells risked her life to write about lynching in America. She did so in a way many claim was sociological in its approach to data and analysis. (Photo_from University of Chicago Illinois Special Collections Research Center.)

Sarin Images/GRANGER

Consider This

In Germany, many museums and historical sites document the Holocaust's horrifying atrocities. How might people's understanding of racial slavery and terror, and modern race relations, in the United States be different if sites like these were common here?

A push for intersectional activism and scholarship moved feminism from the second wave into more inclusive third-wave approaches. The Combahee River Collective played an important role in this process. Combahee was a national Black lesbian feminist organization in Boston, Massachusetts, in the 1970s. Named after the Combahee River Raid led by Harriet Tubman during the Civil War, the Combahee River Collective (1979) is most known for its Combahee River Collective statement, which emphasizes the shortcomings of the White feminist movement's exclusion of Black women's realities. As the collective put it,

> As Black feminists we are made constantly and painfully aware of how little effort White women have made to understand and combat their racism, which requires among other things that they have a more than superficial comprehension of race, color, and Black history and culture. Eliminating racism in the White women's movement is by definition work for White women to do, but we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue.

The collective explored multiple forms of oppression with an intersectional lens, criticizing how racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism all work together to oppress people in a variety of ways. As the statement proclaims, "The inclusiveness of our politics makes us concerned with any situation that impinges upon the lives of women, Third World and working people." Women in Combahee have since become involved with many forms of activism, even transnationally. Member Margo Okazawa-Rey, for example, went on to earn her doctorate in education from Harvard, to hold scholarly positions across the nation, and to produce scholarship and engage in direct activism focusing on militarism, violence against women, and capitalism. She is a cofounder of PeaceWomen Across the Globe, which networks women peace activists transnationally and works to make women's contributions visible.

Another example of intersectional activism beyond American borders can be seen in Senegal, where the SEED (Sports for Education and Economic Development) Project uses basketball as a way to engage youth from the African nations of Senegal and the Gambia (SEED 2023). SEED provides students with academic and sports opportunities to increase youth participation in educational and leadership initiatives. Their goal is to equip young people with tools they can use to make an impact in their home countries.

Because its student body includes young men and women with diverse interests from different geographical areas, SEED has learned to adapt to diverse student-identified needs. SEED alumna Mame Fatou Konare's experiences with the program exemplify this. As a youth, Konare attended and played basketball at SEED. As an adult, she returned to collaborate with the team as their content strategist. When she saw some SEED students—especially girls—expressing interest in science, biology, and horticulture, she used her skills working with community gardens to create one for SEED and to teach gardening and horticulture classes to SEED participants. Her willingness to grow SEED's programming in response to the needs of some of the participants (mostly girls) illustrates how an intersectional approach (i.e., making sure that the differing needs of participants are acknowledged and addressed) can benefit many. Once the garden was built and classes were running, more youth (including more boys) became engaged with the community garden and began learning about the science associated with it.

As these examples make clear, when people acknowledge the diversity within oppressed groups, their efforts to combat injustice can potentially impact a much larger number of lives. Ida B. Wells forced people to recognize gender- and race-based violence as it manifested in lynching. Pushing second-wave feminists to acknowledge their racial biases totally transformed feminism. And rural Latin

American women gathering collectively helped bridge a class divide and bring urban and rural women together to address capitalism's negative impacts in the region.

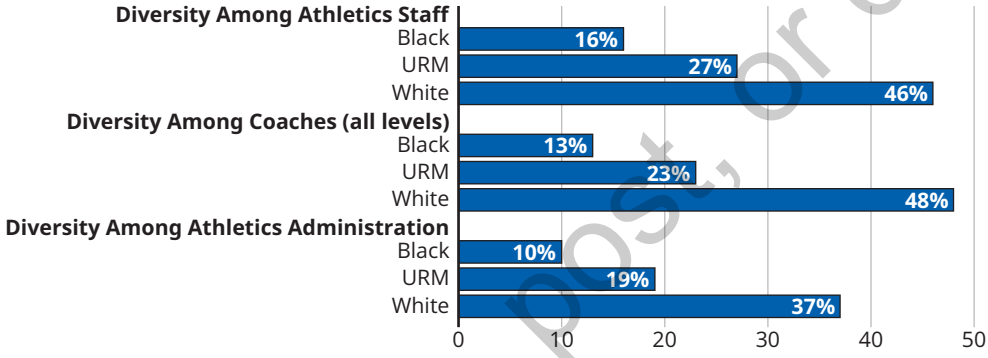
DOING SOCIOLOGY 1.3: INTERSECTIONAL DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Learning Objective 1.3: What is intersectionality, and how does it help us understand the ways people experience racial inequality?

For this exercise, you will explore the usefulness of intersectional data.

In 2020, Louisiana State University's Athletics Department conducted a racial climate survey (Becker and Clayton 2021). Figure 1.1 shows the percentage of Black, White, and "underrepresented minority" (URM) (i.e., Black, Asian/Asian American, Native or Indigenous, Latino/a/x, and multiracial) employees who reported satisfaction with diversity in three areas of LSU Athletics. Look at the figure. Then write answers to the following questions:

FIGURE 1.1 ■ Percentage of Full-Time Employees Reporting Satisfaction With Racial and Ethnic Diversity of Athletics Staff, Coaches, and Athletic Administration



Source: Adapted from data in Becker and Clayton (2021).

1. What does the figure tell us?
2. Now, imagine what the figure might look like if it included data on not just the race of respondents (Black/White/URM) but also on their gender (e.g., indicating respondents as Black women, men, and trans/nonbinary folks; White women, men, and trans/nonbinary folks, etc.) and on their social class. What might this intersectional data reveal that we cannot see in the present figure? Be prepared to share your thoughts with your classmates.

Instructor's Note: This can be done in class and shared in small groups or done as homework and brought back to class to share. Connecting the exercise with climate survey data from your own institution or concepts from your class could be useful as well. For online classes, thoughts can be shared in video or written discussion forums.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What is intersectionality?
2. Who is Ida B. Wells, and how was her work intersectional?
3. How does intersectionality help explain the tensions between second- and third-wave feminists?
4. How can using an intersectional approach help transform activist work?
5. Why are intersectional data important when understanding social topics?

DEFINING TERMS RELATED TO RACE AND ETHNICITY

You will need to understand sociological terms used in this class. For example, it is hard to have a good discussion of racism if not everyone knows the sociological definition of the concept.

Prejudice is believing one group is superior to another. Prejudice can occur without power or action. Anyone can be prejudiced. **Ethnocentrism** is believing one's own ethnic group is superior to others and therefore seeing other groups' language, cultural practices, and other ethnic distinctions as inferior in comparison to one's own. **Discrimination** occurs when somebody treats people differently based on prejudicial beliefs about their race, ethnicity, sex, class, age, sexual orientation, ability, religion, belief system, or other aspect of their status. Anyone can engage in discrimination. Not everyone has the power to make their prejudicial feelings or discriminatory actions impactful, however.

Racism exists when prejudicial beliefs and/or discriminatory actions lead to widespread harm for a racial group(s) because members of the prejudiced/discriminatory group are disproportionately in positions of power. Racism *can* involve coupling (a) the *belief* that one racial group is superior to another and (b) the power to enforce *actions* in favor of the preferred group and to the detriment of other groups. However, we can find many examples of racism without anyone involved ever saying they think White people are superior or that Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, Latinx, Native American, or multiracial people are of any less value or worth. In other words, racism today can exist without overt prejudice, as simply part of the normal operation of society.

The Emergence of Colorblind Racism

One of the ways racism today can exist without openly admitted prejudice is through **colorblind racism**, a racial ideology colloquially referred to as "racism lite" by sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2018). It operates discreetly, with social actors who frequently make mention of "not seeing color" while advocating for policies that create or maintain structural inequalities such as mass incarceration, housing discrimination, and wealth inequality. We discuss this more in later chapters.

DOING SOCIOLOGY 1.4: APPLYING SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN REAL LIFE

Learning Objective 1.4: What are the sociological definitions of race, ethnicity, prejudice, discrimination, ethnocentrism, and racism?

In this exercise, you will apply sociological concepts to real-life examples, fostering a deeper understanding of these terms through personal reflection and application.

Instructions

Reflect on Personal Experiences

Think of a recent event or situation in the news, your community, or your personal experience where concepts of race, ethnicity, prejudice, discrimination, ethnocentrism, or racism were evident. Briefly describe, in writing, how this situation illustrates the concepts of race as a social construction, ethnicity, ethnocentrism, prejudice, discrimination, or the connection between racism and power.

Group Discussion

Share With Peers: In a small group, briefly describe the situation you reflected upon. Discuss how it relates to the sociological concepts mentioned.

Apply Concepts

As a group, discuss the following for each concept:

- How did the situation illustrate race as a social construction?
- In what ways were ethnicity and ethnocentrism factors in the situation?
- Can you identify instances of prejudice and discrimination?
- How did power dynamics play a role in the manifestation of racism?

Instructor's Note, Time Allocation:

- *Reflect on Personal Experiences: 5 minutes*
- *Group Discussion: 10 minutes*

This activity is structured to move students from personal reflection to collaborative analysis, applying theoretical concepts to real-life contexts. It encourages students to engage deeply with sociological terms in a way that personalizes and contextualizes their understanding. If teaching an online class, you could have students answer all the questions individually for an assignment or share their answers via group discussion boards.

Instructor's Note: For in-person classes, we suggest that you have students compete in groups to see who can come up with accurate answers the fastest, having students write their answers on a whiteboard and calling out when they are done. You will check for accuracy as you award points for all correct answers. We suggest giving participation points to everyone who participates and bonus points (or a similar incentive) to the winning team. In online or large classes, students can participate in the quiz via an app like Kahoot or via quiz systems built into your web teaching software.

Structural, Cultural, and Interpersonal Racism

Structural mechanisms that reproduce racism are often seen as racially neutral. **Structural mechanisms** are large-scale factors and practices typically constructed by people (historically, almost always White) in positions of power. No particular person has full control over them. Instead, they are built into institutions and legal systems. Housing segregation is a good example. Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton's (1993) groundbreaking work *American Apartheid* identifies racial residential segregation as a principal cause of racial inequality in American society. Racial segregation in housing leads to multiple types of racial disparities (e.g., in wealth, education, interactions with the criminal justice system, and exposure to pollution and other environmental problems).

People also experience racial oppression through culture. This can be seen in misrepresentation or misuse of cultural symbols, music, art, religious beliefs, legal systems, food, language, or other aspects of people of color's traditions and histories for more powerful (typically White) groups' entertainment or profit. A prominent example is school and sports teams' use of images of Native American peoples for mascots. Consider the Washington Redskins in American football or Cleveland Indians in baseball. Mascots for both teams used Native images adorned with sacred iconography—clothing, headdresses, jewelry, prayer sounds, acts of war—but stripped of their original meaning, promoting a corrupted, distorted, inauthentic, and damaging portrayal of Native American populations (Guiliano 2013). In 2020, after years of protests by many Native American and other social justice organizations and as widespread support for #BlackLivesMatter grew (Buchanan, Bui, and Patel 2020), Washington's football team announced it would finally change its name, and Cleveland's baseball team dropped "Indians" (De la Fuente and Sterling 2020). Washington became the Commanders in 2022 (Young 2022) and Cleveland changed their name to the Guardians at the end of the 2021 season (ESPN News Services 2021).

People also experience racism interpersonally, or in social actions, communications, or exchanges between two or more people in small or intimate groups. Often exhibited in the form of **racial microaggressions**, or harmful interpersonal statements or behaviors (usually by White people toward people of color), individuals who are not negatively impacted by such interactions typically do not notice them. For example, White people may be unaware of the pain associated with the following examples of microaggressions:

- A Muslim woman of color wearing a headscarf getting scowled at in the supermarket
- People touching a Black woman's hair without asking
- A coworker assuming his Mexican friend always wants to eat tacos

Other more obvious microaggressions you may have encountered include a friend or family member asking someone who looks racially ambiguous, "What are you?"; someone asking an Asian, Latinx, or other person of color, "Where are you *really* from?" when they first provide an answer like "Minneapolis"; individuals assuming an Asian person is successful in school *because* they are Asian; or people speaking louder to a Latinx person because they assume they can't speak English well. These interactions may seem innocuous, but all function to identify the person as other or not belonging.

More serious forms of racism can be found in interpersonal relations, too. Widespread discrimination in employment, for example, can start at the interpersonal level. Research consistently demonstrates that even before entry into the workplace, people of color are screened by race, limiting their opportunities for success. Several formal and informal studies (see Kang et al. 2016 and Gerdeman 2017, among others) have shown people with White-sounding names are much more likely to be invited for an interview than those with Black, Latinx, Asian, or other names of (assumed) non-White racial or foreign origin. Later chapters cover this topic in more depth. At its base, however, practices like these position White people for higher levels of employment and economic success while disadvantaging people of color.

Consider This

Researchers have found evidence of interpersonal discrimination at American universities, such as White admissions officers being less likely to answer inquiries from Black applicants whom they perceive as "too concerned" with race and racism (Thornhill 2019) or experiencing overt and covert racism on campus such as racist humor and negative stereotyping (Osbourne, Barnett, and Blackwood 2023). How could these practices benefit White students and disadvantage students of color?

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What are prejudice, ethnocentrism, and discrimination, and how are these concepts distinct from racism?
2. What are racial microaggressions?
3. What are some examples of racism at the structural, cultural, and interpersonal levels?
4. What is colorblind racism?
5. What are some ways people can experience oppression through culture?

HOW YOU CAN PREPARE FOR THIS CLASS

If we look across research covered in this chapter, one thing should be clear: taking a class about race, racism, or race relations will not be the same experience for everyone. If you've gone through life "not seeing color" or were encouraged to believe people of color are poor, less educated, or locked up at higher rates because of character flaws such as laziness or their community's lack of morals or inability to raise children "the right way," you have a lot to unpack before you can accurately understand how race influences modern social life. If you've experienced or witnessed these manifestations of racial inequality directly, you might begin the class with a stronger understanding of racial inequality but could have to deal with listening to classmates go through the messy process of unlearning victim-blaming logics that situate causes of racial disadvantage in the people who disproportionately experience it (Becker and Paul 2015).

Things to Expect

Courses on race are also about *power*. This means you need to learn how race and racism benefit people in a dominant group while harming marginalized persons. In other words, it means studying both people of color and White people. It also means diving into what history and social science tell us

about how power works. You will examine mechanisms and practices that create and sustain race-based uneven access to resources, opportunities, and positive life outcomes, while being mindful of how other aspects of a person's status (such as gender, class, or nationality) affect their experiences with race.

Studying race when people are often discouraged from talking about or acknowledging it for fear of being labeled racist or of being accused of "playing the race card" can be difficult. It is likely to be uncomfortable. Prepare yourself for this. Rather than fighting against the discomfort, you can anticipate and potentially accept it.

Studies show that White students unfamiliar with accurate historical accounts of racial slavery or of people's struggles to fight racial inequality might experience challenging emotions in a class on race: guilt, anger, resentment, or fear, for example (DiAngelo 2018; Harris 2018). Students of color might experience a different set of challenging emotions, such as anxiety, depression, or frustration (Mitchell and Donahue 2009; Tatum 2017; Bonilla-Silva 2019). But there can also be emotional overlap and space for connection. Picture a White student who grew up in a mostly Mexican working-class neighborhood. They might not share experiences with wealthy White peers who grew up in all-White spaces. Think of an upper-middle-class multiracial woman with a White dad and Black mother. She might just be coming to understand how social class and light skin (if she has it) gave her privileges her Black peers who grew up working poor didn't get. So, while you can anticipate discomfort associated with honestly addressing racial inequality and racism, you can also prepare for the liberation that comes from facing emotionally challenging subjects head-on with openness, bravery, and integrity.

Racial Terminology in This Book

As you read this book, you will notice that we use a variety of terms to indicate the different racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Depending on generation, region, context, and various other factors, people within the same racial or ethnic group often use different terminology (e.g., Native, Native American, Indigenous, American Indian, Indian, specific tribal affiliation and Hispanic, Latino, Latina, Latinx, specific nation). We also capitalize *Black* and *White* when referring to these two racial groups. This helps us relay that Black and White "are both historically created racial identities" (Appiah 2020). It is important to remember that racial and ethnic terms, like race and ethnicity themselves, are socially constructed and vary over time and place.

Be Aware That Race and Racism Affect Everyone—Even Toddlers

Many people believe young children "don't see race." Debra VanAusdale and Joe Feagin's (2001) *The First R: How Children Learn about Race and Racism* blows this assumption out of the water with data gathered in a daycare observing and carefully documenting kids' behavior. Their work shows how children as young as 2 or 3 quickly ascertain race-based meanings associating Whiteness with goodness and superiority. Consider a boy who is a member of an interracial family. By the age of 3, he had already picked up on White beauty standards, complimenting his White sisters' hair as "pretty" while insisting his thick, curly hair was not. In addition, little kids quickly learn adults are uncomfortable talking about race and do not want them talking about it either. As a result, preschoolers in VanAusdale and Feagin's study knew to keep their comments about racial difference, often issued in the midst of play, out of adults' earshot. This allowed adults to continue to believe little kids don't see race.

DOING SOCIOLOGY 1.5: WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW HAVE YOU TALKED ABOUT RACE?

Learning Objective 1.5: How might you best handle the challenges that come with a course about race and ethnicity?

In this exercise, you will think about why and how conversations about race differ among racial groups.

Write answers to the following questions and be prepared to share your thoughts on Question 3:

1. Did your parents talk to you frankly about race as a child? Did they give you "the talk" about "surviving interactions with police or other members of authority" (Whitaker 2016:303) and/or facing racism in America?
2. Have you witnessed "two-faced" racism, where White people in all-White spaces openly express prejudice (Picca and Feagin 2007)?
3. How do you think your answers to these questions might compare to your peers'? Your classmates'? Why?
4. How might your past racial experiences affect your ability to connect with or understand other members of this class?

Instructor's Note: This activity should be completed individually by students, after they have read the first chapter. They should submit their answers to the instructor with no names attached. This gives students an opportunity to consider these questions in a safe way and gives the instructor a better understanding of the racial experiences of the students in the class. Having them discuss their answers to Question 3 in person in small groups or on a discussion board can help them start to get to know one another and feel more comfortable talking about their own racial experiences.

VanAusdale and Feagin's data underscore a theme in this chapter: many Americans, in particular White Americans, have been taught since a very young age that talking about race is taboo. For that reason, honest and respectful conversation about it can be incredibly challenging in a classroom setting. A few basic guidelines of engagement can help make your classroom experience less turbulent, though, if you adopt them.

First: Be radically self-honest. Being honest with yourself about what you have learned and experienced around race in your lifetime is a crucial starting point. For example, it's important to identify any racist ideas you've internalized. Without acknowledging them and understanding where they come from, you cannot change the ways they might impact your behavior. Interrogating your own beliefs and experiences is a crucial step on the path to developing a fuller and more accurate picture of how race and racism impact your life and society, broadly speaking.

Second: Choose to believe one another. If someone shares an experience or viewpoint, you and your classmates can analyze it, think about its connection to broader social patterns, explore its ramifications, and link it to course materials. Sharing personal stories can be scary in a classroom full of strangers, especially when learning about race and racism, which many of us have been taught to deny or not talk about—so give each other the benefit of the doubt. Believe what people say about their own lives, even when subjecting one another's experiences to critical analysis.

Third: Recognize the difference between personal opinions and research. No one has the authority to speak for *all* straight people, gay people, people of color, women, men, students at your university, or even for *one* other person without their consent. Say what *you* believe and feel when talking about a personal experience or viewpoint. If making an assertion beyond that, find research-based evidence to support it and cite the studies you reference. Always be clear about which of the two you are doing. Ask yourself, *Am I talking about personal views or discussing research findings? How can I be clear, careful, and honest about the sources of my knowledge?*

CONCLUSION

As you can see, taking a course focused on race and ethnicity can be illuminating and challenging. It can also be empowering. The first step in understanding racial and ethnic issues today is learning how they affected society's past, as Chapter 2 will help you do.

CHAPTER REVIEW

1.1 What is race and how does it influence people's experiences today?

Race is a system of organizing people into groups *perceived* to be distinct because of physical appearance (not genetic makeup). Race and racism formed the basis for racial slavery in the

Americas and its impact persists today. The effects of race and racism can be seen throughout society and in the lives of individuals. Your experiences and opportunities are influenced by your race and racism in society.

1.2 How are racial categories tied to power, and how have they changed in meaning over time?
In addition to its rootedness in racial slavery and violence against Indigenous people, other aspects of race reveal its ties to power. One way power can be seen is in the invisibility of Whiteness. Whiteness is often seen as neutral or generically "human." No one calls traditional Santa images "White Santa," for example, in the way they call him "Black Santa" if he is Black. In addition, the U.S. census helps us see how racial categorizations have changed in law and social practice over time.

1.3 What is intersectionality? How does intersectionality help us understand the ways people experience racial inequality?
Intersectionality refers to seeing how social categories we belong to—such as class, gender, and race—are interconnected and work together to reinforce our advantages or disadvantages in society. It helps reveal things like (a) how women's experiences vary according to factors like race, citizenship status, and social class or (b) how men and women's experiences with race and ethnicity might be dissimilar.

1.4 What are the sociological definitions of race, ethnicity, prejudice, discrimination, ethnocentrism, and racism?
Prejudice is believing one group is superior to another. Ethnocentrism is believing one's own ethnic group is superior to others and the practice of negatively assessing other groups' languages, cultural practices, and other ethnic distinctions in comparison to one's own. Discrimination occurs when somebody treats a person differently based on prejudicial beliefs about their race, ethnicity, sex, class, age, sexual orientation, ability, religion, belief system, or other aspect of status. Racism is when prejudicial beliefs and/or discriminatory actions lead to widespread harm for a specific racial group because members of the prejudiced/discriminatory group are disproportionately in positions of power. In an era of colorblindness, racism can also exist without overt prejudice.

1.5 How might you best handle the challenges that come with a course about race and ethnicity?
Be honest with yourself about preexisting beliefs you carry into class. Unpacking them, thinking about where they come from, choosing to believe people who share experiences in class, and being clear about the difference between personal opinion and research can help make a challenging academic dive into race, ethnicity, ethnocentrism, and racism easier for yourself and your peers.

KEY TERMS

Colonialism
Colorblind racism
Discrimination
Ethnicity
Ethnocentrism
Intersectionality
Power
Prejudice
Race
Racial microaggressions
Racial slavery
Racism
Socially constructed
Structural mechanisms

NOTE

1. *Latinx* is a gender-neutral and nonbinary term used in place of *Latino/Latina* or *Hispanic*.

Robert Abbott Sengstacke via Getty Images

2 IDENTIFYING RACISM THROUGHOUT U.S. HISTORY

Stacye Blount

LEARNING QUESTIONS

2.1 Why is racism a fundamental part of U.S. history?

2.2 What are some examples of systemic racism in U.S. history?

2.3 How did racism in the field of sociology hurt Black sociologists—including W. E. B. Du Bois?

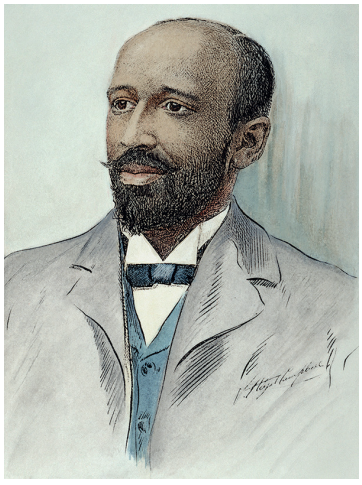
2.4 How can we use the sociological imagination to explain the effects of systemic racism on individual lives?

INTRODUCTION

In his book *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/1997, 3) stated that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." The term **color line** refers to segregation between White and Black people in the United States. Du Bois maintained that racial inequities related to wealth, education, housing, and safety are inextricably tied to this color line problem.

Living in a society with this color line forced what Du Bois called a **double consciousness** onto Black Americans. He used this term to describe an individual whose identity is split into two parts—one around Black people and one around White people. When in the presence of White people, he sees himself through their eyes (as a Black person rather than an American). Du Bois (1903/1997) writes,

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (38)



Sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963).
Sarin Images/GRANGER

This race-based color line also denied Black Americans the privileges and rights attached to their American identity.

The Souls of Black Folk was published in 1903, at the beginning of the 20th century. Why was racism still a problem decades after the Civil War and the abolishment of slavery? Why did racial issues persist well into the 21st century, more than a hundred years after Du Bois wrote those words? What systemic forces have infused race and racism into U.S. society? This chapter provides the answers to these questions and shows how race and racism are inextricably linked to the history of the United States.

HOW I GOT ACTIVE IN SOCIOLOGY

Stacye Blount

I have to admit that my journey to becoming active in sociology was not a direct route. As a child, science and math courses were very interesting to me. My parents nurtured those interests, and I was on track to pursuing a STEM major in college. Armed with an undergraduate degree in clinical laboratory science, I spent 13 years in the clinical laboratory industry before returning to graduate school to pursue the doctoral degree.

One day, I decided to enroll in a master's-level sociology course just to "see how the other side of academic disciplines thought." I enjoyed the course, and my curiosity was piqued to learn more sociology. Of course, the rest is history. In fall 2010, I began my career as a sociology professor. I have taught medical sociology, sociology of mental health, social change, social movements, social stratification, professional and career development, and senior capstone. It is a joy to engage with students.

SEEING THE BIG PICTURE: THE UNITED STATES AND RACISM

Why did slavery persist even after Thomas Jefferson declared that "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence? The short answer is money. Racism is a fundamental part of U.S. history because it provided justification for exploiting human beings (e.g., Africans, Native Americans) for financial success in a capitalist society. The institutions of race-based slavery and capitalism in the United States were interdependent.

No United States Without Racism

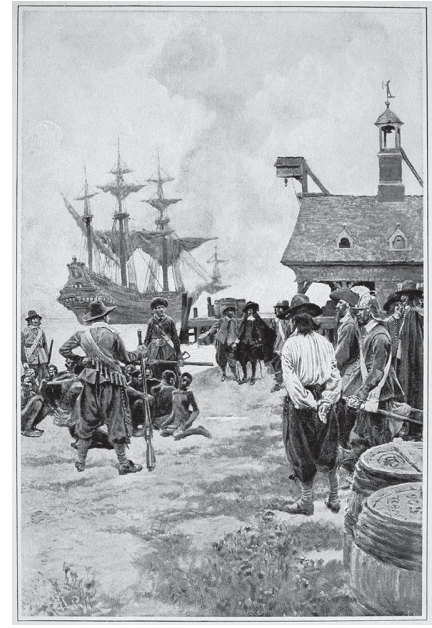
Throughout history, forms of prejudice and discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, and social status have existed in various parts of the world. These prejudices, however, were not racism in the modern sense, which is embedded in a belief in the superiority of one race over others and has been used to justify colonialism, slavery, and the systemic mistreatment of people based on their race. Encounters between Europeans and Native Americans contributed to the development of racial thinking, as Europeans began to categorize peoples and cultures based on physical characteristics and perceived levels of civilization. The concept of race and the institutionalization of racism became more pronounced with the transatlantic slave trade and the colonization of the Americas. These processes relied on and further entrenched the notion of racial differences to justify the enslavement of African peoples and the dispossession and decimation of Native American populations.

In 1619, Jamestown colonists purchased a group of kidnapped Africans from English pirates, and this practice was solidified several decades later when colonists began to equate skin color with free or enslaved status. We discuss this process in more detail in Chapter 8.

The site of abundant land, colonial America, particularly in the South, focused on agricultural production. The South was ideal for farming due to its climate and fertile soil. However, farming, particularly with crops such as indigo, cotton, and tobacco, was tremendously labor intensive. Plantation owners realized that they needed a cheap labor source to make a profit. Enslaved Africans provided such a source.

Although slavery was concentrated more in southern than in northern states, all northern states had enslaved peoples up until the late 1700s. Moreover, in many ways, northerners benefited from enslaved laborers in the South. For example, northerners purchased many of the crops and material objects created on plantations. Northern manufacturers relied on southern plantations to supply the raw material they turned into clothing and other goods (Kendi 2016; Payne, Williams, and Teague 2023).

Northern insurance companies also aided the slave trade directly by underwriting it. For example, insurance companies in Rhode Island covered slave-trading voyages, and Aetna Insurance Company in Connecticut wrote policies on the lives of the enslaved (Groark 2002). Enslavers "could purchase life insurance on their slaves (from some of the most reputable insurance companies in the country) and be paid three-quarters of their market value upon their death" (McGhee 2022:8). Even after the abolishment of slavery in the North, members of both the southern and northern elite were able to pass wealth to their children from profits generated through their slave-related businesses. As noted in Chapter 1, the United States became a financial powerhouse thanks to and at the expense of enslaved laborers.



In 1619, Jamestown colonists purchased a group of enslaved Africans from English pirates.

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DOING SOCIOLOGY 2.1: WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Learning Objective 2.1: Why is racism a fundamental part of U.S. history?

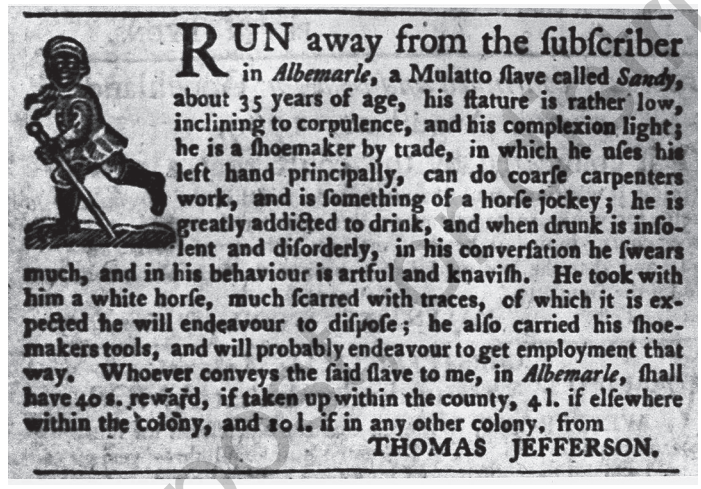
In this exercise, you will put yourself in the shoes of Thomas Jefferson.

One of the reasons Jefferson kept so many people enslaved, despite declaring that all men are created equal, was the fact that he was a big spender, constantly in debt, and the people he enslaved were worth a lot of money. Racist beliefs gave him, and others, an excuse to profit from enslaved labor.

Imagine yourself in Jefferson's shoes in his Virginia society during the late 1700s and early 1800s. If you free the people you enslave, you will be in even greater debt and never be able to pay back all you owe. Your wealthy peers will view you as a traitor to your ("superior") race. You will have no money to hire people to work on your plantation. You will become financially ruined and lose much of your social status. Most people will think you have lost your mind.

Write answers to the following questions:

1. What would you do? Why?
2. In what ways would society have had to change to lead most people to view Jefferson's acts as an enslaver unjust?
3. How does Jefferson's life as an enslaver illustrate how racism is a fundamental part of the history of U.S. society (including the roots of its economic system)?
4. How does this exercise help reveal how society influences the beliefs and actions of individuals?


RUN away from the ſubſcriber in *Albemarle*, a Mulatto ſlave called *Sandy*, about 35 years of age, his ſtature is rather low, inclining to corpulence, and his complexion light; he is a ſhoemaker by trade, in which he uſes his left hand principally, can do coarſe carpenters work, and is ſomething of a horſe jockey; he is greatly addicted to drink, and when drunk is inſolent and diſorderly, in his converſation he ſwears much, and in his behaviour is artful and knaviſh. He took with him a white horſe, much ſcarred with traces, of which it is expected he will endeavour to diſpoſe; he alſo carried his ſhoemakers tools, and will probably endeavour to get employment that way. Whoever conveys the ſaid ſlave to me, in *Albemarle*, ſhall have 40 s. reward, if taken up within the county, 4 l. if elſewhere within the colony, and 20 l. if in any other colony, from
THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States, professed to hate slavery but kept hundreds of enslaved people whom he forced to work for him.

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The United States Constitution and Racism

The first constitution for the United States, the **Articles of Confederation**, did not mention slavery and left decisions about it to individual states. As it quickly became apparent that the new country would not survive without a stronger federal government, political leaders began work on a new constitution. They knew if the new constitution threatened slavery, southern delegates would not sign it and the new nation would disintegrate.

To appease southern members of the Constitutional Convention, the northern delegates agreed to include in the Constitution that Congress could not abolish the international slave trade before 1808, taxes on imported enslaved people would not exceed $10, and enslaved people who ran away must be returned to their enslavers (Lloyd and Martinez 2023). Delegates also agreed on a compromise that, for representation and tax purposes, enslaved peoples would count as three-fifths of a person. This allowed southern states to gain more representatives in the House of Representatives. So, to gain approval for the Constitution from all the states, slavery remained an integral part of the United States. The division it created between the North and the South, however, remained—the Constitution simply papered over it.

Consider This

Imagine if the northern delegates did not compromise on the issue of slavery. In what kind of society might you be living now? How would it differ from the United States we know today?

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Why did racial slavery take root in colonial America?
2. How did many northerners benefit from the institution of slavery in the South?
3. Why did northern delegates to the Constitutional Convention compromise with southern delegates when they created the U.S. Constitution still used today?

RACISM AND SYSTEMIC RACISM

Sociologist Joe Feagin (2006) developed the term **systemic racism** to explain the significance of race and racism from a historical context. He states that the way slavery is embedded in the history of the United States created systemic racism—racism present in its institutions, the very fabric of society. Feagin (2012) describes systemic racism as the deeply rooted, institutionalized racial oppression that gives the dominant group (White people in the United States) power over individuals of color. As noted in Chapter 1, in the United States, racial discrimination exists at the individual (one person discriminates against another person based on race or ethnicity), institutional (policies, laws, and institutions produce and reproduce racial inequities), and structural (interactions across institutions produce and reproduce racial inequities) levels. Systemic racism takes place at the institutional and structural levels and has the power to affect far more people than individual-level racism.

While certain forms of **institutional racism** might be obvious, others might be more difficult to notice because it is embedded in institutions, laws, and policies and "just the way things work." Those who help run the institutions and carry out the laws and policies might not want to hurt people of color or even be aware that they are doing so. Some examples of institutional racism over the history of the United States include slavery, redlining (a government-endorsed policy that prevented individuals of color from buying homes in certain areas), Jim Crow laws (e.g., laws that legalized segregation in the United States), predatory lending practices, exclusion from unions and other organizations, underfunding schools in neighborhoods with a high percentage of people of color, and racial discrimination in the science and medical fields.

Structural racism focuses on the accumulation of the effects of a racialized society over time and interactions among institutions that reinforce racial inequality. For example, past policies that produce racial inequality in housing affect where people of color can go to school, which can lead to fewer opportunities in the labor market. Likewise, racial inequality in housing can lead to health problems that disproportionately affect subordinate racial groups, such as asthma and lead poisoning.

Once you start looking, it is easy to see examples of systemic racism throughout U.S. history. In this next section, we provide some examples of systemic racism faced by various racial and ethnic groups in the American colonies and the United States. We also look at how scientific racism supported such treatment and led to horrific types of racial discrimination.

Consider This

Why is it more important to focus on the institutional and structural effects of systemic racism than on the effects of individual racism?

Racism and Genocide Against American Indians

White colonists used ideas of racial inferiority to try to justify their treatment of Native American bodies, culture, and land. For example, Europeans concluded that American Indians did not make "good use" of land because they did not use it as Europeans did. While they made good use of the resources supplied by the land, they did not treat it as a commodity or clear huge swaths of it for farmland, like

settlers from Europe tended to do. The European colonists used this ethnocentric observation as an excuse to take land from American Indians through whatever means necessary. White colonists seeking land pressed the government to let them push the American Indians out of more fertile land to the west of the colonies. The removal of American Indians from their land occurred from the colonial era through the urbanization movement in the 1950s. You will read more about it in Chapter 6.

Building railroads was one of the dangerous jobs that Asian male immigrants undertook in the United States.

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This image shows immigrants from Ukraine and Poland. These two countries are in eastern Europe. Eastern European immigrants were once considered "less than" White.

Rue des Archives/GRANGER

Asian Immigrants and Racism in the United States

Asian immigrants first came to the United States in sizable numbers in the 1850s. They were usually males who worked exhausting and dangerous low-skilled jobs such as farming, mining, and building railroads. They faced prejudice and discrimination by White people who saw them as a "yellow peril" and a threat to their jobs. Indeed, negative attitudes toward Asian immigrants prompted the first racially discriminatory immigration laws. You will read much more about this in Chapter 9.

European Ethnic Groups Who Eventually "Became" White

Did you know that at times in U.S. history, not all ethnic Europeans were considered White? For many years, Anglo-Saxon White people tended to view Europeans from eastern and southern Europe (e.g., Italians, Polish, and Russians) as racially inferior to White people. The 1924 Immigration Act created a national origins quota that prohibited all but a small number of individuals from eastern and southern Europe to migrate to the United States. Most of the quota slots went to racially "superior" people from western and northern Europe from Anglo-Saxon backgrounds. You will read how and why the White racial category expanded in Chapter 7.

Latinx Experience With Racism in the United States

Latinxs' dealings with racism in the United States began in earnest in 1848—the year the United States won the Mexican–American War. The Treaty of Guadalupe marked the official end of the war and granted 55% of Mexican territory to the United States (Blakemore 2023). Mexicans who decided to remain in United States territory were granted citizenship, causing the United States to gain a large population of Mexican Americans. Anti-Mexican sentiment quickly grew among White Americans, particularly among those who coveted the land of Mexican Americans. Negative stereotypes and discrimination followed. You will read more about the Latinx experience in Chapter 10.

Scientific Racism and Justifications for Racial Inequalities

Perceptions of racial inferiority developed alongside racial discrimination. As Anglo-Saxon Americans convinced themselves that Africans were inferior to them, the process of dehumanization necessary to enslave and exploit them for financial gain became easier. Racial classifications for human beings gave rise to **scientific racism**, the use of pseudoscience to "prove" the innate racial inferiority of some and the superiority of other racial groups (Harvard University Library 2023). Pseudoscience supported widespread discrimination against African Americans and other non-White groups until World War II, when Adolf Hitler's barbaric use of scientific racism made most people recognize its folly.

During the many decades while scientific racism held sway, the field of eugenics promoted selective breeding and involuntary sterilization of the "biologically and genetically unfit" as appropriate means to ensure that the U.S. population remain racially "strong" and "pure." During the first half of the 20th century and even into the second half, White doctors and scientists sterilized many American Indian, Black, and Puerto Rican women without their consent (National Institutes of Health National Human Genome Research Institute 2022; Nittle 2019). Eugenicists were convinced it was important to implement measures that would keep "undesirables" from producing children and "polluting" the population in the United States.

Henrietta Lacks

Another example of scientific racism is the story of Henrietta Lacks, a poor African American woman whose cancer cells changed the course of medical research (Skloot 2011). In late January 1951, Mrs. Lacks visited the Johns Hopkins Hospital because she was experiencing health challenges. During the years of legal segregation in the United States, the Johns Hopkins Hospital was one of the few hospitals around Baltimore, Maryland, that treated poor African Americans (Johns Hopkins Medicine 2019; Skloot 2011).

When the physician examined Lacks, he found a malignant tumor on her cervix and sent a sample of her cancer cells to a tissue laboratory. The physician in the tissue laboratory recognized that her cells were unique in that they multiplied exponentially in approximately 24 hours. Immediately, medical scientists started using these HeLa cells (*He* for her first name and *La* for her last name) in their own research projects. These scientists harvested her cells without her consent or the notion that they were doing anything wrong. Seven decades after her death on October 4, 1951, scientists are still using Henrietta Lacks's cells to study the effects of various entities on the growth of cancer cells and other medical ailments (Johns Hopkins Medicine 2019; Skloot 2011).

Because of the ability of Lacks's cells to remain alive after multiple cell divisions, the sale of HeLa cells became a multimillion-dollar industry but Lacks's family did not receive any of this money. In 2021, Lacks's descendants filed a lawsuit with Thermo Fisher Scientific Incorporated, a biotechnology company that, according to lawyers for the family, has enriched itself off HeLa cells. The descendants settled with the company in 2023 and finally received some compensation (Public Broadcasting Service 2023).

Consider This

What are your thoughts about Henrietta Lacks's descendants' settlement with the biotechnology company? What might be some reasons why the children did not file a lawsuit before 2021?

Henrietta Lacks was a poor African American woman from Virginia. Her cells, known as HeLa cells, revolutionized medical and scientific research. They were important in the development of the polio vaccine, cloning, gene mapping, and in vitro fertilization.

GL Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

Tuskegee Experiment

From 1932 to 1972, approximately 600 men living in Tuskegee, Alabama, were tapped to participate in a scientific experiment on syphilis. Tuskegee was chosen because at the beginning of the study, it had the highest syphilis rate in the United States. The United States Public Health Service performed the experiment, which involved having men with syphilis undergo blood tests, spinal taps, x-rays, and autopsies (Jones 1993). The one thing the scientists did not do was provide treatment for the sick men. The medical professionals' desire to observe the natural course of untreated syphilis led to approximately 200 men with syphilis never receiving treatment—even after penicillin became a safe and reliable cure for the disease. In 1997, President Clinton publicly apologized on behalf of the U.S. government for the experiment.

DOING SOCIOLOGY 2.2: WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

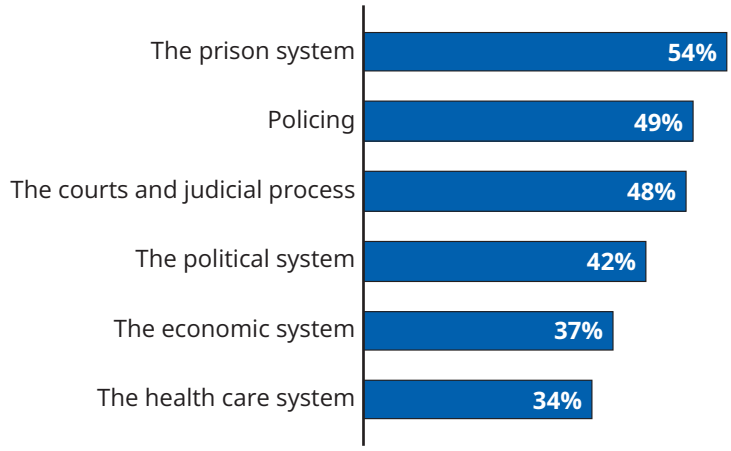
Learning Objective 2.2: What are some examples of systemic racism in U.S. history?

In this exercise, you will use information in this section of the chapter to make sense of the following figure.

Look at Figure 2.1 and answer the following questions:

1. What does this figure tell us?
2. How do these findings help illustrate systemic racism (be sure to define systemic racism)?
3. How do these current data reflect examples of systemic racism in U.S. history?

FIGURE 2.1 ■ Percentage of Black Adults Who Say Each of the Following Needs to Be Completely Rebuilt for Black People to Be Treated Fairly



Source: Pew Research Center, https://www.pewresearch.org/race-ethnicity/2022/08/30/black-americans-have-a-clear-vision-for-reducing-racism-but-little-hope-it-will-happen/

Note: Black adults include those who say their race is Black alone and non-Hispanic, Black and at least one other race and non-Hispanic, or Black and Hispanic. Survey of U.S. adults conducted October 4–17, 2021.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. How did European colonists justify taking land from Native Americans?
2. What is individual racial discrimination?
3. What is institutional racial discrimination?
4. What is structural racial discrimination
5. What is systemic racism?
6. What are some examples of institutional racism?
7. What are some examples of structural racism?
8. What are some examples of institutional racism in the fields of science and medicine?

RACISM AND THE HISTORY OF SOCIOLOGY

People of color have faced racism in many, if not all, fields of work—including academia. For example, although W. E. B. Du Bois made robust contributions to the discipline of sociology, White leaders in sociology tended to ignore his work. Moreover, despite his Harvard education and cutting-edge sociological research, no predominantly White university (PWI) would hire him for a permanent position. He spent much of his time as a professor at Atlanta University (Atlanta, Georgia), a historically Black college and university (HBCU).

DOING SOCIOLOGY 2.3: DISCRIMINATION THROUGH THE YEARS

Learning Objective 2.3: How did racism in the field of sociology hurt Black sociologists—including W. E. B. Du Bois?

This exercise requires you to step outside of the current culture in the United States and recognize discriminatory behavior you may have overlooked.

Answer the following questions in writing. Be prepared to share your answers.

1. What are some examples of how racism in the field of sociology hurt Black sociologists, including W. E. B. Du Bois?
2. If you lived at the same time as W. E. B. Du Bois, would you face discrimination? Why?
3. What is an example of commonplace discriminatory behavior today that people of the future might be appalled by?
4. Were any of these questions difficult to answer? Why or why not?

Du Bois's work contrasted sharply with the racist views held by most White social scientists during his life (Lewis 2022; Morris 2022; Itzigsohn and Brown 2020; Romero 2019; Morris 2017). Most of his work involved studying and advocating for Black Americans—a subject many White sociologists deemed unimportant. Robert E. Park, a leading sociologist based at the University of Chicago, the home of the first department of sociology, knew of Du Bois's contributions to sociology. However, he and most other White sociologists did not give credit to his research in their writings or expose their students to his findings. The lack of inclusion in mainstream sociology affected Du Bois's access to funding for research and influence in the field during his lifetime.

Although ignored by most prominent White sociologists, under Du Bois's leadership at Atlanta University, the Atlanta Sociological Research Laboratory made many important contributions to the discipline of sociology in the areas of race and ethnicity, class, gender, the sociology of religion, urban sociology, and research methodology (Wright 2018). He was one of the first sociologists to conduct large-scale field and survey research. During his tenure at Atlanta University, he directed the annual Atlanta Conferences where scholars convened to discuss race, social change, and social justice (Morris 2017). Du Bois was also a civil rights activist organizing and inspiring people in the United States and many other areas of the world. He was one of the first to organize Black people across nations. One of his many accomplishments, still evident today, is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which he cofounded and where he served as editor of *The Crisis* magazine.

Consider This

Do you think your race will influence your professional opportunities? Why or why not?

A More Inclusive Sociology

Today, sociology is a much more inclusive discipline and one of the most racially diverse. Many sociologists apply their research findings to help create and test social policies and to advocate for solutions to social challenges, as Du Bois did (American Sociological Association 2023). **Social policy** refers to the implementation of a course of action through a formal program or law, and **advocacy** denotes the employment of resources to empower communities. Shawna Feemster, the sociologist in action featured in this chapter, discusses how undergraduate and graduate preparation in sociology provided the platform for her to carry out her service work more effectively and to seize opportunities to advocate for others at her alma mater.

SOCIOLOGISTS IN ACTION

THE GIFT OF SOCIOLOGY: AN ABUNDANCE OF OPPORTUNITIES AT MY ALMA MATER

Shawna Feemster

My interest in sociology was ignited by a Marriage and Family course that I completed at a community college and then deepened with my experience in the workforce. When I became employed at the Autism Society of North Carolina, I began to provide in-home services for families with

varying religious practices, customs, races, and ethnic backgrounds—many of which were new to me. I knew that taking more courses in sociology would give me the tools I needed to interact with these families effectively. I went on to earn my bachelor's and then my master's degree in sociology from Fayetteville State University (FSU), a historically Black college and university (HBCU) founded in 1867 by seven African American free men.

Source: Shawna Feemster

As an undergraduate student at FSU, I was a member of the Sociology Club and Bronco Women, a student organization that engaged in service projects on and off campus. Membership in these organizations allowed me to put my sociological tools into practice by engaging in community service and gaining social capital by networking with members of other organizations and campus offices. The completion of the undergraduate degree imbued me with the confidence to pursue the graduate degree. Since attaining my master's degree, I have been able to teach sociology courses and advise sociology majors. This has allowed me to help others gain sociological knowledge and insights and reach their own personal and professional goals.

What's the icing on the cake? Being able to engage in professional experiences at my alma mater—an HBCU with a mission to help Black students excel.

Discussion Questions

1. What experience or experiences sparked your interest in sociology?
2. How have you been able to connect sociology to your own experiences?

Shawna Feemster is a professional academic advisor for sociology majors and majors in the Intelligence Studies, Geospatial Science, Political Science, and History Department at Fayetteville State University in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. How did racism affect W. E. B. Du Bois's career in sociology?
2. What are some of W. E. B. Du Bois's professional accomplishments?
3. In what ways has the field of sociology changed from what it was like when Du Bois was looking for his first position as a sociology professor?

USING SOCIOLOGY TO RECOGNIZE AND ADDRESS SYSTEMIC RACISM

Sociology is unique in that it helps us to see how social forces influence our personal experiences. Turn your attention now to one sociologist, C. Wright Mills, who developed a concept that helps us see the connection between individuals and larger social forces and how it is more effective to address social issues on a societal, rather than individual, level.

Using the Sociological Imagination to Uncover and Address Systemic Racism

In *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills (1959/2000) proposed that optimal critical thinking about the social world requires individuals to develop and use their **sociological imagination**, the ability to view our personal experiences and lives within a broader social context. The sociological imagination allows us to connect social problems in our own lives with larger social forces. For example, if you are having difficulty paying for college, this experience is connected to the larger social problem of the cost of college across the United States increasing dramatically over the past several decades. The reasons for this cost increase (e.g., a decline in state support for public education, fewer government grants

and subsidized loans for college students, competition among colleges to build the most appealing campuses and provide the most services for students, etc.) are institutional. Trying to address it on an individual basis (e.g., working multiple jobs, dropping out of school) will not put a dent in the overall problem. Social problems like the high cost of college (or racism) require solutions at the institutional, rather than the individual, level.

Experiences unique to individuals or small groups (e.g., making yourself happy or sad by winning or losing a board game, stubbing your toe, getting first dibs on dessert), on the other hand, are best addressed within the confines of your personal sphere. They do not relate to larger social forces. It is experiences connected to social patterns that affect a lot of people (e.g., effects of the climate crisis, racial segregation in schools, voter suppression) that are best addressed on the societal level. Next, we look at how we might address some race-related social issues today.

Food Apartheid and Access to Healthy Foods

Consider access to healthy foods in neighborhoods. Karen Washington coined the term **food apartheid** to describe geographic locations that lack access to healthy foods because it reflects how oppressive systems create food deserts, food mirages, and food swamps (Bioneers 2022). The term *food apartheid* helps us grasp a historical understanding of food systems and identify inequitable systems of power that control food consumption, production, and distribution.

You may have heard the words *food desert, food swamp*, and/or *food mirage* to describe certain locations based on the availability of and access to healthy foods in them. Each refers to a different type of food inequality. A **food desert** is a term used to describe a geographic location where residents' access to fresh food, particularly fruits and vegetables, is very limited or nonexistent due to the lack of grocery stores in close proximity. **Food swamps** are locales with an overabundance of food that does not have nutritional value (e.g., lots of fast-food restaurants) (Slow Food USA 2023). A **food mirage** refers to a location where food is plentiful but at costs that make it out of reach for many area residents.

Why do such areas exist? Their origins can be traced back to institutional racist practices including racially restrictive covenants and redlining (Sullivan 2023). Up until the late 1960s, such practices were legal. **Racially restrictive covenants** were agreements in which property owners refused to sell homes to certain racial groups. **Redlining** refers to exclusionary practices, required by the U.S. government, that prohibited banks from giving mortgages for homes in areas with a large number of people of color.

These practices made it almost impossible for Black middle-class families to join in the movement from cities to suburbs, which many White families embarked on after World War II. When middle-class White people moved into new suburban neighborhoods, businesses, including grocery stores, moved there as well. They wanted to continue to take advantage of the spending habits common among White people. Thus, many poor urban areas where many people of color lived were left without access to supermarkets that sell healthy foods.

To end the root cause of the lack of healthy food in economically distressed, racially segregated neighborhoods, we must address the effects of past discrimination and change the policies that perpetuate racial segregation in housing. People without a sociological imagination, however, will not notice the connection among present and past racially discriminatory practices and policies and what individuals eat. People without a sociological perspective tend to perceive choices made within constrained circumstances as being based on personal tastes rather than systemic racism. This allows many policymakers to ignore the constricted circumstances within which individuals in poor urban areas must make food choices and permit food deserts, swamps, and mirages to persist.

This lack of attention to social issues has many negative social repercussions. People with access to only unhealthy food tend to gain weight—and weight-related health problems—from consistent consumption of foods laden with artificial ingredients and refined sugar and processed in a manner designed to increase rather than decrease feelings of hunger. All these—and more—negative repercussions of a lack of healthy food increase the cost of health care for everyone.

Some policymakers *have* made these connections and taken steps to address social issues related to institutional racism. For example, the decision to expand the Child Tax Credit demonstrates how government intervention can have a positive effect and how elected leaders can directly impact the lives of individual Americans. When lawmakers decided to expand the Child Tax Credit through President

Biden's American Rescue Plan (aimed at bringing the nation back from the negative economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic), an additional 2.9 million children were lifted out of poverty. This was particularly helpful for low-income families of color, who make up a disproportionate percentage of families eligible for child tax credits (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2023). Unfortunately, lawmakers then allowed this expansion to expire after 1 year, returning these children and their families to lives of poverty.

Some state lawmakers' decision to provide free school lunch meals to all public school students in their state—regardless of family income—provides another example of how government can assist with tackling food apartheid. The pandemic-era funds provided by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for free school lunches for all U.S. schoolchildren expired in June 2022, leaving states to decide if they would continue the program themselves with their own funds. Eight states decided to continue offering free school lunches: California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Vermont (Meisner 2023). In doing so, they are working to ameliorate the effects of food apartheid.

Recognizing systemic racism allows voters to make more informed decisions as they consider which politicians and policymakers to support. This awareness helps us understand that racial inequities come from laws, policies, and practices—not individual triumphs of White people or the failures of people of color. Once we gain this sociological perspective on society, we can help dismantle systemic racism and separate our nation from its racist origins and history.

Vice President Kamala Harris looks at a lead pipe after announcing that the Biden infrastructure law will remove and replace lead pipes across the United States.

Kamil Krzaczynski via Getty Images

Consider This

How might the actions of some policymakers change if more of their constituents start to recognize systemic racism?

DOING SOCIOLOGY 2.4: WHY SHOULD NEIGHBORHOODS HAVE ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS?

Learning Objective 2.4: How can we use the sociological imagination to explain the effects of systemic racism on individual lives?

In this exercise, you will imagine you are a resident of an economically disadvantaged neighborhood. You are working with other members of your sociology class to convince your city council to adopt policies that will lead to the establishment of a supermarket in your neighborhood so you and your neighbors will

have access to affordable healthy foods. The council has already promised to address systemic racism in your city. How will you convince them that the lack of a supermarket in the economically disadvantaged, predominantly Black area of your city is an example of systemic racism that they need to confront?

Write down answers to the following questions:

1. Using your sociological imagination, how would you explain to the city council that the lack of a supermarket in that area is a social issue, rather than a personal problem for individual residents in the economically disadvantaged, predominantly Black area of your city?
2. How would you help them see that it is an example of systemic racism?
3. How would you convince them that bringing a supermarket to this community would help diminish present-day racial patterns of food and health inequality in your city?
4. Conclude by describing how bringing a supermarket to your neighborhood will affect your own life.

Instructor's Note: This activity works well in online and in-person classes of all sizes. After giving individual students time to write their own answers, have them share and refine their answers with another student and then have that pair join another pair of students to jointly create one plan and prepare to share it with the class.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What is the sociological imagination?
2. How does the sociological imagination help us understand the effects of systemic racism on individual lives?
3. What is food apartheid?
4. How is the lack of access to healthy foods in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods tied to racist policies and practices?
5. Why must we address systemic racism on the institutional, rather than the individual, level?
6. What are some examples of government leaders addressing systemic racism?

CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a brief look at the history of race and racism in the United States and a sneak peek of what you will learn in later chapters. Racism is a global issue and exists in nations throughout the world. In Chapter 3, we look at racism through a global perspective.

CHAPTER REVIEW

2.1 Why is racism a fundamental part of U.S. history?

From the colonial era to the creation of the U.S. Constitution, up to the present day, race and racism are integral to the history of the United States. Racism provided a justification for stealing the land that is now the United States and exploiting human labor to grow wealth in a capitalist society. It also helped maintain economic and social inequality in the United States by dividing the nonelite members of society and creating a racial bond among wealthy and nonwealthy White Americans.

2.2 What are some examples of systemic racism in U.S. history?

Systemic racism refers to racism present at institutional and structural levels in society. Examples include slavery, the attempted genocide of American Indians, Jim Crow laws, redlining, and food apartheid.

2.3 How did racism in the field of sociology hurt Black sociologists—including W. E. B. Du Bois?

In the early years of the field of sociology, White sociologists tended to be as racist as their peers outside the discipline. They tended not to give Black sociologists the respect they gave to White sociologists. Most were neither obliged nor accustomed to accepting people of color as their peers. The treatment of W. E. B. Du Bois provides a powerful example of how racism trumped brilliant research in the field. No predominantly White college or university would hire him, and his sociological work was ignored by most White sociologists.

2.4 How can we use the sociological imagination to explain the effects of systemic racism on individual lives?

The sociological imagination is a concept coined by C. Wright Mills that encourages people to connect their individual lives to societal forces. People can use their sociological imaginations to explain the effects of systemic racism as they evaluate individual lives within social, political, historical, and economic contexts. For example, understanding the roots of food apartheid requires recognition of the institutional and structural forces that created racially segregated, low-income neighborhoods without healthy, affordable food options.

KEY TERMS

Advocacy
Articles of Confederation
Color line
Double consciousness
Food apartheid
Food desert
Food mirage
Food swamp
Institutional racism
Racially restrictive covenants
Redlining
Scientific racism
Social policy
Sociological imagination
Structural racism
Systemic racism