II

SYSTEMS OF POWER AND INEQUALITY

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One of the most important things to learn about race, class, and gender is that they are *systemic forms of inequality*. Although most people tend to think of them as individual characteristics (or identities), they are built into the very structure of society—and it is this social fact that drives our analysis of race, class, and gender as intersectional systems of inequality. This does not make them irrelevant as individual or group characteristics, but points you to the analysis of *social structure* to think about how race, class, and gender operate, what they mean, and how they influence people's lives.

Locating racial oppression in the structure of social institutions provides a different frame of analysis from that which would be obtained by analyzing only individuals. Using a social structural analysis of race, class, and gender turns your attention to how they work as systems of power—systems that differentially advantage and disadvantage groups depending on their social location. Moreover, this means that no one of these social facts singularly predetermines where you will be situated within this system of power and social relationships. Thus, not all men are equally powerful and not all women are equally oppressed. When you focus on the intermingling structural

relationships of race, class, *and* gender, you see a more complex, ever-changing, and multidimensional social order.

To repeat, neither race nor class nor gender operate alone. They do so within a system of simultaneous, interrelated social relationships—what we have earlier called the *matrix of domination.* This means that they also engage other social facts—ethnicity, sexuality, age, disability, even the region where you live, and so forth. In this section we examine race, class, and gender from an institutional or structural perspective. And, later in the section, we examine how race, class, and gender also intersect with ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality. You will see that each of these systems of power and inequality intertwine—and they do so in different ways at different points in time. Thus, now sexuality has become more visible as a system of social subordination, but beliefs about sexuality have long served to buttress the beliefs that support racial and gender subordination. Likewise, a system of racial subordination has historically been one of the ways that class structure was created: Some accumulated property through the appropriation of other people's labor, even while groups who provided the labor that produced property for others were denied basic rights of citizenship, such as the right to vote, the right to marry, the right to own property, and the right to be considered a U.S. citizen.

Throughout Part II, you should keep the concept of *social structure* in mind. Remembering Marilyn Frye's analogy of the birdcage in Part I, be aware that race, class, and gender form a structure of social relations. This structure is supported by ideological beliefs that make things appear "normal" and "acceptable," thus clouding our awareness of how the structure operates. Thus, one of the prevailing beliefs about racism is that it is largely a thing of the past, now that formal barriers to racial discrimination have been removed. But, as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva ("Racism without Racists") points out in his formulation of *color-blind racism,* racism persists, even when it takes on new forms.

Understanding the intersections between race, class, and gender—and how they interrelate with ethnicity and sexuality—requires knowing how to conceptualize each. Although we would rather not treat them separately, we do so initially here to learn what each means and how each is manifested in different group experiences. At the same time, the readings in this section examine the connections among race, class, gender, and other important social categories—namely, ethnicity and sexuality. As we review each in turn, you will also notice several common themes.

First, *each is a socially constructed category.* That is, their significance stems not from some "natural" state, but from what they have become as the result

of social and historical processes. Second, notice how *each tends to construct groups in binary (or polar opposite) terms*: man/woman, Black/White, rich/poor, gay/straight, or citizen/alien. These binary constructions create the "otherness" that we examined in the first part of this book. Third, *each is a category of individual and group identity, but note—and this is important—they are also social structures.* That is, they are not just about identity but are about group location in a system of power and inequality. Thus, when we move into Part II, you will see how they are part of the institutional fabric of society. More than being about individual and group identity, race, class, and gender—and the other systems that they intersect with—shape patterns in the labor market, families, state institutions (such as the government and the law), mass media, and so forth. This is a key difference, as we have seen, in a model that focuses solely on difference and one that focuses on the matrix of domination. That is, the matrix of domination forces you to look at social structures, while models of difference often dissolve into individual or group identities. Finally, *neither race, class, nor gender is a fixed category.* Because they are social constructions, their form—and their interrelationship—changes over time. This also means that social change is possible.

As you learn about race, class, and gender, you should keep the intersectional model in mind. One way to think about their interrelationship in a social system is to imagine a typical college basketball game. This will probably seem familiar: the players on the court, the cheerleaders moving about on the side, the band playing, fans cheering, boosters watching from the best seats, and—if the team is ranked—perhaps a television crew. Everybody seems to have a place in the game. Everybody seems to be following the rules. But what explains the patterns that we see and don't see?

Race clearly matters. The predominance of young African American men on many college basketball teams is noticeable. Why do so many young Black men play basketball? Some people argue that African Americans are simply better in areas requiring physical skills such as sports, but there is another reality: For many young Black men, sports may seem the only hope for a good job, so sports, like the military, can seem like an attractive mobility route. Perceived promises of high salaries, endorsements, and merchandise can make young people believe sports are a path to success, thus many young African American boys believe they can earn a good living playing professional sports. The odds of actually doing so are extremely slim. In truth, of the 40,000 African American boys playing high school basketball, only 35 will make it to the NBA (National Basketball Association) and only 7 of those will

be starters. This makes the odds of success 0.000175 (Eitzen 1999)! But, in the face of other systematic disadvantages posed by race, some will still think this is their best chance for success.

But does a racial analysis fully explain the "rules" of college basketball? Not really. Who benefits from college basketball? Yes, players (both Black and White, and, increasingly, immigrants) get scholarships and a chance to earn college degrees. Players reap the rewards, but who really benefits? College athletics is big business, and the players make far less from it than many people believe. As amateur athletes, they are forbidden to take any payment for their skills. They are offered the hope of an NBA contract when they turn pro, or at least a college degree if they graduate. But, few actually turn pro. Indeed, few even graduate from college. Among Division I Black basketball players, 42 percent graduate from college, compared with 48 percent of White male basketball players. Among Hispanic and Native American basketball players (men), only 33 percent graduate. Interestingly, however, graduation rates among Black college athletes (including all sports) are higher than among nonathletes, most likely because of the scholarship support they receive; the reverse is true for Hispanic, Native American, and Asian students. And, among women, student-athletes also have higher graduation rates than nonathletes, as well as higher graduation rates than male student-athletes (National Collegiate Athletic Association 2005).

But winning teams also benefit educational institutions. Winning teams garner increased admissions applications, more alumni giving, higher levels of corporate support, and television revenues. Simply put, athletics is big business. Corporate sponsors want their names and products identified with winning teams and athletes; advertisers want their products promoted by winning players. Even though college athletes are forbidden to promote products, corporations create and market products in conjunction with prevailing excitement about basketball, sustained by the players' achievements. Athletic shoes, workout clothing, cars, and beer all target the consumer dollars of those who enjoy watching basketball. And how many jobs are supported by the revenues generated from the enterprise of college basketball? Of course, there are the sports reporters, team physicians, trainers, coaches, most of them defined as professionals. But there are also the service workers—preparing and selling food, cleaning the toilets and stands, maintaining the stadium. A class system defines one's place in this system of inequality, so much so that many of the service workers are invisible to the fans. So, while institutions profit the most—whether schools, product manufacturers,

advertisers—there are differential benefits depending on your "rank" within the system of basketball. And the stakes get even bigger when you move beyond college into the world of professional sports.

So, do race and class fully explain the "rules" of basketball? What about gender? Only in a few schools does women's basketball draw as large an audience as men's. And certainly in the media, men's basketball is generally the public's focal point, even though women's sports are increasingly popular. In college basketball, like the pros, most of the coaches and support personnel are men, as are the camera crew and announcers. Where are the women? A few are coaches, rarely paid what the men receive—even on the most winning teams. Those closest to the action on the court may be cheerleaders—tumbling, dancing, and being thrown into the air in support of the exploits of the athletes. Others may be in the band. Some women are in the stands, cheering the team—many of them accompanied by their husbands, partners, boyfriends, parents, and children. Many work in the concession stands, fulfilling women's roles of serving others. Still others are even more invisible, left to clean the restrooms, locker rooms, and stands after the crowd goes home.

Men's behavior reveals a gendered dimension to basketball, as well. Where else are men able to put their arms around each other, slap one another's buttocks, hug each other, or cry in public without having their "masculinity" unnoticed? Sportscasters, too, bring gender into the play of sports, such as when they talk about men's heroic athletic achievements but talk about women athletes' looks or their connection to children. For that matter, look at the prominence given to men's teams in sports pages of the daily newspaper compared with sports news about women, who are typically relegated to the back pages—if their athletic accomplishments are reported at all. Sometimes what we don't see can be just as revealing as what we do see. Gender, as a feature of the game on the court, is so familiar that it may go unquestioned.

This discussion of college basketball demonstrates how race, class, and gender each provide an important, yet partial, perspective on social action. Using an intersectional model, we not only see each of them in turn but also the connections among them. In fact, race, class, and gender are so inextricably intertwined that gaining a comprehensive understanding of a basketball game requires thinking about all of them and how they work together. New questions then emerge: Why are most of those serving the food in concession stands likely to be women and men of color? How are norms of masculinity played out through sport? What class and racial ideologies are promoted through assuming that sports are a mobility route for those who try hard enough? If

race, class, and gender relations are embedded in something as familiar and widespread as college basketball, to what extent are other social practices, institutions, relations, and social issues similarly structured?

Race, gender, and class divisions are deeply embedded in the structure of social institutions such as work, family, education, and the state. They shape human relationships, identities, social institutions, and the social issues that emerge from within institutions. Evelyn Nakano Glenn postulates that you can see the intersections of race, class, and gender in three realms of society: the representational realm, the realm of social interaction, and the social structural realm. The representational realm includes the symbols, language, and images that convey racial meanings in society; social interaction refers to the norms and behaviors observable in human relationships; the social structural realm involves the institutional sites where power and resources are distributed in society (Glenn 2002: 12).

This means that race, class, and gender affect all levels of our experience—our consciousness and ideas, our interaction with others, and the social institutions we live within. And, because they are interconnected, no one can be subsumed under the other. In this section of the book, although we focus on each one to provide conceptual grounding, keep in mind that race, class, and gender are connected and overlapping—in all three realms of society: the realm of ideas, interaction, and institutions.

You might begin by considering a few facts:

- The United States is in the midst of a sizable redistribution of wealth, with a greater concentration of wealth and income in the hands of a few than at most previous periods of time. At the same time, a declining share of income is going to the middle class—a class that finds its position slipping, relative to years past (Krugman 2002; DeNavas-Walt et al. 2005).
- Within class groups, racial group experiences are widely divergent. Thus, although there has been substantial growth of an African American and Latino middle class, they have a more tenuous hold on this class status than groups with more stable footing in the middle class. Furthermore, there is significant class differentiation within different racial groups (Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Massey 1993).
- Women in the top 25 percent of income groups have seen the highest wage growth of any group over the last twenty years; the lowest earning groups of women, like men, have seen wages fall, while the middle has remained flat (Mishel et al. 2005). Class differences within gender are hidden by thinking of women as a monolithic group.

- Women of color, including Latinas, African American women, Native American women, and Asian American women are concentrated in the bottom rungs of the labor market along with recent immigrant women (U.S. Department of Labor 2005).
- Poverty has been steadily increasing in the United States since 2000; it is particularly severe among women, especially among women of color and their children, but, in recent years, has risen most among White people (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2005).
- While the mass media extol the virtues of recent reforms in welfare legislation and herald a "decline in the welfare rolls," studies show that increases in family income among former welfare recipients are meager, and there has been an increase in the number of such families evicted from housing because of falling behind on rent. Families also report an increase in other material hardships—phones and utilities being cut off, for example (Lewis et al. 2002; Acker et al. 2002).
- Welfare reform is only one dimension of the shrinkage of social support systems from federal and state assistance. The shrinkage of social support is not only affecting the very poor, however. Job benefits in the form of health insurance, pensions, and so forth for all workers have declined. Following job loss, less than half of U.S. workers are currently eligible for unemployment insurance (Emsellem et al. 2002).
- At both ends of the economic spectrum there is a growth of gated communities: well-guarded, locked neighborhoods for the rich and prisons for the poor—particularly Latinos and African American men. At the same time, growth in the rate of imprisonment is highest among women (Harrison and Beck 2002; Collins and Veskel 2000).

None of these facts can be explained through an analysis that focuses only on race or class or gender. Clearly, class matters. Race matters. Gender matters. And they matter together. We turn now to defining some of the basic concepts involving the systems of power and inequality that we examine in this section.

RACE AND RACISM

Locating racial oppression in the structure of social institutions means distinguishing racism and prejudice. *Prejudice* is a hostile attitude toward a person who is presumed to have negative characteristics associated with a group to which he or she belongs. Racism is more systematic than this and is not the same thing as prejudice. Prejudice refers to people's attitudes. *Racism* is a

system of power and privilege; it can be manifested in people's attitudes but is rooted in society's structure. It is reflected in the different group advantages and disadvantages, based on their location in this societal system. Racism is structured into society, not just in people's minds. As such, it is built into the very fabric of dominant institutions in the United States and has been since the founding of the nation. Joe Feagin refers to this as *systemic racism*, meaning the "complex array of anti-black practices, the unjustly gained political-economic power of whites, the continuing economic and other resource inequalities along racial lines, and the white racial ideologies and attitudes created to maintain and rationalize white privilege and power" (2000: 6).

In this definition of institutional racism, notice first that racism is part of society's structure, not just present in the minds of individual bigots. Seen in this light, people may not be individually racist but can still benefit from a system that is organized to benefit some at the expense of others, as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva points out in his essay on color-blind racism ("Racism without Racists"). *Color-blind racism* is a new form of racism in which dominant groups assume that race no longer matters—even when society is highly racially segregated and when individual and group well-being is still strongly determined by race. Many people also believe that being nonracist means being color-blind—that is, refusing to recognize or treat as significant a person's racial background and identity. But to ignore the significance of race in a society where racial groups have distinct historical and contemporary experiences is to deny the reality of their group experience. Being color-blind in a society structured on racial privilege means assuming that everybody is "White," which is why people of color might be offended by friends who say, for example, "But I never think of you as Black." This blindness to the persistent realities of race also leads to an idea that there is nothing we should be doing about it—either individually or collectively—thus racism is perpetuated. In "White Privilege and Male Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" Peggy McIntosh describes how the system of racial privilege becomes invisible to those who benefit from it, even though it structures the everyday life of both White people and people of color.

Racism also shapes everyday social relations. Patricia J. Williams, a noted African American legal scholar, illustrates this in her discussion of persistent discrimination in housing ("Of Race and Risk"). Despite her middle-class status, systemic racism confronts her—and other African Americans—in daily encounters. Practices of everyday racism are part of the edifice of institutional racism; yet, we often misread their meaning.

Discrimination is one of the driving forces of racism. Though it is perhaps not as overt as, for example, during Jim Crow segregation in the South, discrimination can still be seen in various patterns and practices. Indeed, segregation, though not mandated by law as it was during Jim Crow, is as stark as ever. Segregation in schools has actually increased over recent years. And, in research known as *audit studies*, researchers, one White and one Black, are matched in credentials and appearance; they pose—in person—as job or housing applicants. Audit studies find significant levels of discrimination. White job applicants in such studies are offered the job almost half of the time; Black applicants, only 11 percent of the time. White applicants are often told things such as "You are just what we are looking for." Black applicants, on the other hand, are told they do not have the right attributes for the job. Studies of employers have also found that employers hold considerable stereotypes about Black workers that prevent them from hiring them (Moss and Tilly 2001; see also the article by Philip Moss and Chris Tilly in Part III).

Another dimension of racism is that its forms change over time. Racial discrimination is no longer legal, but racism nonetheless continues to structure relations between groups and to differentiate the power that different groups have. The changing character of racism is also evident in the fact that specific racial group histories differ, but different racial groups share common experiences of racial oppression. Thus, Chinese Americans were never enslaved, but they experienced forced residential segregation and economic exploitation based on their presumed racial characteristics. Mexican Americans were never placed on federal reservations, as Native Americans have been, but in some regards both groups share the experience of colonization by White settlers. Both have experienced having their lands appropriated by White settlers; Native Americans were removed from their lands and forced into reservations, if not killed. Chicanos originally held land in what is now the American Southwest, but it was taken following the Mexican American War; in 1848 Mexico ceded huge parts of what are now California, New Mexico, Nevada, Colorado, Arizona, and Utah to the United States for $15 million. Mexicans living there were one day Mexicans, the next living in the United States, though without all the rights of citizens.

Most people assume that race is biologically fixed, an assumption that is fueled by arguments about the presumed biological basis for different forms of inequality. But the concept of race is more social than biological; scientists working on the human genome project have even found that there is no "race" gene. But you should not conclude from this that race is not "real."

It is just that its reality stems from its social significance. That is, the meaning and significance of race stems from specific social, historical, and political contexts. It is these contexts that make race meaningful, not just whatever physical differences may exist between groups.

To understand this, think about how racial categories are created, by whom, and for what purposes. Racial classification systems reflect prevailing views of race, thereby establishing groups that are presumed to be "natural." These constructed racial categories then serve as the basis for allocating resources; furthermore, once defined, the categories frame political issues and conflicts (Omi and Winant 1994). Omi and Winant define *racial formation* as "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (1994: 55). In Nazi Germany, Jews were considered to be a race—a social construction that became the basis for the Holocaust. Abby L. Ferber's essay ("What White Supremacists Taught a Jewish Scholar about Identity") shows the complexities that evolve in the social construction of race. As someone who studies White supremacist groups, she sees how White racism defines her as Jewish, even while she lives in society as White. Her reflections reveal, too, the interconnections between racism and anti-Semitism (the hatred of Jewish people), reminding us of the interplay between different systems of oppression.

In understanding racial formation, we see that societies construct rules and practices that define groups in racial terms. Moreover, racial meanings constantly change as institutions evolve and as different groups contest prevailing racial definitions. Some groups are "racialized"; others, are not. Where, for example, did the term *Caucasian* come from? Although many take it to be "real" and don't think about its racist connotations, the term has racist origins. It was developed in the late eighteenth century by a German anthropologist, Johann Blumenbach. He developed a racial classification scheme that put people from the Russian Caucases at the top of the racial hierarchy because he thought Caucasians were the most beautiful and sophisticated people; darker people were put on the bottom of the list: Asians, Africans, Polynesians, and Native Americans (Hannaford 1996). It is amazing when you think about it that this term remains with us, with few questioning its racist origin and connotations.

Consider also the changing definitions of race in the U.S. census. Given the large number of multiracial groups and the increasing diversity brought about by immigration, we can no longer think of race in mutually exclusive terms. In 1860, only three "races" were presumed to exist—Whites, Blacks, and mulattoes. By 1890, however, these original three races had been joined

by five others—quadroon, octoroon, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian. Ten short years later, this list shrank to five races—White, Black, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian—a situation reflecting the growth of strict segregation in the South (O'Hare 1996). Now people of mixed racial heritage present a challenge to census classifications. In the 2000 census, the U.S. government for the first time allowed people to check multiple boxes to identify themselves as more than one race. In addition, you could check "Hispanic" as a separate category. This change in the census reflects the growing number of multiracial people in the United States. The census categories are not just a matter of accurate statistics; they have significant consequences in the apportionment of societal resources. Thus, while some might argue that we should not "count" race at all, doing so is important because data on racial groups are used to enforce voting rights, to regulate equal employment opportunities, and to determine various governmental supports, among other things.

Shifting definitions of race are grounded in shifting relations of power. Recent decades have seen additional revisions to definitions of race. In particular, the experiences of Latino groups in the United States challenge longstanding racial categories of "Black" and "White." Elizabeth Martinez (in "Seeing More than Black and White") notes that White-Black relations have defined racism in the United States for centuries but that a rapidly changing population that includes diverse Latino groups is forcing Americans to reconsider the nature of racism. Color, she argues, has been the marker of race, but she challenges the dualistic thinking that has promoted this racist thinking.

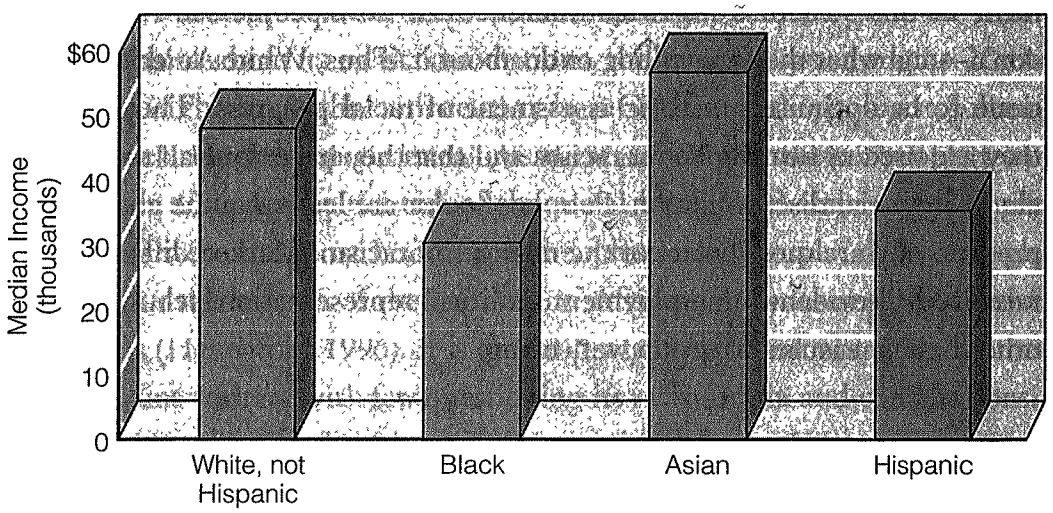
The overarching structure of racial power relations means that placement in this structure leads to differences in how people see racism—or don't—and what they are willing to do about it. Thus, White Americans continue to be optimistic in their assessment of racial progress. They say that they are tired of hearing about racism and that they have done all they can to eliminate racial discrimination. People of color are less sanguine about racial progress and are more aware of the nuances of racism. Marked differences by race are still evident in employment, political representation, schooling, and other basic measures of group well-being.

CLASS

Like race, the social class system is grounded in social institutions and practices. Rather than thinking of social class as a rank held by an individual, think of social class as a series of relations that pervade the entire society and shape

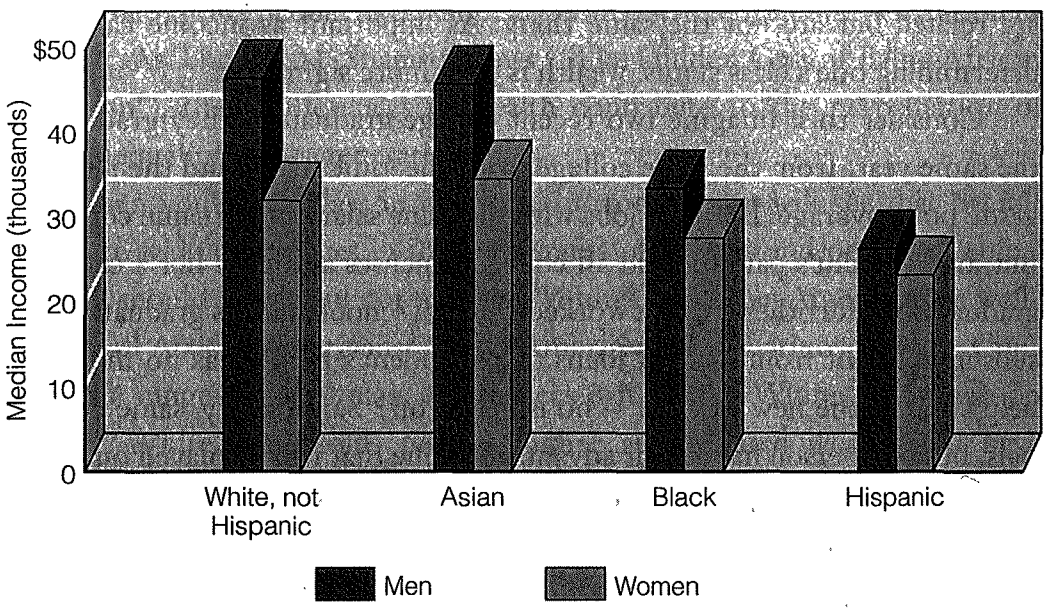
our social institutions and relationships with one another. Although class shapes identity and individual well-being, class is a system that differentially structures group access to economic, political, cultural, and social resources. Within the United States, the class system evolves from patterns of capitalist development, and those patterns intersect with race and gender. To begin with, the class system in the United States is marked by striking differences in income. *Income* is the amount of money brought into a household in one year. Measures of income in the United States are based on annually reported census data drawn from a sample of the population. These data show quite dramatic differences in class standing when taking gender and race into account. *Median income* is the income level above and below which half of the population lies. It is the best measure of group income standing. Thus, in 2004 median income for non-Hispanic White households was $48,977 (meaning half of such households earned more than this and half below); this is the "middle." Black households had a median income of $30,134; Hispanic households, $34,241; Asian and Pacific Islander households, $57,518 (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2005; see also Figure 1).

But this tells only part of the story. Household income is the income of a total household. What about individual earners? This is where you can see the confounding influence of gender. Among full-time, year-round workers, men earned (in 2003) $41,503 and women, $31,653. But when you also consider race, you see that income does not fall simply along lines of either race



Source: DeNavas-Walt, Carmen. 2005. *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance: Coverage in the United States: 2004,* Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

FIGURE 1 Median Household Income (2004)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005. *Detailed Historical Tables*. www.census.gov

FIGURE 2 Median Income, Year-round, Full-time Workers

or gender (see Figure 2). White and Asian American women actually earn more than Black and, especially, Hispanic men, although there is a persistent gap within each racial-ethnic group between women and men (U.S. Census Bureau 2005). These data should lead you to be cautious about making general claims that women earn less than men—it matters *which women* and *which men* you are talking about.

Something to keep in mind is that because household income results from the income of individual workers, many households need more than one earner just to reach median levels of income. Some workers also have to hold multiple jobs to make ends meet. People who have more than one job typically do so to meet regular household expenses or to pay off debt. Although Whites (both men and women) are the group most likely to hold multiple jobs, Black and Hispanic jobholders are more likely to do so to meet basic household expenses (*Monthly Labor Review*, October 2000; www.bls.gov). In addition, workers at every class level have increased the number of hours that they work (since 1980), although it is women and those at the lower ends of the class scale who have increased their working hours the most (Mishel et al. 2005).

Differences in patterns of wealth are even more revealing than income regarding how inequality is perpetuated in society. *Wealth* is determined by adding all of one's financial assets and subtracting all debt. Income and wealth

are related but are not the same thing. As important as income can be in determining one's class status, wealth is even more significant.

Consider this: Imagine two recent college graduates. They graduate in the same year, from the same college, with the same major and the identical grade point average. Both get jobs with the same salary in the same company. But, one student's parents paid all college expenses and gave her a car upon graduation. The other student worked while in school and has graduated with substantial debt from student loans. This student's family has no money to help support the new worker. Who is better off? Same salary, same credentials, but one person has a clear advantage—one that will be played out many times over as the young worker buys a home, finances her own children's education, and possibly inherits additional assets. This shows you the significance of wealth—not just income—in structuring social class.

Thus, income data indicate quite dramatic differences in class, race, and gender standing. Furthermore, wealth differences are also startling. The wealthiest 1 percent of the population control 33 percent of all wealth—the bottom 80 percent, only 16 percent (Mishel et al. 2005). For most Americans, debt, not wealth, is more common. Furthermore, 25 percent of White households, 61 percent of Black households, and 54 percent of Hispanic households have no financial assets at all (Oliver and Shapiro 1995), indicative of the vast differences in wealth holdings among different racial groups. In fact, the median net worth of White households is more than ten times that of African American and Latino households.

Wealth is especially significant because it provides a *cumulative* advantage to those who have it. Wealth helps pay for college costs for children and down payments on houses; it can cushion the impact of emergencies, such as unexpected unemployment or sudden health problems. Even small amounts of wealth can provide the cushion that averts economic disaster for families. Buying a home, investing, being free of debt, sending one's children to college, and transferring economic assets to the next generation are all instances of class advantage that add up over time and produce advantage, even beyond one's current income level. Sociologists Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro (1995) have found, for example, that even Black and White Americans at the same income level, with the same educational and occupational assets, have a substantial difference in their financial assets—an average difference of $43,143 per year! This means that, even when earning the same income, the two groups are in quite different class situations—although both may be considered middle class. Furthermore, wealth produces more wealth, because

inheritance allows people to transmit economic status from one generation to the next. As Thomas M. Shapiro shows ("The Hidden Cost of Being African American"), these differences in wealth contribute to the perpetuation of racial inequality across generations.

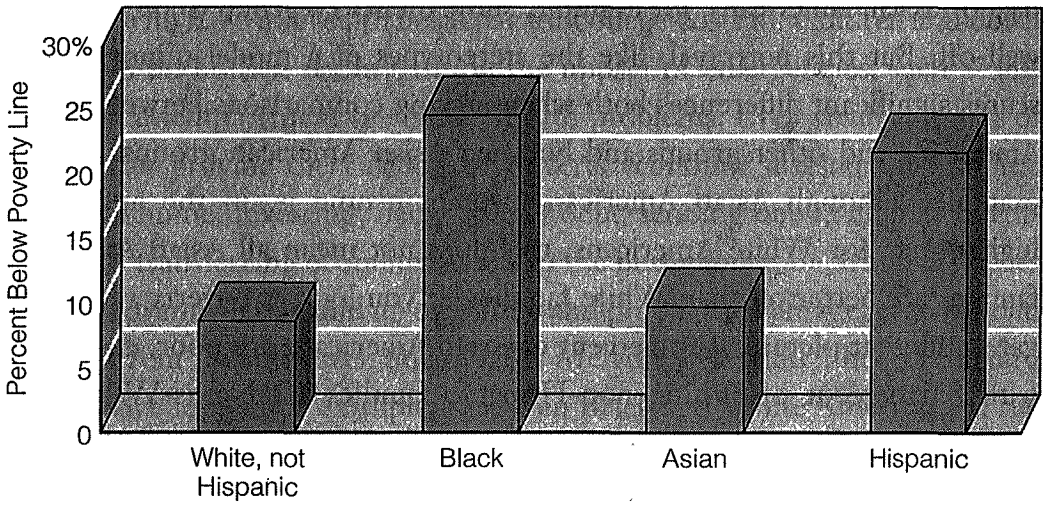
When you study class in relationship to race, you will see that overall there are wide differences in the class status of Whites and people of color, but you should be careful not to see all Whites and Asian Americans as well-off and all African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos as poor. Consider the range of social class experiences just among Whites. Although on average White households possess higher accumulated wealth and have higher incomes than Black, Hispanic, and Native American households, large numbers of White households do not. White people also account for almost half (46 percent) of the nation's poor; and, as poverty has risen since the year 2000, it has risen most among White Americans (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2005). In addition, class experiences across racial groups can vary widely, as shown by Mary Pattillo-McCoy's research on the Black middle class in "Black Picket Fences." She shows that the Black middle class continues to experience racial segregation and, as one result, is more exposed to the risks that the Black poor experience than would be true of the White middle class.

These facts should caution us about conclusions based on *aggregate data* (that is, data that represent whole groups). Such data give you a broad picture of group differences, but they are not attentive to the more nuanced picture you see when taking into account race, class, and gender (along with other factors, such as age, level of education, occupation, and so forth). Aggregate data on Asian Americans, for example, show them as a group to be relatively well-off. But this portrayal, like the stereotypes of a model minority, obscures significant differences both when making comparisons between Asian Americans and other groups and between Asian American groups. So, for example, although Asian American median income is, in the aggregate, higher than for White Americans, this does not mean all Asian American families are better off than White families. If you look at poverty rates, you get a different picture. Ten percent of Asian Americans are poor, compared with 8.6 percent of White, non-Hispanic families (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2005). The highest rates of poverty are those for the most recent immigrant groups, including Laotians, Cambodians, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Korean immigrants (Lee 1995).

As the U.S. public witnessed following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, poverty is more widespread than many believe it to be, even though

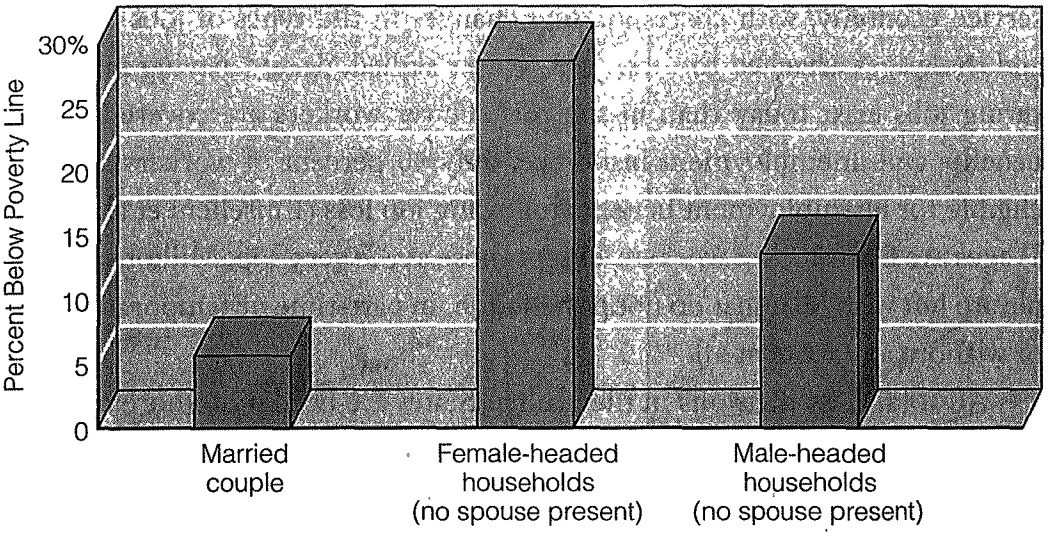
in recent years it has been increasing. Hurricane Katrina brought renewed attention to poverty and its location in the intersection of race and class (as discussed by Jason De Parle in "Broken Levees, Unbroken Barriers"), but poverty is also a matter of gender—evidenced by the fact that women and their children are especially hard hit by poverty. Thirty-nine percent of Hispanic and Black families headed by women are poor, as are 15 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander and 24 percent of White families headed by women. Poverty rates among children are especially disturbing: in 2004, 18 percent of all children in the United States lived below the *poverty line* ($19,157 for a family of four, including two children). When adding race, the figures are even more disturbing: 34 percent of African American children, 29 percent of Hispanic children, 10 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander children, and 11 percent of White (non-Hispanic) children (those under 18 years of age) are poor—astonishing figures for one of the most affluent nations in the world (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2005; see Figures 3 and 4).

Simplistic solutions suggested by current welfare policy imply that women would not be poor if they would just get married or get a job. But the root causes of poverty lie in the distribution of wealth and capital, coupled with low wages and high unemployment among certain groups—groups whose social location is the result of race, class, and gender stratification. Keep in mind that 16 percent of workers still end up being poor; even among those working year-round and full time, 8 percent are poor. And these figures count only those whose earnings fell below the official poverty line. If you



Source: DeNavas-Walt, Carmen. 2005. *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance: Coverage in the United States: 2004.* Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

FIGURE 3 Percent Living in Poverty (2004)



Source: DeNavas-Walt, Carmen. 2005. *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance: Coverage in the United States: 2004.* Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

FIGURE 4 Poverty and Household Type

calculate the income received by someone working full time (40 hours a week) and year-round (52 weeks, no vacation) at the federal minimum wage ($5.50 per hour), you will see that the dollars earned ($11,440) do not even come close to the federal poverty line for a family of four ($19,157 in 2004; U.S. Census Bureau 2005).

In the United States, the social class system is also marked by differences in power. Social class is not just a matter of material difference; it is a pattern of domination in which some groups have more power than others. *Power* is the ability to influence and dominate others. This refers not just to interpersonal power but also refers to the structural power that some groups have because of their position in the class system. Groups with vast amounts of wealth, for example, can influence systems such as the media and the political process in ways that less-powerful groups cannot. Privilege in social class thus encompasses both a position of material advantage and the ability to control and influence others.

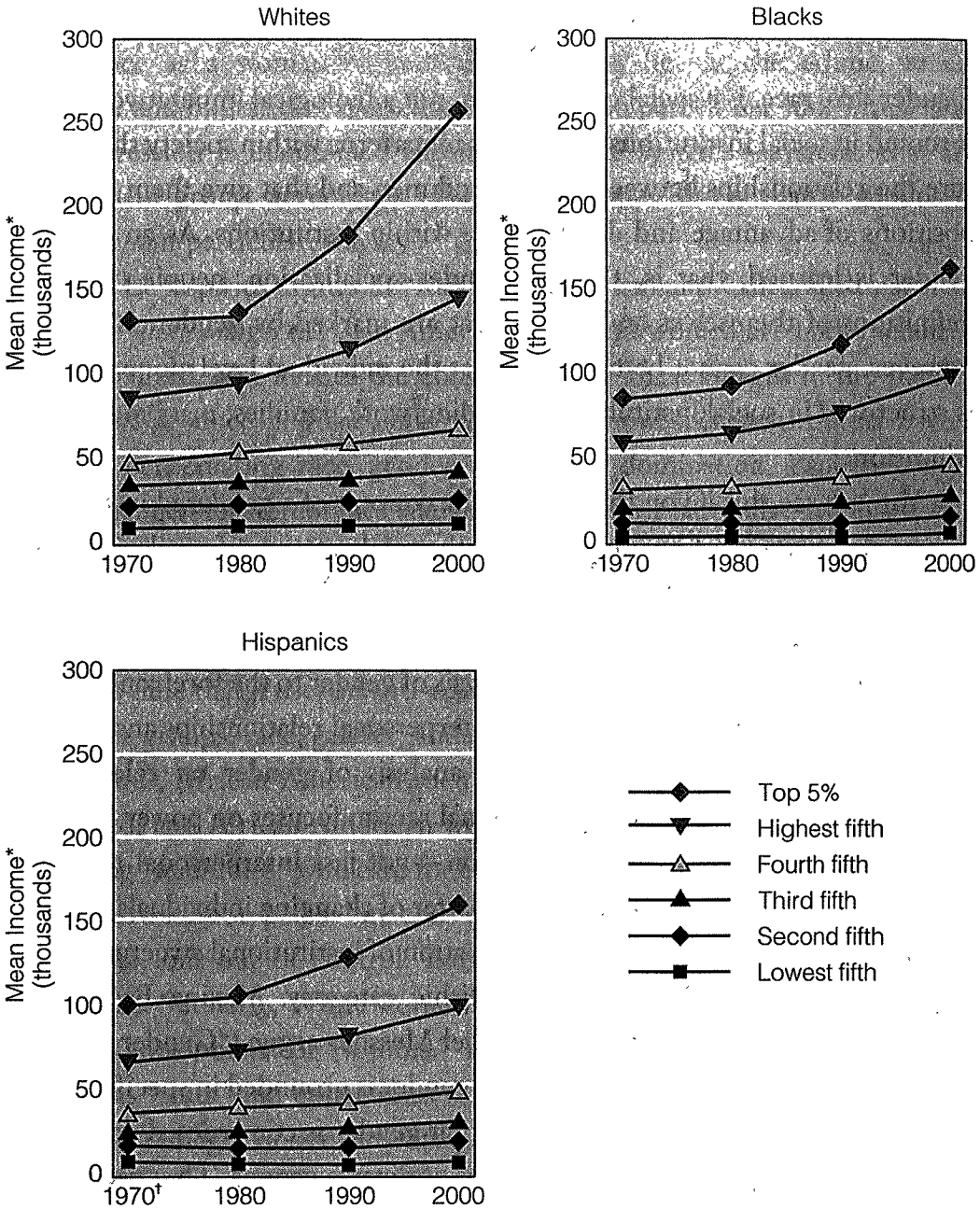
The class system is currently undergoing some profound changes, as detailed by Sklar ("Growing Gulf Between Rich and the Rest of Us"). These changes are intimately linked to patterns of economic transformation in the political economy—changes that are both global and domestic. Jobs are being exported overseas as vast multinational corporations seek to enhance their profits by promoting new markets and cutting the cost of labor. Within the United States, there is a shift from a manufacturing-based economy to a

service economy, with corresponding changes in the types of jobs available and the wages attached to these jobs. Fewer skilled, decent-paying manufacturing jobs exist today than in the past. Fewer workers are covered by job benefits and unemployment insurance; only 40 percent of workers are now eligible for unemployment benefits following job loss (Emsellem et al. 2002). Wages are flat for most workers, except those at the very top. Millions of people are left with jobs that do not pay enough, in part-time or temporary work, or without any work at all.

All told, class divisions in the United States are becoming more marked. There is a growing gap between the haves and have-nots. Income growth has been greatest for those at the top end of the population—the upper 20 percent and the upper 5 percent of all income groups, regardless of race. For everyone else, income growth has remained flat. Although in every racial group, the top earners have seen the most growth in income, Black and Hispanic high-earners still earn less overall than Whites (see Figure 5). At the same time, in the nation's cities and towns, homelessness has become increasingly apparent even to casual observers. Even before Hurricane Katrina displaced hundreds of thousands of families, the number of homeless in a given year was estimated to be about two million. Families are the largest segment of the homeless population. Half of the homeless are African American; about 20 percent are children (National Coalition for the Homeless 2005).

If social class is so important in shaping life chances, why don't more people realize its significance? The answer lies in how dominant groups use ideology to explain the class system and other systems of inequality. Ideology created by dominant groups refers to a system of beliefs that simultaneously distort reality and justify the status quo. The class system in the United States has been supported through the myth that we live in a classless society. This myth serves the dominant class, making class privilege seem like something that one earns, not something that is deeply embedded in the institutions of society. The system of privilege and inequality (by race, class, and gender) is least visible to those who are most privileged and who, in turn, control the resources to define the dominant cultural belief systems. Perhaps this is why the privileged, not the poor, are more likely to believe that one gets ahead through hard work. It also helps explain why men more than women deny that patriarchy exists and why Whites more than Blacks believe racism is disappearing.

Overall, the effects of race, class, and gender manifest themselves in patterns of advantage and disadvantage. For example, in some ways—such as in rates of poverty and the racial gap in earnings in the labor market—women



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2002. *Historical Income Tables—Households.* Website: www.census.gov/hhes/income/histinc/

FIGURE 5 Income Growth

of color share a class position with men of color. In other ways, women of different races share a common class position: they all make less on average than men of their racial group. These trends point to the need for analyzing race, class, and gender together in thinking about inequality.

*In 2000 CPI-adusted dollars.

†Data not available for Hispanics in 1970;1972 data used.

GENDER

Gender, like race, is a social construction, not a biological imperative. *Gender* is rooted in social institutions and results in patterns within society that structure the relationships between women and men and that give them differing positions of advantage and disadvantage within institutions. As an identity, gender is learned; that is, through gender socialization, people construct definitions of themselves and others that are marked by gender. Like race, however, gender cannot be understood at the individual level alone. Gender is structured in social institutions, including work, families, mass media, and education.

You can see this if you think about the concept of a gendered institution. *Gendered institution* is now used to define the total patterns of gender relations that are "present in the processes, practices, images, and ideologies, and distribution of power in the various sectors of social life" (Acker 1992: 567). This term brings a much more structural analysis of gender to the forefront. Rather than seeing gender only as a matter of interpersonal relationships and learned identities, this framework focuses the analysis of gender on relations of power—just as thinking about institutional racism focuses on power relations and economic and political subordination—not just interpersonal relations. Changing gender relations is not just a matter of changing individuals. As with race and class, change requires transformation of institutional structures.

Gender, however, is not a monolithic category. Maxine Baca Zinn, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Michael Messner argue ("Gender through the Prism of Difference") that, although gender is grounded in specific power relations, it is important to understand that gender is constructed differently depending on the specific social locations of diverse groups. Thus race, class, nationality, sexual orientation, and other factors produce varying social and economic consequences that cannot be understood by looking at gender differences alone. These authors ask us to move beyond studying differences and instead to use multiple "prisms" to see and comprehend the complexities of multiple systems of domination—each of which shapes and is shaped by gender. Seen in this way, men appear as a less monolithic and unidimensional group as well.

Gender, race, class, and sexuality *together* construct stereotypes. Each gains meaning in relationship to the others (Glenn 2002). Thus, for Julia Alvarez ("A White Woman of Color") gender identity is intricately part of her status as Dominican, and, to complicate things further, ideals of beauty in her

narrative intertwine with ideas about color. You cannot understand her experience as a woman without also locating her in the ethnic, racial, national, and migration experiences that are also part of her life. Thus, gender oppression is maintained through multiple systems—systems that are reflected in group stereotypes. These stereotypes also sexualize groups in different, but particular, ways.

Yen Le Espiritu argues in "Ideological Racism and Cultural Resistance" that *controlling images* of Asian American men and women are both racialized and sexualized. She locates the construction of these images in the institutions that produce popular culture, showing how such institutions have a stake in perpetuating race, gender, and sexual domination. Espiritu's work shows that gender stereotypes take unique forms for particular groups. Jewish American women, for example, are stereotyped as "JAPs" (Jewish American princesses), as if all were rich and privileged. This stereotype simultaneously promotes anti-Semitism and misogyny (defined as the hatred of women) at the same time that it uses an anti-Asian stereotype ("Jap") to denigrate others. For other groups, race, gender, and sexual stereotypes intertwine in different ways. Thus, African American men are stereotyped as hypermasculine and oversexed, and African American women as promiscuous, bad mothers, and nurturing "mammies" who care for everyone else, but not their own children. Latinos are stereotyped as "macho" and, like African American men, sexually passionate, but out of control. Latinas are stereotyped as either "hot" or virgin-like. Similarly, White women are sexually stereotyped in dichotomous terms as "madonnas" or "whores." Working-class women are more likely to be seen as "sluts" and upper-class women as frigid and cold. We can see that controlling images of sexuality are part of the architecture of race, class, and gender oppression (Collins 2000), revealing the interlocking systems of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Like color-blind racism, gender ideologies may make it seem that women now have it made, even though the facts tell us otherwise. True, the gap between women's and men's income has closed, although most analysts agree that the narrowing of the gap reflects a drop in men's wages more than an increase in women's wages. And, women are more present in professional jobs—women who have become defined as the stereotypical "working woman." Despite this new image, though, most women remain concentrated in gender-segregated occupations with low wages, little opportunity for mobility, and stressful conditions. This is particularly true for women of color, who are more likely to be in occupations that are both race- and

gender-segregated. And, as we have seen, among women heading their own households, poverty persists at alarmingly high rates. Income and occupational data, however, do not tell the full story for women. High rates of violence against women—whether in the home, on campus, in the workplace, or on the streets—indicate the continuing devaluation of and danger for women in this society.

Gender is also formed in the context of social institutions—family, workplaces, schools, religion, and so forth. Michael Messner shows (in "Masculinities and Athletic Careers") that sports are an important arena where gender identities and relations are formed. His study examines how boys from different racial and social class backgrounds learn about masculinity through their involvement in sports. Messner demonstrates that there is no one set of beliefs about masculinity to which all men subscribe; instead, sports shape understandings of masculinity and men's experiences in sports in race- and class-specific ways.

Taking this idea in a different direction, Thomas J. Gerschick ("Toward a Theory of Disability and Gender") analyzes how understanding disability requires an analysis of gender, as well as how gender in relationship to race and class explains dimensions of disability that might otherwise go unnoticed. Taken together, the articles in this section show the social construction of gender, its interrelationship within systems of race, class, and gender power, and the connection of gender to such factors as nationality, age, and physical ability.

ETHNICITY AND MIGRATION

Sociologists traditionally define *ethnicity* as groups who share a common culture; however, like race, ethnicity develops within the context of systems of power. Thus, the meaning and significance of ethnicity can shift over time and in different social and political contexts. For example, groups may develop a sense of heightened ethnicity in the context of specific historical events; likewise, their feeling of sharing a common group identity can result from being labeled as "outsiders" by dominant groups. Think, for example, of the heightened sense of group identity that has developed for Arab Americans in the aftermath of 9/11.

Social and historical context also shapes who becomes defined as "ethnic." Asian Americans, as an example, have developed a *panethnic* identity—that is, an identity of common experiences, even across diverse ethnic groups. But this

panethnic identity has arisen from social movements that defined different Asian American groups (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and so forth) as having common social and political experiences within the United States (Espiritu 1992). Thus, even groups given a single group identity may have diverse ethnic and cultural experiences among them, as with African Americans who may be West Indian, Dominican, U.S. born, or from other cultural origins.

Patterns in the shifting meaning of ethnicity are being influenced by the changing contours of the U.S. population. Racial-ethnic groups are a larger proportion of the U.S. population, and their numbers are expected to rise over the years ahead. One quarter of the U.S. population is now Black, Hispanic, Asian American, Pacific Islander, or Native American; by 2050, non-Hispanic Whites are predicted to make up only slightly more than half the total population. At the same time that the nation is becoming more diverse, changes are occurring regarding which groups predominate. Latinos have recently exceeded African Americans as the largest minority group in the population. Hispanic, Native American, Asian American, and African American populations are also growing more rapidly than White American populations, with the greatest growth among Hispanics and Asian Americans (Grieco and Cassidy 2001).

Immigration into the United States is only one facet of the increasing importance that ethnicity and migration play in contemporary social life. Changes in ethnicity and migration are being enacted on a world stage—a global context that increasingly links nations together in a global social order where diversity is more typical than not. You need only consult an older world atlas to get a sense of the widespread changes that characterize the current period. *World cities* have been formed that are linked through international systems of commerce; within these cities, migrants play an important role in providing the labor that is needed to keep pace with the global economy. Migrant (or "guest") workers may provide the labor for multinational corporations; or, they may provide the service work that increasingly characterizes postindustrial society. Some workers may provide agricultural labor for multinational producers of food; others do domestic labor for middle- and upper-class families whose own lives are being transformed by changes in the world economic system. Wherever you look, the world is being changed by the increasingly global basis of modern life.

Such changes indicate that globalization is not just about what is happening elsewhere in the world—as if global studies were just a matter of comparing societies. Globalization is everywhere. No nation, including the

United States, can really be understood without seeing how globalization is affecting life even at home. Patterns of life in any one society are now increasingly shaped by the connections between societies, and this is evident by looking at how ethnicity and migration are changing life in the United States. *Transnational families* are more common—that is, families whose members live and reside in different nations (often at a great distance from each other). Cultural features associated with different cultural traditions are increasingly evident, even in communities in the United States that have been thought of as "all-American" towns. Youth cultures embrace common features whether in Russia, Mexico, Japan, or the United States because of the penetration of world capitalist markets. Thus, hip-hop plays on the streets of Mexico City and salsa is heard on radio stations in the United States.

What do such changes mean for understanding ethnicity and migration in a transnational, global context? Within the formal borders of the United States, changes associated with migration are raising new questions about national identity. How will the United States define itself as a nation-state in the changing global context? How will the increased visibility of people of color in the United States, in Latin America, in Africa, in Asia, and within the borders of former European colonial powers shape the future? How are cultural representations and institutions changed in a world context marked by such an ethnic mix—both within and between countries? In this context, who gets defined as a race, and how does that map onto concepts of citizenship and the division of labor in different nations? What will it mean to be American in a nation where racial-ethnic diversity is so much a part of the national fabric?

The events of September 11, 2001, give these questions additional importance. In response to terrorism, most in the United States were catapulted into a strong sense of national identity. But, just as racial profiling was becoming increasingly criticized by the public, fears of terrorism have made it suddenly permissible to many. In the aftermath of 9/11, more restrictive immigration practices and policies have been employed; international and "ethnic" students are increasingly under surveillance; civil liberties have been restricted in the interests of national security. The events of 9/11 and the international tensions that have followed bring increasing urgency to our grappling with questions of how we can maintain a society of such great diversity within a framework of social justice.

Thus, several themes emerge in rethinking ethnicity and migration through the lens of race, class, and gender. Despite the ideology of the

"melting pot," national identity in the United States has been closely linked to a history of racial privilege. As Lillian Rubin points out in "Is This a White Country, or What?" the term *American* is usually assumed to mean White. Other types of Americans, such as African Americans and Asian Americans, become distinguished from the "real" Americans by virtue of their race. More importantly, certain benefits are reserved for those deemed to be "deserving Americans."

Many Americans never "melted" into the melting pot. Many people think that race is like ethnicity and that the failure of people of color to assimilate into the mainstream as White ethnic groups purportedly have done represents an unwillingness to shed their culture. But as Mary Waters points out in "Optional Ethnicities: For Whites Only?" this view seriously misreads the meaning of both race and ethnicity in shaping American national identity. Waters suggests that White Americans of European ancestry have *symbolic ethnicity* in that their ethnic identity does not influence their lives unless they want it to. Waters contrasts this symbolic ethnic identity among many Whites with the socially enforced and imposed racial identity among African Americans. Because race operates as a physical marker in the United States, intersections of race and ethnicity operate differently for Whites and for people of color. White ethnics can thus have "ethnicity" without cost, but people of color pay the price for their ethnic identity.

We see this in Robert Smith's discussion of the increasing presence of Mexicans in the United States ("'Mexicanness' in New York"). Smith uses the concept of *racialization* to describe how groups become defined as having racial characteristics that are also the basis for their mistreatment. Although we might imagine Mexicans and Mexican Americans as an ethnic group—in that their identity comes from a commonly shared cultural background—in the context of migration, they have been redefined within the context of racial, social, and class hierarchies in the United States. As Smith argues, Mexican immigrants confront the racial segregation and discrimination that have characterized Black American experience. They are also juxtaposed against both White ethnics and other groups, such as Puerto Ricans, by social structures that place different values on groups exploited for their labor. His article shows how race and ethnicity intertwine—both between dominant and subordinate groups and among subordinate groups—those "racialized" as Black.

Despite these structural forces, however, people are not just passive victims of these social forces. Peggy Levitt ("Salsa and Ketchup: Transnational Migrants Straddle Two Worlds") shows how immigrant communities use

their own institutions—whether families, community organizations, or other social networks—to provide support, as well as to sustain ties to the homelands. Nazli Kibria's research ("Migration and Vietnamese American Women") shows how Vietnamese American women and men negotiate with each other to adjust to the specific experiences they face as immigrants. By examining gender roles in Vietnamese American families, Kibria shows how women rebuild families to provide economic and social support during the transition to a new community. Her analysis reminds us that immigration and migration are not just about ethnicity and race, but are also gendered processes. Families are sites where gender is both *created* and also *contested*, as people face circumstances that require reconstruction of prior relationships. Kibria's research also emphasizes that people actively shape viable family networks and support systems that enable them to survive even in the face of cultural, economic, and social assaults. The experiences of groups migrating to the United States show both the tenacity of race, class, and gender structures *and* how people work to change these systems.

SEXUALITY

The linkage between race, class, and gender is revealed within studies of sexuality, just as sexuality is a dimension of each. For example, constructing images about Black sexuality is central to maintaining institutional racism. Similarly, beliefs about women's sexuality structure gender oppression. Thus, sexuality operates as a system of power and inequality comparable to and intersecting with the systems of race, class, and gender.

At the same time, sexuality is commodified in a capitalist society such as the United States. Jean Kilbourne shows ("You Talkin' to Me?") that the commodification of sex through advertising is especially harmful to women. The denigrating images of sex in advertising, according to Kilbourne, lead to dehumanization, as well as generating actual physical and mental harm.

Homophobia—the fear and hatred of homosexuality—supports the institutionalized power and privilege accorded to heterosexual behavior and identification. If only heterosexual forms of gender identity are labeled "normal," then gays, lesbians, and bisexuals become ostracized, oppressed, and defined as "socially deviant." Homophobia affects heterosexuals as well because it is part of the gender ideology used to distinguish "normal" men and women from those deemed deviant. Thus, young boys learn a rigid view of masculinity—one often associated with violence, bullying, and degrading

others—to avoid being perceived as a "fag." The oppression of lesbians and gay men is then linked to the structure of gender in everyone's lives.

The institutionalized structures and beliefs that define and enforce heterosexual behavior as the only natural and permissible form of sexual expression are what is meant by *heterosexism.* As Jonathan Katz points out ("The Invention of Heterosexuality"), heterosexism is a specific historic construction; its meaning and presumed significance have evolved and changed at distinct historical times.

Understanding this rests on understanding sexuality, like race, gender, class, and ethnicity, as a social construction. Sexuality has a biological context, because bodies make sex pleasurable. But the real significance of sexuality lies in its social dimensions. Thus, ideas about gender in society influence how we experience sexuality and how sexuality is controlled. Homophobia is used as a mechanism to enforce the construction of "masculinity." The hatred directed toward lesbians, gays, and bisexuals is thus part of the system by which gender is created and maintained. In this regard, sexuality and gender are deeply linked.

Cornel West ("Black Sexuality: The Taboo Subject") adds another social dimension to sexuality, showing how sexuality has been used as the vehicle to support racial fears and racial subordination. Racial subordination was built on the exploitation of Black bodies—both as labor and as sexual objects. West's essay untangles multiple dimensions of racial-sexual politics. Strictures against certain interracial, sexual relationships (but not those between White men and African American women) are a way to maintain White patriarchy. And, as West points out, race mixes with both gender and sex. Without examining the ways that sexuality, race, and gender—and, we should add, class—entangle, we remain shrouded in myths and distortions about human sexuality and human relationships.

But how do race, class, gender, and sexuality interrelate? This complex question is explored in the interview by Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed with longtime activist Barbara Smith ("Where Has Gay Liberation Gone?"). Many have argued that race, class, gender, and sexuality are similar in social relations and processes of society. Can we collapse them as similar categories of difference? Smith carefully identifies some of the ways in which race and sexuality are not similar. She notes that racial oppression is historically and structurally embedded in the founding of the United States, whereas lesbian and gay oppression was not. Differences in historical paths and varying structural arrangements should not blind us, however, to the similarities that link race,

class, and gender oppression to homophobia and heterosexism. As Smith notes, similar strategies are used to oppress people by race and by sexuality. As she succinctly puts it, "Our enemies are the same. That to me is the major thing that should be pulling us together." When you use a race/class/gender framework to think about sexuality, you will see both common patterns and different realities in race, class, gender, and sexual oppression. Sexuality, for example, has not been used as an explicit category to organize the division of labor, as have race, class, and gender. Nonetheless, sexuality has been a key part of the division of labor, primarily in the form of heterosexual households where the White middle and upper classes rely on male breadwinners. But, this family form, as we have seen, has not been available to all and is currently undergoing great change. Female-headed and female-supported families have long been characteristics of families of color and are now increasingly common among White, middle-class families too. Thus, the idea of the male breadwinner—supported as it was through heterosexism—is more an ideological ideal than a reality.

Kamala Kempadoo in "Globalizing Sex Workers' Rights" raises another dimension to the discussion of sexuality—sex as work. Sex workers sell their bodies or images of their bodies for money. Kempadoo emphasizes how sex workers have organized worldwide to address issues of human rights, working conditions, and decriminalization. Her analysis links sex work to other struggles for women's rights and social justice. She also brings a global perspective to the discussion of sexuality. Sex work on a global scale is also linked to world politics about race and class, given the specific position of women of color in international sex work. Furthermore, the class politics of international relations are also apparent in the place of women in the international traffic in sex, where women's sexuality is used to promote tourism and where images of the "exotic other" are used to attract more affluent classes to various regions of the world. Kempadoo also links sexuality to processes of migration, showing how race, class, gender, and sex are part of the international traffic in women.

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