

EDITION

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**DIVERSITY  
& SOCIETY**

Race, Ethnicity,  
and Gender

**JOSEPH F. HEALEY • ANDI STEPNIK**



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# 5

## **African Americans: From Segregation to Modern Institutional Discrimination and Modern Racism**

*My first victim was a woman—white, well dressed, probably in her early twenties. I came upon her late one evening on a deserted street in Hyde Park, a relatively affluent neighborhood in an otherwise mean, impoverished section of Chicago. . . . To her, the youngish black man—a broad six feet two inches with a beard and billowing hair, both hands shoved into the pockets of a bulky military jacket—seemed menacingly close. After a few more quick glimpses, she picked up her pace and was soon running in earnest. Within seconds she disappeared into a cross street.*

*. . . It was in the echo of that terrified woman's footfalls that I first began to know the unwieldy inheritance I'd come into—the ability to alter public space in ugly ways. It was clear that she thought herself the quarry of a mugger, a rapist, or worse. . . .*

*I moved to New York and . . . have remained an avid night walker. I often witness the "hunch posture," from women after dark. . . . They seem to set their faces on neutral and, with their purse straps strung across their chests bandolier-style, they forge ahead as though bracing themselves against being tackled. I understand, of course, that the danger they perceive is not a hallucination. Women are particularly vulnerable to street violence, and young black males are drastically overrepresented among the perpetrators of that*

*violence. Yet these truths are no solace against the kind of alienation that comes of being ever the suspect, against being set apart, a fearsome entity with whom pedestrians avoid making eye contact.*

—Brent Staples (1986)

Virtually all African American men—including President Barack Obama—have experienced this “otherness,” the presumption of guilt, threat, and danger, the “unwieldy inheritance” that echoes centuries of history, crime statistics, and the gory recitations of the evening news. Shopkeepers watch young black customers with special attention; police routinely stop, question, and frisk black (and other minority group) men; and white pedestrians may cross the street when they see black men approaching.

All of this might be considered as an annoyance, something people could learn to live with, if it weren’t for the high potential for escalation and tragedy, as illustrated by the 2012 case of Trayvon Martin, a black young man shot and killed while walking home from the store. His assailant, George Zimmerman, stopped Martin because he “looked suspicious,” and their confrontation quickly turned deadly. Zimmerman, a sometimes-member of a neighborhood watch group, was acquitted of homicide charges in July 2013.

These experiences demonstrate that, on many levels, African Americans continue to be seen as outsiders, apart from and alien to the American mainstream. Certainly, there has been progress toward racial justice and inclusion, but, as this chapter will demonstrate, the struggle is far from over.

**A** century ago, African Americans were primarily a southern, rural peasantry, victimized by de jure segregation, exploited by the sharecropping system of agriculture, and blocked from the better-paying industrial and manufacturing jobs in urban areas. Segregation had disenfranchised them and stripped them of the legal and civil rights they had briefly enjoyed during Reconstruction. As we saw in Chapter 4, the huge majority of African Americans had limited access to quality education, few political rights, few occupational choices, and few means of expressing their grievances to the larger society or the world.

Today, African Americans are highly urbanized, dispersed throughout the United States, and represented in every occupation. Perhaps the single most significant sign of racial progress is the election of Obama to the presidency of the United States, but African Americans are visible across the board at the highest levels of American society: from the Supreme Court to corporate boardrooms to the most prestigious universities. Some of the best-known, most successful, most respected (and wealthiest) people in the world have been African Americans: Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Michael Jordan, Toni Morrison, Michael Jackson, Maya Angelou, Muhammad Ali, Oprah Winfrey, Colin Powell, and Will Smith, to name just a few. Furthermore, African Americans have led some of the most important and prestigious American corporations, including Merrill Lynch, American Express, and Time Warner.

Compared with 100 years ago, the situation of black Americans today is obviously much improved. The journey to racial equality and a truly color-blind society is, however, far from accomplished. As we shall see in this chapter, a large percentage of black Americans remain on the margins of society: excluded, segregated, and victimized by persisting inequalities in education, health care, housing, and jobs. Even the more fortunate segments of the black community remain in a tenuous situation: they have fewer resources to fall back on in hard times and weaker connections to the sources of power and privilege. The glittering success stories of the few obscure the continuing struggles of the many, and racism, prejudice, and discrimination continue to be significant problems.

To understand black–white relations in the present, we must deal with the watershed events of the recent past: the end of *de jure* segregation, the triumph (and limitations) of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the urban riots and Black Power movement of the 1960s, and the continuing racial divisions within U.S. society since the 1970s. Behind these events, we can see the powerful pressures of industrialization and modernization, the shift from rigid to fluid competitive group relations, deindustrialization and modern institutional discrimination, changing distributions of power and forms of intergroup competition, the shift from traditional prejudice to modern racism, and new ideas about assimilation and pluralism. Black–white relations changed as a direct result of protest, resistance, and the concerted actions of thousands of individuals, both black and white.

## The End of De Jure Segregation

As a colonized minority group, African Americans entered the 20th century facing extreme inequality, relative powerlessness, and sharp limitations on their freedom. Their most visible enemy was the system of *de jure* segregation in the South, the rigid competitive system of group relations that controlled the lives of most African Americans.

Why and how did *de jure* segregation come to an end? Recall from Chapter 4 that dominant–minority relationships change as the larger society and its subsistence technology change. As the United States industrialized and urbanized during the 20th century, a series of social, political, economic, and legal processes were set in motion that ultimately destroyed Jim Crow segregation.

The mechanization and modernization of agriculture in the South had a powerful effect on race relations. As farm work became less labor-intensive and machines replaced people, the need to maintain a large, powerless workforce declined (Geschwender, 1978, pp. 175–177). Thus, one of the primary motivations for maintaining Jim Crow segregation and the sharecropping system of farming lost force.

In addition, the modernization of Southern agriculture helped to spur the migration northward and to urban areas, as we discussed in Chapter 4. Outside the rural South, African Americans found it easier to register to vote and pursue other avenues for improving their situations. The weight of the growing African American vote was first felt in the 1930s and was large enough to make a difference in local, state, and even national elections by the 1940s. In 1948, for example, President Harry Truman recognized that he

could not be reelected without the support of African American voters. As a result, the Democratic Party adopted a civil rights plank in the party platform—the first time since Reconstruction that a national political party had taken a stand on race relations (Wilson, 1973, p. 123).

The weight of these changes accumulated slowly, and no single date or specific event marks the end of de jure segregation. The system ended as it had begun: gradually and in a series of discrete episodes and incidents. By the mid-20th century, resistance to racial change was weakening, and the power resources of African Americans were increasing. This enhanced freedom and strength fueled a variety of efforts that sped the demise of Jim Crow segregation. Although a complete historical autopsy is not necessary here, a general understanding of the reasons for the death of Jim Crow segregation is essential for an understanding of modern black-white relations.

### Wartime Developments

One of the first successful applications of the growing stock of black power resources occurred in 1941, as the United States was mobilizing for war against Germany and Japan. Despite the crisis atmosphere, racial discrimination was common, even in the defense industry. A group of African Americans, led by labor leader A. Philip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, threatened to march on Washington to protest the discriminatory treatment.

To forestall the march, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 8802, banning discrimination in defense-related industries, and created a watchdog federal agency, the Fair Employment Practices Commission, to oversee compliance with the new antidiscriminatory policy (Franklin & Moss, 1994, pp. 436–437; Geschwender, 1978, pp. 199–200). President Roosevelt's actions were significant in two ways. First, a group of African Americans not only had their grievances heard at the highest level of society but also succeeded in getting what they wanted. Underlying the effectiveness of the planned march was the rising political and economic power of the African American community outside the South and the need to mobilize all segments of the population for a world war. Second, the federal government made an unprecedented commitment to fair employment rights for African Americans. This alliance between the federal government and African Americans was tentative, but it foreshadowed some of the dynamics of racial change in the 1950s and 1960s.

### The Civil Rights Movement

The **civil rights movement** was a multifaceted campaign to end legalized segregation and ameliorate the massive inequalities faced by African Americans. The campaign lasted for decades and included lawsuits and courtroom battles as well as protest marches and demonstrations. We begin our examination with a look at the movement's successful challenge to the laws of racial segregation.

***Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.*** Undoubtedly, the single most powerful blow to de jure segregation was delivered by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of*

*Education of Topeka* in 1954. The Supreme Court reversed the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896 (see Chapter 4) and ruled that racially separate facilities are inherently unequal and therefore unconstitutional. Segregated school systems—and all other forms of legalized racial segregation—would have to end.

The landmark *Brown* decision was the culmination of decades of planning and effort by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and individuals such as Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP's chief counsel (who was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1967). The strategy of the NAACP was to attack Jim Crow by finding instances in which the civil rights of an African American had been violated and then bringing suit against the relevant governmental agency.

These lawsuits were intended to extend far beyond the specific case being argued. The goal was to persuade the courts to declare segregation unconstitutional not only in the specific instance being tried but in all similar cases. The *Brown* (1954) decision was the ultimate triumph of this strategy. The significance of the Supreme Court's decision was not that Linda Brown—the child in whose name the case was argued—would attend a different school or even that the school system of Topeka, Kansas, would be integrated. Instead, the significance was in the rejection of the principle of de jure segregation in the South and, by implication, throughout the nation. The *Brown* decision changed the law and dealt a crippling blow to Jim Crow segregation.

The blow was not fatal, however. Southern states responded to the *Brown* (1954) decision by stalling and mounting campaigns of massive resistance. Jim Crow laws remained on the books for years. White Southerners actively defended the system of racial privilege and attempted to forestall change through a variety of means, including violence and intimidation. The Ku Klux Klan (KKK), largely dormant since the 1920s, reappeared, along with other racist and terrorist groups, such as the White Citizens' Councils. White politicians and other leaders competed with one another to express the most adamant statements of racist resistance (Wilson, 1973, p. 128). One locality, Prince Edward County in central Virginia, chose to close its public schools rather than integrate. The schools remained closed for 5 years. During that time, the white children attended private, segregated academies, and the county provided no schooling at all for African American children (Franklin, 1967, p. 644).

**Nonviolent Direct Action Protest.** The principle established by *Brown* (1954) was assimilationist: It ordered the educational institutions of the dominant group to be opened up freely and equally to all. Southern states and communities overwhelmingly rejected the principle of equal access and shared facilities. Centuries of racist tradition and privilege were at stake, and considerable effort would be required to overcome southern defiance and resistance. The central force in this struggle was a protest movement, the beginning of which is often traced to Montgomery, Alabama. There, on December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a seamstress and NAACP member, rode the city bus home from work, as she usually did. As the bus filled, she was ordered to surrender her seat to a white male passenger. When she refused, the police were called and Rosa Parks was jailed for violating a local segregation ordinance.

Although Mrs. Parks was hardly the first African American to be subjected to such indignities, her case stimulated a protest movement in the African American community, and a boycott of the city buses was organized. Participants in the boycott set up car pools, shared taxis, and walked (in some cases, for miles) to and from work. They stayed off the buses for more than a year, until victory was achieved and the city was ordered to desegregate its buses. The Montgomery boycott was led by the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., the new minister of a local Baptist church.

From these beginnings sprang the protest movement that eventually defeated de jure segregation. The central strategy of the movement involved **nonviolent direct action**, a method by which the system of de jure segregation was confronted head-on, not in the courtroom or in the state legislature, but in the streets. The movement's principles of nonviolence were adopted from the tenets of Christianity and from the teachings of Mohandas K. Gandhi, Henry David Thoreau, and others. Dr. King expressed the philosophy in a number of books and speeches (King, 1958, 1963, 1968). Nonviolent protest was intended to confront the forces of evil rather than the people who happened to be doing evil, and it attempted to win the friendship and support of its enemies rather than to defeat or humiliate them. Above all, nonviolent protest required courage and discipline; it was not a method for cowards (King, 1958, pp. 83–84).

The movement used different tactics for different situations, including sit-ins at segregated restaurants, protest marches and demonstrations, prayer meetings, and voter registration drives. The police and terrorist groups such as the KKK often responded to these protests with brutal repression and violence, and protesters were routinely imprisoned, beaten, and attacked by police dogs. The violent resistance sometimes escalated to acts of murder, including the 1963 bombing of a black church in Birmingham, Alabama, that took the lives of four little girls, and the 1968 assassination of Dr. King. Resistance to racial change in the South was intense. It would take more than protests and marches to end de jure segregation, and the U.S. Congress finally provided the necessary tools (see D'Angelo, 2001; Halberstam, 1998; Killian, 1975; King, 1958, 1963, 1968; Lewis, 1999; Morris, 1984).

**Landmark Legislation.** The successes of the protest movement, combined with changing public opinion and the legal principles established by the Supreme Court, coalesced in the mid-1960s to stimulate the passage of two laws that together ended Jim Crow segregation. In 1964, at the urging of President Lyndon B. Johnson, the U.S. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, banning discrimination on the grounds of race, color, religion, national origin, or gender. The law applied to publicly owned facilities such as parks and municipal swimming pools, businesses and other facilities open to the public, and any programs that received federal aid.

Congress followed this up with the Voting Rights Act in 1965, also initiated by President Johnson, which required that the same standards be used to register all citizens in federal, state, and local elections. The act banned literacy tests, whites-only primaries, and other practices that had been used to prevent African Americans from registering to vote. This law gave the franchise back to black Southerners for the first time since Reconstruction and laid the groundwork for increasing black political

power. This landmark federal legislation, in combination with court decisions and the protest movement, finally succeeded in crushing Jim Crow.

The significance of these two laws for ending state-sponsored racial discrimination and furthering the commitment of the nation to equality and justice cannot be easily understated. The principles of the Civil Rights Act are now firmly implanted in American culture and law, and the hypocrisies of the past that granted equal rights only to whites seem like hopelessly outdated relics.

The Voting Rights Act was equally crucial in ending de jure segregation, but, unlike the Civil Rights Act, it was specifically designed as a remedy for discriminatory practices in certain states in the mid-1960s. The act had to be renewed periodically, and Congress did so, most recently in 2006 with a huge majority in the House and by a unanimous vote in the Senate.

However, in a 5-to-4 decision in 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled parts of the Voting Rights Act unconstitutional on the grounds that the specific discriminatory voting practices the act was designed to remedy no longer exist. For example, Chief Justice John Roberts noted that African Americans turned out to vote at higher rates than did whites in the 2012 presidential election in most of the states originally covered by the law in 1965 (Liptak, 2013). We will consider some of the implications of this decision later in the chapter when we discuss African American political power.

**The Success and Limitations of the Civil Rights Movement.** Why did the civil rights movement succeed? A comprehensive list of reasons would be lengthy, but we can cite some of the most important causes of its success, especially those consistent with the general points about dominant–minority relations that have been made in previous chapters.

1. *Changing subsistence technology.* The continuing industrialization and urbanization of the society as a whole—and the South in particular—weakened the Jim Crow, rigid competitive system of minority group control and segregation. We made this point in Chapter 4 when we discussed the impact of the changing subsistence technology and the end of paternalistic controls (see Table 4.2).
2. *An era of prosperity.* Following World War II, the United States enjoyed a period of prosperity that lasted into the 1960s. Consistent with the Noel hypothesis, this was important because it reduced the intensity of intergroup competition, at least outside the South. During prosperous times, resistance to change tends to weaken. If the economic “pie” is expanding, the “slices” claimed by minority groups can increase without threatening the size of anyone else’s portions, and the prejudice generated during intergroup competition (à la Robber’s Cave, Chapter 1) is held in check. Thus, these “good times” muted the sense of threat in the dominant group sparked by the demands for equality made by the civil rights movement.
3. *Increasing resources in the black community.* Some of the economic prosperity of the era found its way into African American communities and increased their pool of economic and political resources. Networks of independent, African American–controlled organizations and institutions, such as churches and colleges, were created or grew in

size and power. The increasingly elaborate infrastructure of the black community included protest organizations, such as the NAACP (see Chapter 4), and provided material resources, leadership, and “people power” to lead the fight against segregation and discrimination.

4. *Assimilationist goals.* The civil rights movement embraced the traditional American values of liberty, equality, freedom, and fair treatment. It demanded civil, legal, and political rights for African Americans, rights available to whites automatically. Thus, many whites did not feel threatened by the movement because they saw it as consistent with mainstream American values, especially in contrast to the intense, often violent resistance of southern whites.
5. *Coalitions.* The perceived legitimacy of the goals of the movement also opened up the possibility of alliances with other groups (e.g., white liberals, Jews, college students). The support of others was crucial because black Southerners had few resources of their own other than their numbers and courage. By mobilizing the resources of other, more powerful groups, black Southerners forged alliances and created sympathetic support that was brought to bear on their opposition.
6. *Mass media.* Widespread and sympathetic coverage from the mass media, particularly television, was crucial to the success of the movement. The oft-repeated scenario of African Americans being brutally attacked while demonstrating for their rights outraged many Americans and reinforced the moral consensus that eventually rejected “traditional” racial prejudice along with Jim Crow segregation.

The southern civil rights movement ended de jure segregation but found it difficult to survive the demise of its primary enemy. The confrontational tactics that had been so effective against the Jim Crow system proved less useful when attention turned to the actual distribution of jobs, wealth, political power, and other valued goods and services. Outside the South, the allocation of opportunity and resources always had been the central concern of the African American community. Let’s take a look at these concerns.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What forces led to the end of Jim Crow segregation? What was the role of broad social changes such as changing subsistence technology? How important were the contributions of individuals and organizations?
2. What Supreme Court decision and laws ended de jure segregation? How?
3. How do the concepts of competition and differential in power in the Noel hypothesis apply to the demise of the Jim Crow system of segregation?
4. List and explain the important reasons for the success of the civil rights movement.

## Developments Outside the South

### De Facto Segregation

Chapter 4 discussed some of the difficulties encountered by African Americans as they left the rural South. Discrimination by labor unions, employers, industrialists, and white ethnic groups was common. Racial discrimination outside the South was less overt but was still pervasive, especially in housing, education, and employment.

The pattern of racial separation and inequality outside the South is often called **de facto segregation**: segregation resulting from what seems to be, at first glance, the voluntary choices of dominant and minority group members. As opposed to the Jim Crow system in the South or apartheid in South Africa, under de facto segregation, no public laws mandate racial separation. Thus, people often assume that de facto segregation “just happened” as people and groups made decisions about where to live and work; or, that it resulted from some benign tendency of people to be “with their own kind.”

On the contrary, de facto segregation was quite intentional and is best thought of as de jure segregation in disguise. Racial segregation outside the South was the direct result of intentionally racist decisions made by governmental and quasi-governmental agencies, such as real estate boards, school boards, and zoning boards (see Massey & Denton, 1993, pp. 74–114; also see Loewen, 2005). De facto segregation was created when local and state authorities actively colluded with private citizens behind the scenes, ignored racist practices within their jurisdiction, and “simply refrained from enforcing black social, economic, and political rights so that private discriminatory practices could do their work” (Massey, 2007 p. 57). For example, shortly after World War I, the real estate board in the city of Chicago adopted a policy that required its members, on penalty of “immediate expulsion,” to enforce racial residential segregation (Cohen & Taylor, 2000, p. 33). The city itself passed no Jim Crow laws but the result was the same: Black Americans were consigned to a separate and unequal status.

African Americans outside the South faced more poverty, higher unemployment, and lower-quality housing and schools than did whites, but there was no clear equivalent of Jim Crow to attack or blame for these patterns of inequality. Thus, the triumphs of the civil rights movement had little impact on their lives. In the 1960s, the African American community outside the South expressed its frustration over the slow pace of change in two ways: urban unrest and a movement for change that rose to prominence as the civil rights movement faded.

### Urban Unrest

In the mid-1960s, the frustration and anger of urban African American communities erupted into a series of violent uprisings. The riots began in the summer of 1965 in Watts, a black neighborhood in Los Angeles, California, and over the next four years, virtually every large black urban community experienced similar outbursts.

Racial violence was hardly a new phenomenon in America. Race riots had existed as early as the Civil War, and various periods had seen racial violence of considerable magnitude.

The riots of the 1960s were different, however. Most race riots in the past had been attacks by whites against blacks, often including the invasion and destruction of African American neighborhoods (e.g., see D'Orso, 1996; Ellsworth, 1982). The urban unrest of the 1960s, in contrast, consisted largely of attacks by blacks against the symbols of their oppression and frustration. The most obvious targets were white-owned businesses operating in black neighborhoods and the police, who were seen as an army of occupation and whose excessive use of force was often the immediate precipitator of riots (Conot, 1967; National Advisory Commission, 1968).

### **The Black Power Movement**

The urban riots of the 1960s were an unmistakable sign that the problems of race relations had not been resolved with the end of Jim Crow segregation. Outside the South, the problems were different and called for different solutions. Even as the civil rights movement was celebrating its victory in the South, a new protest movement rose to prominence. The **Black Power movement** was a loose coalition of organizations and spokespersons that encompassed a variety of ideas and views, many of which differed sharply from those of the civil rights movement. Some of the central ideas included racial pride ("Black is beautiful" was a key slogan of the day), interest in African heritage, and Black Nationalism. In contrast to the assimilationist goals of the civil rights movement, Black Power groups worked to increase African American control over schools, police, welfare programs, and other public services operating in black neighborhoods.

Most adherents of the Black Power movement believed that white racism and institutional discrimination, forces buried deep in the core of American culture and society, were the primary causes of racial inequality in America. Thus, if African Americans were ever to be truly empowered, they would have to liberate themselves and do it on their own terms. Some Black Power advocates specifically rejected the goal of assimilation into white society, arguing that integration would require blacks to become part of the very system that had for centuries oppressed, denigrated, and devalued them and other peoples of color.

**The Nation of Islam.** The themes of Black Power voiced so loudly in the 1960s were decades, even centuries, old. Marcus Garvey had popularized many of these ideas in the 1920s, and they were espoused and further developed by the Nation of Islam, popularly known as the Black Muslims, in the 1960s.

The Black Muslims, one of the best-known organizations within the Black Power movement, were angry, impatient, and outspoken. They denounced the hypocrisy, greed, and racism of American society and advocated staunch resistance and racial separation. The Black Muslims did more than talk, however. Pursuing the goals of autonomy and self-determination, they worked hard to create a separate, independent African American economy within the United States. They opened businesses and stores in African American neighborhoods and tried to deal only with other Muslim-owned

firms. Their goal was to develop the African American community economically and to supply jobs and capital for expansion using solely their own resources (Essien-Udom, 1962; Lincoln, 1961; Malcolm X, 1964; Marable, 2011; Wolfenstein, 1993).

The Nation of Islam and other Black Power groups distinguished between racial separation and racial segregation. The former is a process of empowerment whereby a group becomes stronger as it becomes more autonomous and self-controlled. The latter is a system of inequality in which the African American community is powerless and is controlled by the dominant group. Thus, the Black Power groups were working to find ways in which African Americans could develop their own resources and deal with the dominant group from a more powerful position, a strategy similar to that followed by minority groups that form ethnic enclaves (see Chapter 2).

The best-known spokesperson for the Nation of Islam was Malcolm X, one of the most charismatic figures of the 1960s. Malcolm X forcefully articulated the themes of the Black Power movement. Born Malcolm Little, he converted to Islam and joined the Nation of Islam while serving a prison term. He became the chief spokesperson for the Black Muslims and a well-known but threatening figure to the white community. After a dispute with Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X founded his own organization, in which he continued to express and develop the ideas of Black Nationalism. In 1965, like so many other protest leaders of the era, Malcolm X was assassinated (Marable, 2011).

Black power leaders such as Malcolm X advocated autonomy, independence, and a pluralistic direction for the African American protest movement. They saw the African American community as a colonized, exploited population in need of liberation from the unyielding racial oppression of white America, not integration into the system that was the source of its oppression.

## Protest, Power, and Pluralism

### The Black Power Movement in Perspective

By the end of the 1960s, the riots had ended, and the most militant and dramatic manifestations of the Black Power movement had faded. In many cases, the passion of Black Power activists had been countered by the violence of the police and other agencies, and many of the most powerful spokespersons of the movement were dead; others were in jail or in exile. The nation's commitment to racial change wavered and weakened as other concerns, such as the Vietnam War, competed for attention. Richard M. Nixon was elected president in 1968 and made it clear that his administration would not ally itself with the black protest movements. Pressure from the federal government for racial equality was reduced. The boiling turmoil of the mid-1960s faded, but the idea of Black Power had become thoroughly entrenched in the African American community.

In some part, the pluralistic themes of Black Power were a reaction to the failure of assimilation and integration in the 1950s and 1960s. Laws had been passed; court decisions had been widely publicized; and promises and pledges had been made by presidents, members of Congress, ministers, and other leaders. For many African Americans, though, little had changed. The problems of their parents and grandparents continued

to constrain and limit their lives and, as far into the future as they could see, the lives of their children. The pluralistic Black Power ideology was a response to the failure to go beyond the repeal of Jim Crow laws and fully implement the promises of integration and equality.

Black Nationalism, however, was and remains more than simply a reaction to a failed dream. It was also a different way of defining what it means to be black in America. In the context of black-white relations in the 1960s, the Black Power movement served a variety of purposes. First, along with the civil rights movement, it helped carve out a new identity for African Americans. The cultural stereotypes of black Americans (see Chapter 1) stressed laziness, irresponsibility, and inferiority. This image needed to be refuted, rejected, and buried. The black protest movements supplied a view of African Americans that emphasized power, assertiveness, seriousness of purpose, intelligence, and courage.

Second, Black Power served as a new rallying cry for solidarity and unified action. Following the success of the civil rights movement, these new themes and ideas helped to focus attention on “unfinished business”: the black-white inequalities that remained in U.S. society.

Finally, the ideology provided an analysis of the problems of American race relations in the 1960s. The civil rights movement, of course, had analyzed race relations in terms of integration, equality of opportunity, and an end to exclusion. After the demise of Jim Crow, that analysis became less relevant. A new language was needed to describe and analyze the continuation of racial inequality. Black Power argued that the continuing problems of U.S. race relations were structural and institutional, not individual or legal. Taking the next steps toward actualizing racial equality and justice would require a fundamental and far-reaching restructuring of the society. Ultimately, white Americans, as the beneficiaries of the system, would not support restructuring. The necessary energy and commitment had to come from African Americans pursuing their own self-interests.

The nationalistic and pluralistic demands of the Black Power movement evoked defensiveness and a sense of threat in white society. By questioning the value of assimilation and celebrating a separate African heritage equal in legitimacy with white European heritage, the Black Power movement questioned the legitimacy and worth of Anglo American values. In fact, many Black Power spokespersons condemned Anglo American values fiercely and openly and implicated them in the creation and maintenance of a centuries-long system of racial repression. Today, almost 50 years after the success of the civil rights movement, assertive and critical demands by the African American community continue to be perceived as threatening.

### **Gender and Black Protest**

Both the civil rights movement and the Black Power movement tended to be dominated by men. African American women were often viewed as supporters of men rather than as equal partners in liberation. Although African American women were heavily involved in the struggle, they were often denied leadership roles or decision-making positions in favor of men. In fact, the women in one organization, the Student

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, wrote position papers to protest their relegation to lowly clerical positions and the frequent references to them as “girls” (Andersen, 1993, p. 284). The Nation of Islam emphasized girls’ and women’s subservience, imposing a strict code of behavior and dress for women and separating the people by gender in many temple and community activities. Thus, the battle against racism and the battle against sexism were separate struggles with separate and often contradictory agendas, as the black protest movements continued to subordinate women (Amott & Matthaei, 1991, p. 177).

When the protest movements began, however, African American women were already heavily involved in community and church work, and they often used their organizational skills and energy to further the cause of black liberation. Many people view African American women as the backbone of the movement, even if they were often relegated to less glamorous but vital organizational work (Evans, 1979).

Fannie Lou Hamer of Mississippi, an African American who became a prominent leader in the black liberation movement, illustrates the importance of the role played by women. Born in 1917 to sharecropper parents, Hamer’s life was so circumscribed that until she attended her first rally at the beginning of the civil rights movement she was unaware that blacks could—even theoretically—register to vote. The day after the rally, she quickly volunteered to register:

I guess if I’d had any sense I’d a-been a little scared, but what was the point of being scared? The only thing they could do to me was kill me and it seemed like they’d been trying to do that a little bit at a time ever since I could remember. (Evans, 1989, p. 271)

As a result of her activism, Hamer lost her job, was evicted from her house, and was jailed and beaten on a number of occasions. She devoted herself entirely to the civil rights movement and founded the Freedom Party, which successfully challenged the racially segregated Democratic Party and the all-white political structure of the State of Mississippi (Evans, 1979; Hamer, 1967).

Much of the energy that motivated black protest was forged in the depths of segregation and exclusion, a system of oppression that affected all African Americans. Not all segments of the community had the same experience; the realities faced by the black community, as always, were differentiated by class as well as gender.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

5. How did de facto segregation differ from de jure segregation? Were the differences merely cosmetic? Why or why not?
6. How and why did the Black Power movement differ from the civil rights movement?
7. Did the Black Power movement succeed? Explain.
8. What were some of the important gender dimensions of black protest movements?

## Black-White Relations Since the 1960s: Issues and Trends

Black-white relations have changed over the past five decades, of course, but the basic outlines of black inequality and white dominance have persisted. To be sure, improvements have been made in integrating society and eliminating racial inequality. Obama's election—unimaginable just a few decades ago (and maybe a few years ago)—stands as one unmistakable symbol of racial progress, a breakthrough so stunning it has led many to conclude that America is now “postracial” and that people's fates are no longer connected to the color of their skin, an argument that is easily refuted by a consideration of the trends and statistics presented in this chapter.

Without denying the signs of progress, the situation of the African American community today has stagnated in many dimensions, and the problems that remain are deep rooted and inextricably mixed with the structure and functioning of modern American society. As was the case in earlier eras, racism and racial inequality today cannot be addressed apart from the trends of change in the larger society, especially changes in subsistence technology. This section examines the racial separation that continues to characterize so many areas of U.S. society and applies many of the concepts from previous chapters to present-day black-white relations.

### COMPARATIVE FOCUS: Race in Another America

One of the key characteristics of traditional U.S. anti-black prejudice is a simple “two-race” view: Everyone belongs to one and only one race, and a person is either black or white. This perception is a legacy of the assumption of black inferiority that was at the heart of both U.S. slavery and Jim Crow segregation in the South. The southern states formalized the racial dichotomy in law as well as custom with the “one-drop rule”: Any trace of black ancestry, even “one drop” of African blood, meant that a person was legally black and subject to all the limitations of extreme racial inequality.

The U.S. perception of race contrasts sharply with the racial sensibilities in many other nations. Throughout Central and South America, for example, race is perceived as a continuum of possibilities and combinations, not as a simple split between white and black. This does not mean that these societies are egalitarian, racially open utopias. To the contrary, they incorporate a strong sense of status and position and clear notions of who is higher and who is lower. However, other factors, especially social class, are considered more important than race as criteria for judging and ranking other people. In fact, social class can affect perceptions of skin color to the extent that people of higher status can be seen as “whiter” than those of lower status, regardless of actual skin color.

One interesting comparison is between the United States and Brazil, the largest nation in South America. The racial histories of Brazil and the United States run parallel in many ways, and prejudice, discrimination, and racial inequality are very much a part of Brazilian society, past and present. Like other Central and South Americans, however, Brazilians recognize many gradations of skin color and the different blends that are possible in people of mixed-race heritage. Commonly used terms in Brazil include *branco* (white), *moreno* (brown), *moreno claro* (light brown), *claro* (light), *pardo* (mixed race), and *negro* and *preto* (black). Some reports count scores of Brazilian racial categories, but Telles (2004, p. 82) reports that fewer than 10 are in common use. Still, this system is vastly more complex than the traditional U.S. perception of race.

Why does Brazil have a more open-ended, less rigid system than the United States? Let's consider several important points:

- The foundation for the Brazilian racial perception was laid in the distant past. The Portuguese, the colonial conquerors of Brazil, were mostly single men, and they intermarried with other racial groups, thus producing a large class of mixed-race people.
- Slavery was not so thoroughly equated with race in Brazil as it was in North America and did not carry the same presumption of racial inferiority as in North America, where slavery, blackness, and inferiority were tightly linked in the dominant ideology, an equation with powerful echoes in the present.
- After slavery ended, Brazil did not go through a period of legalized racial segregation like the Jim Crow system in the U.S. South or apartheid in South Africa. Thus, there was less need politically, socially, or economically to divide people into rigid groups in Brazil.

We should stress that Brazil is not a racial utopia, as is sometimes claimed. Prejudice is an everyday reality, the legacy of slavery is strong, and there is a high correlation between skin color and social status. Black Brazilians have much higher illiteracy, unemployment, and poverty rates, and are much less likely to have access to a university education. Whites dominate the more prestigious and lucrative occupations and the leadership positions in the economy and in politics, while blacks are concentrated at the bottom of the class system, with mixed-race people in between (Haan & Thorat, 2012; Kuperman, 2001, p. 25; Marteleto, 2012).

It would be difficult to argue that race prejudice in Brazil is less intense than in the United States. On the other hand, given the vastly different perceptions of race in the two societies, we can conclude that Brazilian prejudice has a different content and emotional texture and reflects a different contact situation and national history (Mikulak, 2011).

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

9. Compare and contrast the understandings of race in the United States and Brazil. Why do these differences exist?
10. What is the role of the contact situation in shaping contemporary race relations in these two societies?

### Continuing Separation

More than 45 years ago, a presidential commission charged with investigating black urban unrest warned that the United States was “moving towards two societies, one black, one white, separate and unequal” (National Advisory Commission, 1968, p. 1). We could object to the commission’s use of the phrase “moving towards,” with its suggestion that U.S. society was at one time racially unified, but the warning still seems prophetic.

While race relations are clearly better today, African Americans and white Americans, in many ways, continue to live in separate worlds. The separation is especially complete when race is compounded with class and residence: The black urban poor lead lives that barely intersect with the lives of the more affluent whites of suburbia.

Each group has committed violence and hate crimes against the other, but the power differentials and the patterns of inequality that are the legacy of our racist past guarantee that African Americans will more often be seen as “invaders” pushing into areas where they do not belong and are not wanted. Sometimes the reactions to these perceived intrusions are immediate and bloody, but other, subtler attempts to maintain the exclusion of African Americans continue to be part of everyday life, even at the highest levels of society. For example, in a lawsuit reminiscent of Jim Crow days, a national restaurant chain was accused of discriminating against African American customers by systematically providing poor service. In 2004, the company agreed to pay \$8.7 million to settle the lawsuit (McDowell, 2004).

Many African Americans mirror the hostility of whites, and as the goals of full racial equality and integration continue to seem remote, frustration and anger continue to run high. While Obama’s election stirred strong optimism and positive attitudes toward the future in the black community, the more typical mood is pessimistic. (Recall our discussion of public opinion poll results and the differences in black and white perceptions of U.S. race relations from Chapter 1.)

The discontent and frustration have been manifested in violence and riots; the most widely publicized example was the racial violence that began with the 1991 arrest and beating of Rodney King by police officers in Los Angeles. The attack on King was videotaped and shown repeatedly on national and international news, and contrary to the expectations of most who saw the videotape, the police officers were acquitted of almost all charges in April 1992. On hearing word of the acquittals, African American

communities in several cities erupted in violence. The worst disturbance occurred in the Watts section of Los Angeles, where 58 people lost their lives and millions of dollars' worth of property was damaged or destroyed (Wilkins, 1992).

This aftermath of the beating of Rodney King illustrates several of the common ingredients that have sparked black collective violence and protest since the 1960s: the behavior of the police and the ubiquity of recording devices. An additional example occurred in 2009 in Oakland, California. Oscar Grant, a 23-year-old black man, was returning from New Year's Eve celebrations in San Francisco when he was caught up in an altercation at a subway station. Police had Grant down on the ground when Officer Johannes Mehserle shot him in the back. Grant was not handcuffed, and Mehserle claimed that Grant was reaching for his waistband—possibly for a weapon—when he fired the fatal shot. In fact, Grant was unarmed. These events were recorded on multiple cameras and cell phones, and quickly went viral on the Internet. To many, Grant's death appeared to be an intentional, unprovoked execution.

The black community responded with both peaceful protests and violent rioting. Mehserle was eventually convicted of involuntary manslaughter and sentenced to a two-year prison term. The punishment seemed a mere slap on the wrist to many and provoked further protest, both peaceful and violent (Bulwa, 2010; Egelko, 2009). These types of incidents continue. The deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, and others in 2014 and 2015 have sparked protests such as those in Ferguson, Missouri, as well as other forms of activism (like #BlackLivesMatter) across the United States.

In some ways, these events were similar to the 1960s riots. The protests and mass violence were spontaneous and expressed diffuse but bitter discontent with the racial status quo. They signaled the continuing racial inequality, urban poverty and despair, and reality of separate communities, unequal and hostile.

### **The Criminal Justice System and African Americans**

As illustrated by the shooting of Grant, Garner, Brown, and Gray, no area of race relations is more volatile and controversial than the relationship between the black community and the criminal justice system. There is considerable mistrust and resentment of the police among African Americans, and the perception that the entire criminal justice system is stacked against them is common.

**A Biased Criminal Justice System?** The perception of bias is not without justification: The police and other elements of the criminal justice system have a long tradition of abuse, harassment, and mistreatment of black citizens, who, in turn, commonly see the police as the enemy and the entire criminal justice system as an occupying force. For example, a 2013 nationally representative poll found that 68% of black respondents—two thirds of the sample—thought the American justice system was racially biased. Only 25% of whites agreed (Newport, 2013a). We should note that this poll was conducted shortly after George Zimmerman was acquitted of murder and manslaughter charges in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin. We would generally expect such incidents to intensify the perception of bias. On the other hand, the percentage of black

respondents who perceived bias was essentially unchanged from two previous polls, one in 2008 and the other in 1993.

The great majority of social science research has documented the continuing bias of the criminal justice system, at all levels, against African Americans (and other minorities). In a comprehensive summary of this research, Rosich (2007) concluded that, while blatant and overt discrimination has diminished over the past few decades, the biases that remain have powerful consequences for the black community, even though they often are more subtle and harder to tease out. Even slight acts of discrimination can have a cumulative effect throughout the stages of processing in the criminal justice system and result in large differences in racial outcomes (Rosich, 2007).

The magnitude of these racial differences is documented by a report that found that, while African Americans make up 16% of all young people, they account for 28% of juvenile arrests, 34% of youths formally processed by the courts, and 58% of youths sent to adult prison (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2007, p. 37; see also Mauer, 2011). Civil rights advocates and other spokespersons for the black community charge that there is a dual justice system in the United States and that blacks, adults as well as juveniles, are likely to receive harsher treatment than are whites charged with similar crimes.

The greater vulnerability of the African American community to the criminal justice system is further documented in two recent studies. The first (Pettit & Western, 2004) focused on men born between 1965 and 1969 and found that 20% of blacks, compared with 3% of whites, had been imprisoned by the time they were 30 years old. Also, the study found that education was a key variable affecting the probability of imprisonment: Nearly 60% of African American men in this cohort who had not completed high school went to prison. The second study (Pew Charitable Trust, 2008) found that black men were imprisoned at far higher rates than white men: While less than 1% of all white men were in prison, the rate for black men was 7%. Furthermore, 11% of black men aged 20 to 34 were imprisoned.

**The War on Drugs.** Perhaps the most important reason for these racial differences is that, since the 1980s, black men have been much more likely than white men to get caught up in the national “get tough” policy on drugs, especially crack cocaine. Crack cocaine is a cheap form of the drug, and the street-level dealers who have felt the brunt of the national antidrug campaign disproportionately have been young African American men from less affluent areas.

Some see the “war on drugs” as a not-so-subtle form of racial discrimination. For example, until 2010, federal law required a mandatory prison term of 5 years for possession of five grams of crack cocaine, a drug much more likely to be dealt by poor blacks. In contrast, comparable levels of sentencing for dealing powder cocaine—the more expensive form of the drug—are not reached until the accused possesses a minimum of 500 grams (Rosich, 2007).

In 2010, the sentencing disparity was reduced by congressional action, and the mandatory 5-year prison term for simple possession of crack cocaine was eliminated (Eckholm, 2010), but Figure 5.1 illustrates the much higher drug arrest rate for black

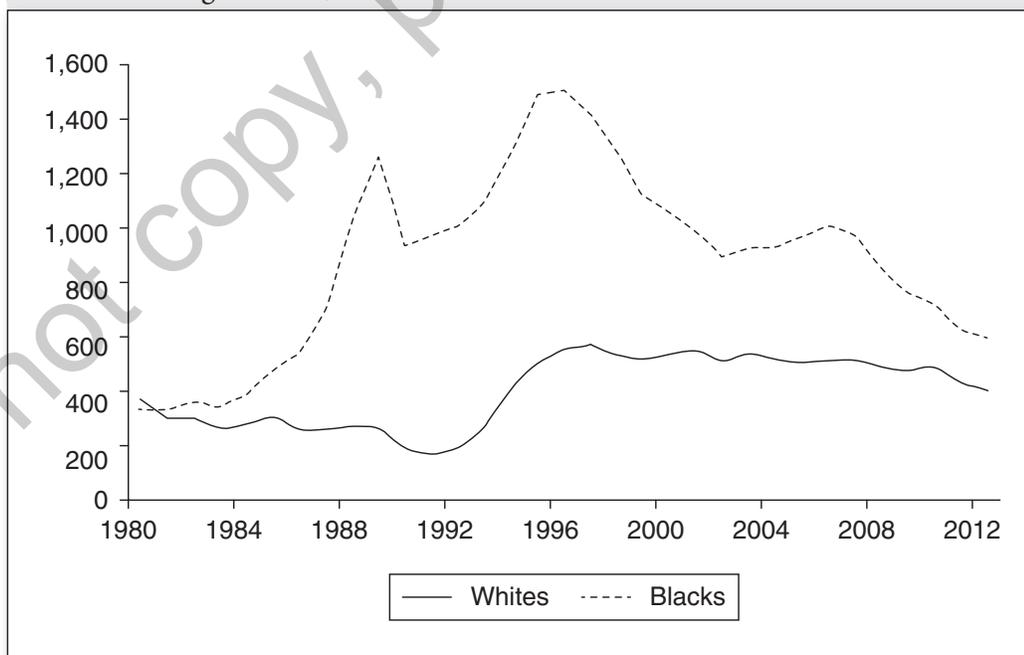
juveniles since the early 1980s. Notice that the arrest rate for blacks spiked in the late 1980s, when the war on drugs began.

Another recent study focused on marijuana arrests and found huge racial disparities in the nation as a whole, in every state except Hawaii, and in the great majority of counties (American Civil Liberties Union, 2013). Nationally, in 2010, blacks were arrested at a rate of about 700 per 100,000 population, while the white arrest rate was slightly less than 200 per 100,000 population. Thus, blacks were roughly 3.5 times more likely to be arrested for this crime. Is this because black Americans use the drug more than do white Americans? Decidedly not. There was virtually no difference in the rate of use for blacks and whites either in the populations as a whole or among younger people.

If there is no racial difference in use of marijuana, what accounts for the huge racial disparity in arrests? Like Brent Staples, whose essay opened this chapter, blacks are more likely to be policed, watched, stopped and frisked, and profiled than are whites. Their greater vulnerability to arrest for this relatively minor offense is echoed in patterns throughout the criminal justice system and reflects the continuing “otherness” of African Americans in U.S. society.

**Racial Profiling.** The racial differences in vulnerability to arrest are captured by the concept of racial profiling: the police use of race as an indicator when calculating

**Figure 5.1** Arrest Rates for Drug Abuse Violations by Race for Juveniles Aged 10–17, 1980–2012



Source: National Center for Health Statistics (2010).

whether a person is suspicious or dangerous (Kennedy, 2001, p. 3). The tendency to focus more on blacks and disproportionately to stop, question, and follow them is a form of discrimination that generates resentment and increases the distrust (and fear) many African Americans feel toward their local police forces.

According to some, humiliating encounters with police (e.g., being stopped and questioned for “driving while black”) are virtually a rite of passage for black men (Kennedy, 2001, p. 7). According to one national survey, 17% of young black men felt that they had been “treated unfairly” in dealings with the police within the previous 30 days (Newport, 2013b).

The charges of racial profiling and discrimination in the war on drugs can be controversial, but these patterns sustain the ancient perceptions of African Americans as dangerous outsiders, and in the African American community they feed the tradition of resentment and anger toward the police.

**The New Jim Crow?** Many of the themes and ideas in this section are presented in a provocative and important book that argues that the racial differentials in the war on drugs amount to a new racial control system that has halted the advances made during the civil rights era (Alexander, 2012). The millions of black men who have been convicted under the racially biased drug laws are not only sent to prison; they also carry the stigma of a felony conviction for their entire lives. Their prospects for legitimate employment are miniscule, they lose the right to vote, and they are ineligible for many government programs, including student loans for college. Like the entire black population under de jure segregation, they are marginalized, excluded, second-class citizens highly controlled by the state.

### **Increasing Class Inequality**

As black Americans moved out of the rural South and as the repressive force of de jure segregation receded, social class inequality within the African American population increased. Since the 1960s, the black middle class has grown, but black poverty continues to be a serious problem.

**The Black Middle Class.** A small African American middle class, based largely on occupations and businesses serving only the African American community, had been in existence since before the Civil War (Frazier, 1957). Has this more affluent segment benefited from increasing tolerance in the larger society, civil rights legislation, and affirmative action programs? Does Obama’s election and reelection signal the continuing rise of the black middle class?

The answer to these questions appears to be no. Any progress that might have been made since the civil rights era seems to have been wiped out by the downturn in the American economy that began in 2007.

In actuality, it seems that the size and prosperity of the black middle class was always less than is sometimes assumed. Two studies illustrate this point. Kochhar (2004) found that between 1996 and 2002, the percentage of blacks that could be considered middle and upper class never exceeded 25% of the black population. The

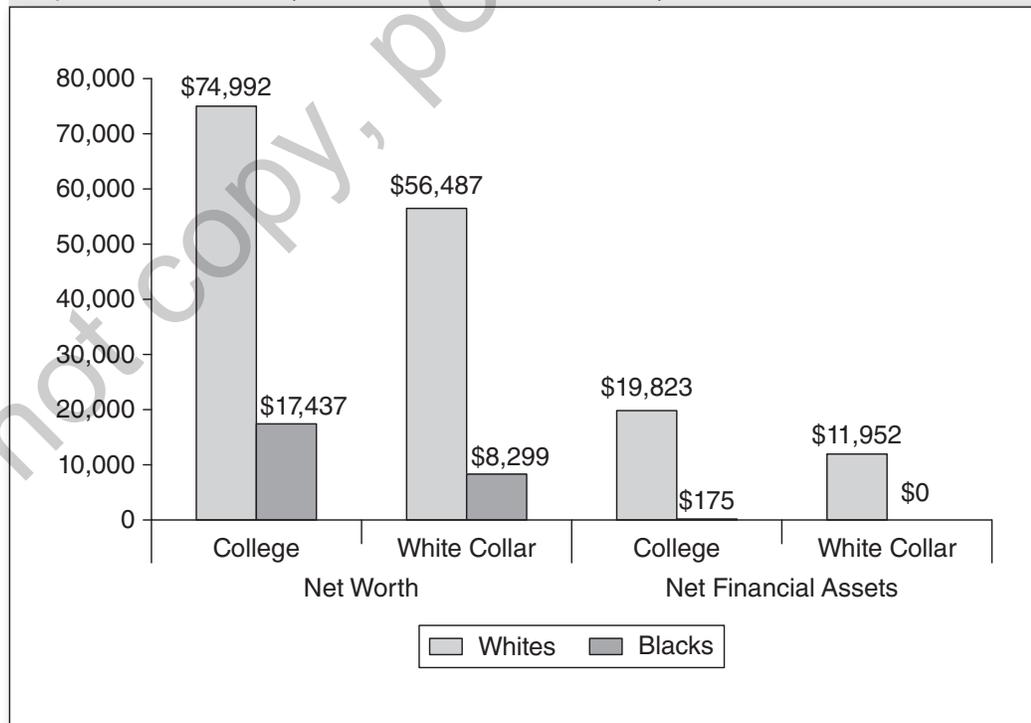
comparable figure for whites was almost 60%. Thus, according to this study, the black middle and upper classes were less than half the size of the white middle and upper classes.

The other study (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006) indicates that, prior to the 2007 economic disruption, the African American middle class was not only smaller than the white middle class, but also much less affluent. The researchers studied racial differences in wealth, which includes not only income but all other financial assets: the value of houses, cars, savings, other property, and so forth.

Figure 5.2 compares the wealth of blacks and whites, using two different definitions of middle class and two different measures of wealth. Middle-class status is defined, first, in terms of level of education, with a college education indicating middle-class status and, second, in terms of occupation, with a white-collar occupation indicating middle-class status.

Wealth is defined first in terms of net worth, which includes all assets (houses, cars, and so forth) minus debt. The second measure, net financial assets, is the same as net worth but excludes the value of a person's investments in home and cars. This second measure is a better indicator of the resources that are available to invest in educating the next generation or financing new businesses (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006, pp. 60–62).

**Figure 5.2** Wealth by Definition of Middle Class by Race



Source: Based on Oliver & Shapiro (2006, p. 96).

By either definition, the black middle class was at a distinct disadvantage. There are huge differentials in net worth between blacks and whites, and even greater differences in net financial assets. Note, in fact, that the figure for net financial assets of blacks in white-collar occupations is exactly zero. Once their equity in houses and cars is subtracted out, they are left with no wealth at all, a statistic that strongly underscores the greater precariousness of middle-class standing for blacks.

While the bad economic times that began in 2007 have affected virtually all Americans, they appear to have had a disproportionately harsh effect on African Americans in general and the African American middle class in particular. One study found that, while both blacks and whites lost wealth after 2007, the median wealth for black families was only 10% of that for white families in 2009 (Shapiro, Meschede, & Osoro, 2013, p. 2; see also Kochhar, Fry, & Taylor, 2011).

These economic differences are due partly to discrimination in the present and partly to the racial gaps in income, wealth, and economic opportunity inherited from past generations. As we mentioned in Chapter 4, racial differences in homeownership are a key component of the racial gap in wealth (Shapiro et al., 2013, p. 4). The greater economic marginality of the African American middle class today is a form of past-in-present institutional discrimination (see Chapter 4). It reflects the greater ability of white parents (and grandparents), in large part rooted in higher rates of homeownership, to finance higher education and subsidize business ventures and home mortgages (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006).

Not only is their economic position more marginal, but middle-class African Americans commonly report that they are unable to escape the narrow straitjacket of race. No matter what their level of success, occupation, or professional accomplishments, race continues to be seen as their primary defining characteristic (Benjamin, 2005; Cose, 1993; Hughes & Thomas, 1998). Without denying the advances of some, many analysts argue that the stigma of race continues to set sharp limits on the life chances of African Americans.

There is also a concern that greater class differentiation may decrease solidarity and cohesion within the African American community. There is greater income inequality among African Americans than ever before, with the urban poor at one extreme and some of the wealthiest, most recognized figures in the world—millionaires, celebrities, business moguls, politicians, and sports and movie stars—at the other. Will the more affluent segment of the African American community disassociate itself from the plight of the less fortunate and move away from the urban neighborhoods, taking with it its affluence, articulateness, and leadership skills? If this happens, it would reinforce the class division and further seal the fate of impoverished African Americans, who are largely concentrated in urban areas.

**Urban Poverty.** African Americans have become an urban minority group, and the fate of the group is inextricably bound to the fate of America's cities. The issues of black-white relations cannot be successfully addressed without dealing with urban issues, and vice versa.

As we saw in Chapter 4, automation and mechanization in the workplace have eliminated many of the manual labor jobs that sustained city dwellers in earlier

decades (Kasarda, 1989). The manufacturing, or secondary, segment of the labor force has declined in size, and the service sector has continued to expand. The more desirable jobs in the service sector have more and more demanding educational prerequisites. The service-sector jobs available to people with lower educational credentials pay low wages, often less than the minimum necessary for the basics, including food and shelter, and offer little in the way of benefits, little security, and few links to more rewarding occupations. This form of past-in-present institutional discrimination constitutes a powerful handicap for colonized groups such as African Americans, who have been excluded from educational opportunities for centuries.

Furthermore, many of the blue-collar jobs that have escaped automation have migrated away from the cities. Industrialists have been moving their businesses to areas where labor is cheaper, unions have less power, and taxes are lower. This movement to the suburbs, to the Sunbelt, and offshore has been devastating for the inner city. Poor transportation systems, the absence of affordable housing outside the center city, and outright housing discrimination have combined to keep urban poor people of color confined to center-city neighborhoods, distant from opportunities for jobs and economic improvement (Feagin, 2001, pp. 159–160; Kasarda, 1989; Massey & Denton, 1993).

Sociologist Rogelio Saenz (2005) recently analyzed the situation of blacks in the 15 largest metropolitan areas in the nation and found that they are much more likely than whites to be living in highly impoverished neighborhoods, cut off from the “economic opportunities, services, and institutions that families need to succeed” (para 2). Saenz found that the greater vulnerability and social and geographical isolation of blacks is pervasive, however, and includes not only higher rates of poverty and unemployment, but also large differences in access to cars and even phones, amenities taken for granted in the rest of society. In the areas studied by Saenz, blacks were as much as three times more likely not to have a car (and, thus, no means to get to jobs outside center-city areas) and as much as eight times more likely not to have a telephone.

Some of these industrial and economic forces affect all poor urbanites, not just minority groups or African Americans in particular. The dilemma facing many African Americans is not only due to racism or discrimination; the impersonal forces of evolving industrialization and social class structures contribute in some part as well. However, when immutable racial stigmas and centuries of prejudice (even disguised as modern racism) are added to these economic and urban developments, the forces limiting and constraining many African Americans become extremely formidable.

For the past 60 years, the African American poor have been increasingly concentrated in narrowly delimited urban areas (“the ghetto”) in which the scourge of poverty has been compounded and reinforced by a host of other problems, including joblessness, high rates of school dropout, crime, drug use, teenage pregnancy, and welfare dependency. These increasingly isolated neighborhoods are fertile grounds for the development of oppositional cultures, which reject or invert the values of the larger society. The black urban counterculture may be most visible in music, fashion, speech, and other forms of popular culture, but it is also manifest in widespread lack of trust in the larger society, and whites in particular. An **urban underclass**, barred from the

mainstream economy and the primary labor force and consisting largely of poor African Americans and other minority groups of color, has become a prominent and perhaps permanent feature of the American landscape (Kasarda, 1989; Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1987, 1996, 2009).

Consider the parallels and contrasts between the plight of the present urban underclass and black Southerners under *de jure* segregation:

- In both eras, a large segment of the African American population was cut off from opportunities for success and growth.
- In the earlier era, African Americans were isolated in rural areas; now they are isolated in urban areas, especially center cities.
- In the past, escape from segregation was limited primarily by political and legal restrictions and blatant racial prejudice; escape from poverty in the present is limited by economic and educational deficits and a more subtle and amorphous prejudice.

The result is the same: Many African Americans remain as a colonized minority group—isolated, marginalized, and burdened with a legacy of powerlessness and poverty.

### **Modern Institutional Discrimination**

The processes that maintain racial inequality in the present are indirect and sometimes difficult to document and measure. They often flow from the patterns of blatant racial discrimination in the past but are not overtly racial in the present. They operate through a series of cumulative effects that tend to filter black Americans into less desirable positions in education, housing, the criminal justice system, and the job market. Consider two areas where racial class inequalities are perpetuated: employment networks that were closed in the past and remain shut today, and the greater vulnerability of the black community to economic hardships.

**Closed Networks and Racial Exclusion.** The continuing importance of race as a primary factor in the perpetuation of class inequality is dramatically illustrated in a recent research project. Royster (2003) interviewed black and white graduates of a trade school in Baltimore. Her respondents had all completed the same curriculum and earned similar grades. In other words, they were nearly identical in terms of the credentials they brought to the world of work. Nonetheless, the black graduates were employed less often in the trades for which they had been educated, had lower wages and fewer promotions, and experienced longer periods of unemployment. Virtually every white graduate found secure and reasonably lucrative employment. The black graduates, in stark contrast, usually were unable to stay in the trades and became, instead, low-skilled, low-paid workers in the service sector.

What accounts for these differences? Based on extensive interviews with the subjects, Royster (2003) concluded that the differences could not be explained by training or by personality characteristics. Instead, she found that what really mattered was not “what you know” but “who you know.” The white graduates had access to networks of referrals and recruitment that linked them to the job market in ways that simply were

not available to black graduates. In their search for jobs, whites were assisted more fully by their instructors and were able to use intraracial networks of family and friends, connections so powerful that they “assured even the worst [white] troublemaker a solid place in the blue collar fold” (p. 78).

Needless to say, these results run contrary to some deeply held American values, most notably the widespread, strong support for the idea that success in life is due to individual effort, self-discipline, and the other attributes enshrined in the Protestant ethic. The strength of this faith is documented in a recent survey that was administered to a representative sample of adult Americans. The respondents were asked whether they thought people got ahead by hard work, luck, or a combination of the two. Fully 69% of the sample chose “hard work,” and another 20% chose “hard work and luck equally” (National Opinion Research Council, 1972–2012). This overwhelming support for the importance of individual effort is echoed in human capital theory and many “traditional” sociological perspectives on assimilation (see Chapter 2).

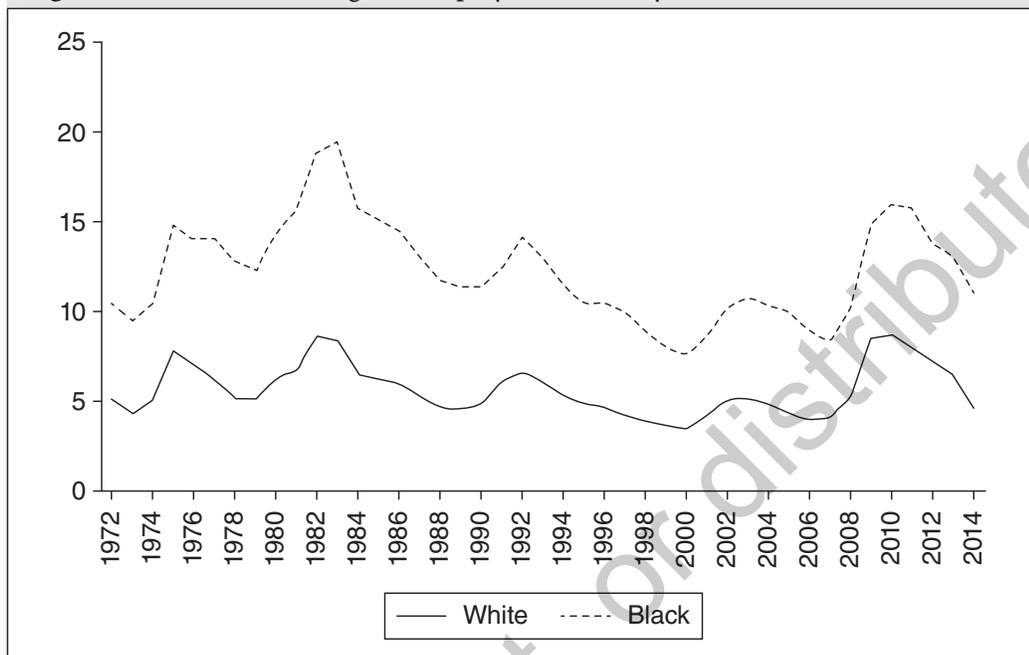
Royster’s (2003) results demonstrate that American faith in the power of hard work alone is simply wrong. To the contrary, access to jobs is controlled by networks of personal relationships that are decidedly not open to everyone. These subtle patterns of exclusion and closed intraracial networks are more difficult to document than the blatant discrimination that was at the core of Jim Crow segregation, but they can be just as devastating in their effects and just as powerful as mechanisms for perpetuating racial gaps in income and employment.

**The Differential Impact of Hard Times.** Because of their greater vulnerability, African Americans are more likely to suffer the more virulent form of any illness—economic or otherwise—that strikes the society: they will tend to feel the impact earlier, experience higher levels of distress, and be the last to recover. As we have seen, the recent downturn in the U.S. economy has affected almost everyone in one way or another. Americans everywhere have suffered from job loss, increasing poverty, home foreclosures, loss of health-care coverage, and other disasters. How has the recession affected the black community?

Consider the unemployment rate, which generally runs twice as high for blacks as for whites. During the recession, the rate rose for all groups but, as displayed in Figure 5.3, it rose earlier for blacks, rose at a steeper angle to a much higher peak, and leveled off and began to fall later than for whites. The highest rate for whites was 9.4%, about 56% of the peak rate of 16.7% for blacks.

The white unemployment rate leveled off and began to fall in early 2010, but the rate for blacks did not begin to decline until nearly 2 years later. These hard times affected all groups, across the board, but created a deeper economic hole for black Americans.

Another crucial area in which African Americans have been disproportionately affected by the recession is homeownership, which, as we have noted on several occasions, is a crucial source of wealth for the average American. Income enables families to get along, but financial assets such as home ownership help families get ahead, escape poverty, and become socially mobile (Oliver & Shapiro, 2008, p. A9).

**Figure 5.3** Annual Average Unemployment Rate by Race, 1972–2014

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2014.

Not surprisingly, black Americans have suffered more in this area, as they have in unemployment. A recent report (Oliver & Shapiro, 2008) found that black Americans and other minority groups of color, compared with whites, were more than three times as likely to be victimized by toxic “subprime” home loans and more than twice as likely to suffer foreclosure as a result. Subprime home loans were new financial instruments that enabled many previously ineligible people to qualify for home mortgages. Predatory lenders marketed the loans especially to more vulnerable populations, and the deals had hidden costs, higher interest rates, and other features that made keeping up with payments difficult. One result of the housing market’s collapse was “the greatest loss of financial wealth” in the African American community (Oliver & Shapiro, 2008, p. A11).

Thus, a group that was already more vulnerable and economically marginal suffered the greatest proportional loss—an economic collapse that will take years to recover from. Societal disasters such as the recent recession are not shared equally by everyone, but are especially severe for the groups that are the most vulnerable and have the most tenuous connections with prosperity and affluence. Thus, racial inequality persists decades after the end of blatant, direct, state-supported segregation.

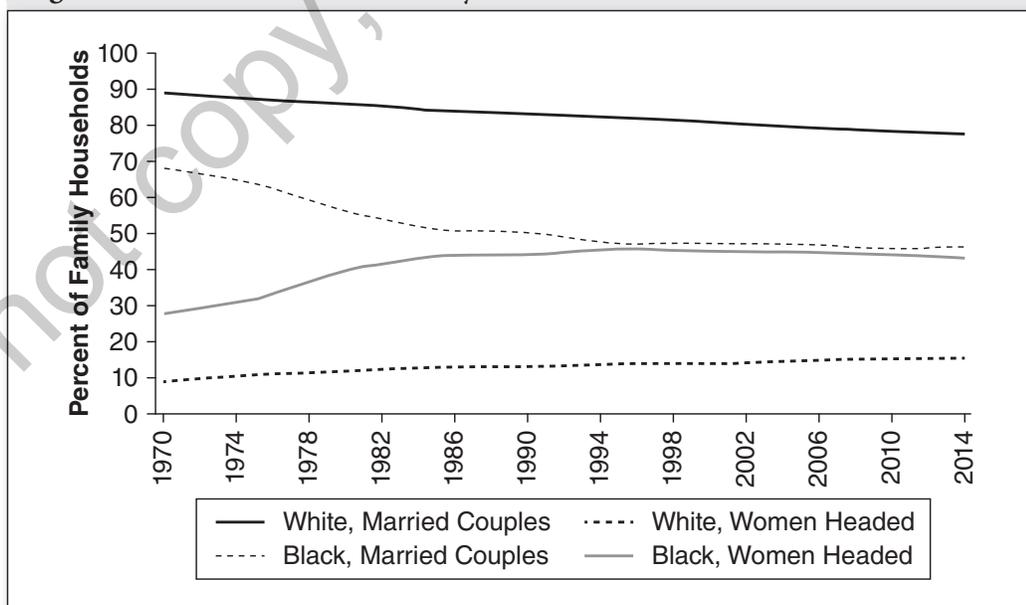
### The Family Institution and the Culture of Poverty

The state of African American families as a social institution has been a continuing source of concern and controversy. On one hand, some analysts see the African

American family as structurally weak, a cause of continuing poverty and a variety of other problems. No doubt the most famous study in this tradition was the Moynihan (1965) report, which focused on the higher rates of divorce, separation, desertion, and illegitimacy among African American families and the fact that black families were far more likely to be woman headed than were white families. Moynihan concluded that the fundamental barrier facing African Americans was a family structure that he saw as crumbling, a condition that would perpetuate the cycle of poverty entrapping African Americans (p. iii). Today, many of the differences between black and white families identified by Moynihan are even more pronounced. Figure 5.4, for example, compares the percentage of households headed by women (black and white) with the percentage of households headed by married couples. (Note that the trends seem to have stabilized since the mid-1990s.)

The line of analysis implicit in the Moynihan (1965) report locates the problem of urban poverty in the characteristics of the African American community, particularly in the African American family. These structures are “broken” in important ways and need to be “fixed.” This argument is consistent with the **culture of poverty theory**, which argues that poverty is perpetuated by the particular characteristics of the poor. Specifically, poverty is said to encourage **fatalism** (the sense that one’s destiny is beyond one’s control) and an orientation to the present rather than the future. The desire for instant gratification is a central trait of the culture of poverty, as opposed to the ability to defer gratification, which is thought to be essential for middle-class success. Other characteristics include violence, school failure, authoritarianism, and high rates of alcoholism and family desertion by men (Lewis, 1959, 1965, 1966; for a recent

**Figure 5.4** Characteristics of Family Households in the United States, 1970–2014



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (1978, p. 43; 2007, p. 56; 2012c, p. 56; 2015b).

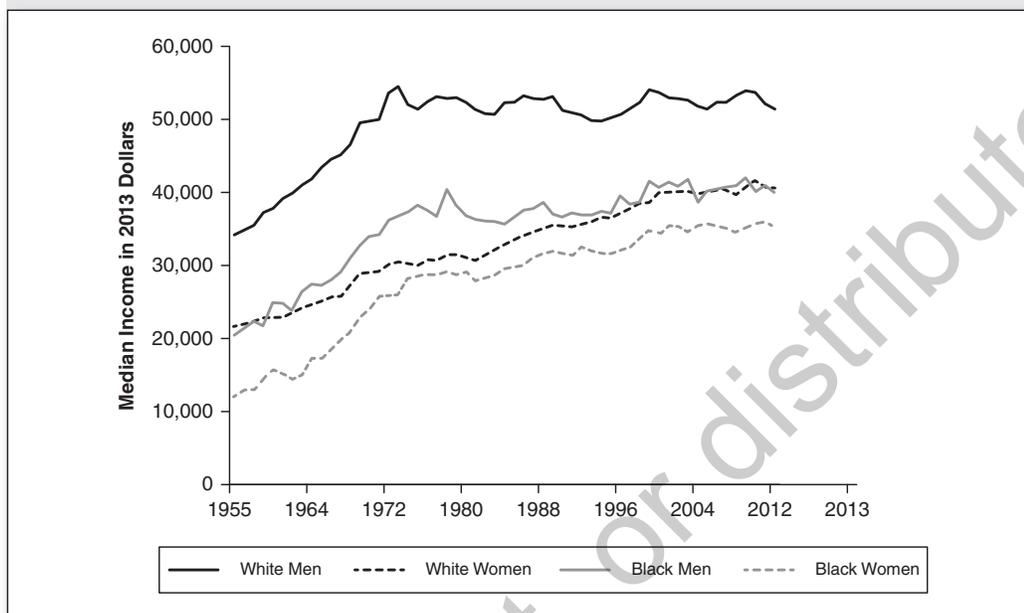
reprise of the debate over the culture of poverty concept, see Small, Harding, & Lamont 2010; Steinberg, 2011).

The culture of poverty theory leads to the conclusion that the problem of urban poverty would be resolved if woman-headed family structures and other cultural characteristics correlated with poverty could be changed. Note that this approach is consistent with the traditional assimilationist perspective and human capital theory: The poor have “bad” or inappropriate values. If they could be equipped with “good” (i.e., white, middle-class) values, the problem would be resolved.

An opposed perspective, more consistent with the concepts and theories that underlie this text, sees the matriarchal structure of the African American family as the *result* of urban poverty—rather than a cause—and a reflection of pervasive, institutional racial discrimination and the scarcity of jobs for urban African American men. In impoverished African American urban neighborhoods, the supply of men able to support a family is reduced by high rates of unemployment, incarceration, and violence, and these conditions are, in turn, created by the concentration of urban poverty and the growth of the “underclass” (Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1996, 2009). Thus, the burden of child rearing tends to fall on women, and woman-headed households are more common than in more advantaged neighborhoods.

Woman-headed African American families tend to be poor, not because they are weak in some sense, but because of the lower wages accorded to women in general and to African American women in particular, as documented in Figure 5.5. Note that Figure 5.5 includes only full-time, year round workers and that wages are presented in 2013 dollars, to control for the effects of inflation. Black woman workers have the lowest wages throughout the time period. Also note that the gap between black women and white men has narrowed over the years. In 1955, black women earned about a third of what white men earned. In 2012, the gap stood at about 68% (after shrinking to just under 70% in 2005), largely because men’s wages (for blacks as well as whites) have been relatively flat since the 1970s, while women’s wages (again for whites and blacks) have risen. This pattern reflects the impact of deindustrialization: the shift away from manufacturing, which has eliminated many good blue-collar jobs, and the rise of employment sectors in which women tend to be more concentrated. A similar pattern was documented in Figure 4.5, which compared the wages of all full-time, year-round workers by gender.

The poverty associated with black women-headed households reflects the interactive effects of sexism and racism on black women, not some weakness in the black family. African American urban poverty is the result of the complex forces of past and present institutional discrimination, American racism and prejudice, the precarious position of African American women in the labor force, and continuing urbanization and industrialization. African American family life is not in need of “fixing,” and the attitudes and values of the urban underclass are more the results of impoverishment than they are the causes. The solution to African American urban poverty lies in fundamental changes in the urban industrial economy and sweeping alterations in the distribution of resources and opportunities.

**Figure 5.5** Median Income for Full-Time, Year-Round Workers by Race and Gender, 1955–2013

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2014).

### Mixed Race and New Racial Identities

As we have discussed, Americans traditionally see race as a simple dichotomy: people are either black or white, with no intermediate categories. In the past, the social convention of the “one-drop rule” meant that people of mixed racial descent were classified as black. To illustrate, consider the story of Gregory Williams (known then as Billy), a white boy growing up in the segregated South in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Williams, 1995). When Billy was 10, his father revealed that he was “half-colored.” Under the one-drop rule, that made Billy black. He at first refused to believe his father: “I’m not colored, I’m white! I look white! I’ve always been white! I go to the ‘whites only’ school, ‘whites only’ movie theaters, and ‘whites only’ swimming pool” (p. 34). Gradually, he came to realize that his life—not just his life chances and his relations with others but his very identity—had been transformed by the revelation of his father’s race.

In the past, mixed-race people such as Williams had few choices: Others classified him as black, and the rigid social conventions of the day forced him to accept that identity, with all its implications. Today, five decades after the formal end of Jim Crow segregation, Americans are confronting the limitations of this dichotomous racial convention. People of mixed-race descent are increasing in number and, in fact, are some of the most prominent and well-known people in society. President Obama is an obvious example of a highly visible mixed-race person, but others include professional

golfer Tiger Woods (who defines himself—tongue in cheek—as Cablanasian: Caucasian, black, American Indian, and Asian), vocalist Mariah Carey, Yankee baseball star Derek Jeter, and actress Halle Berry.

How do people of multiracial descent define themselves today? How are they defined by others? Have the old understandings of race become irrelevant? Is there still pressure to place people in one and only one group? There has been a fair amount of research on this issue and we can begin to formulate some ideas.

One important study illustrates some of the possible identities for mixed race individuals. Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2008; Brunnsma, 2005) interviewed a sample of several hundred mixed-race college students, confining their attention to people who had one white and one black parent. They found that, in contrast to the definition of racial identity faced by Williams, today the meaning of mixed-race identity is conceptually complex and highly variable (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2008, p. 50). They identified four main categories that their respondents used to understand their biracialism, and we present these in order from most to least common. However, the sample they assembled was not representative, so we can't assume that these same percentages would characterize all biracial Americans.

1. The most common racial identity in the sample was the *border identity*. These respondents (58% of the sample) didn't consider themselves to be either black or white. They define themselves as members of a third, separate category that is linked to both groups but is unique in itself. One respondent declared, "I'm not black, I'm biracial" (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2008, p. 43). The authors make a further distinction:
  - a. Some border identities are "validated" or recognized and acknowledged by others. These respondents see themselves as biracial, and they are also seen that way by family, friends, and the community.
  - b. Other border identities are "unvalidated" by others. These individuals see themselves as biracial but are classified by others as black. For example, one respondent said, "I consider myself biracial but I experience the world as a black person" (p. 45). This disconnect may be the result of the persistence of traditional dichotomous racial thinking and the fact that some people do not recognize or understand the category of "biracial." According to the authors, people in this category are of special interest because of the tensions created by the conflict between their self-image and the way they are defined by others.
2. The second most common identity in the sample was the *singular identity*. These individuals saw themselves not as biracial, but as exclusively black (13%) or exclusively white (3%). As Williams's case illustrated, the singular black identity is most consistent with American traditional thinking about race. The authors argue that the fact that this identity is *not* the most common in their sample illustrates the complexity of racial identity for biracial people today.
3. A third identity was the *transcendent identity* (15%). The respondents in this category rejected the whole notion of race, along with the traditional categories of black and white, and insisted that they should be seen as unique individuals and not placed in a category, especially since those categories carry multiple assumptions about character,

personality, intelligence, attitudes, and a host of other characteristics. Respondents with the transcendent identity were in a constant battle to avoid classification in our highly race-conscious society. One respondent's remarks are illustrative:

*I'm just John, you know? . . . I'm a good guy, just like me for that . . . When I came here (to college), it was like I was almost forced to look at other people as being white, black, Asian, or Hispanic. And so now, I'm still trying to go "I'm just John," but uh, you gotta be something.* (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2008, p. 49)

4. The final racial identity is the least common (4%) but perhaps the most interesting. The authors describe the racial identity of these individuals as *protean*, or changing as the individual moves from group to group and through the various social contexts of everyday life. There are different "ways of being" in groups of blacks versus groups of whites, and individuals with the protean racial identity slip effortlessly from one mode to the next and are accepted by both groups as insiders. The authors point out that most people adjust their *behavior* to different situations (e.g., a fraternity party vs. a family Thanksgiving dinner), but these individuals also change their *identity* and adjust who they are to different circumstances. Respondents with the protean identity felt empowered by their ability to fit in with different groups and felt they were endowed with a high degree of "cultural savvy" (p. 47). In our increasingly diverse, multicultural, and multiracial society, the ability to belong easily to multiple groups may prove to be a valuable strength.

What can we conclude? Racial identity, like so many other aspects of our society, is evolving and becoming more complex. Traditions such as the one-drop rule live on but in attenuated, weakened form. Also, racial identity, like other aspects of self-concept, can be situational or contingent on social context, not permanent or fixed. Given the world in which he lived, Williams had no choice but to accept a black racial identity. Today, in a somewhat more tolerant and pluralistic social environment, biracial people have choices and some space in which to carve out their own, unique identity. According to Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2008), these identity choices are contingent on a number of factors, including personal appearance, but they are always made in the context of a highly race-conscious society with long and strong traditions of racism and prejudice.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

11. This section examined a number of issues and trends in contemporary black–white relations. In your opinion, which of these is most important? Why?
12. To what extent do blacks and whites live in different worlds? Is it fair to characterize contemporary black–white relations as "continuing separation"? Why or why not?
13. How has racial identity evolved in modern America? How is racial identity for biracial Americans different today?

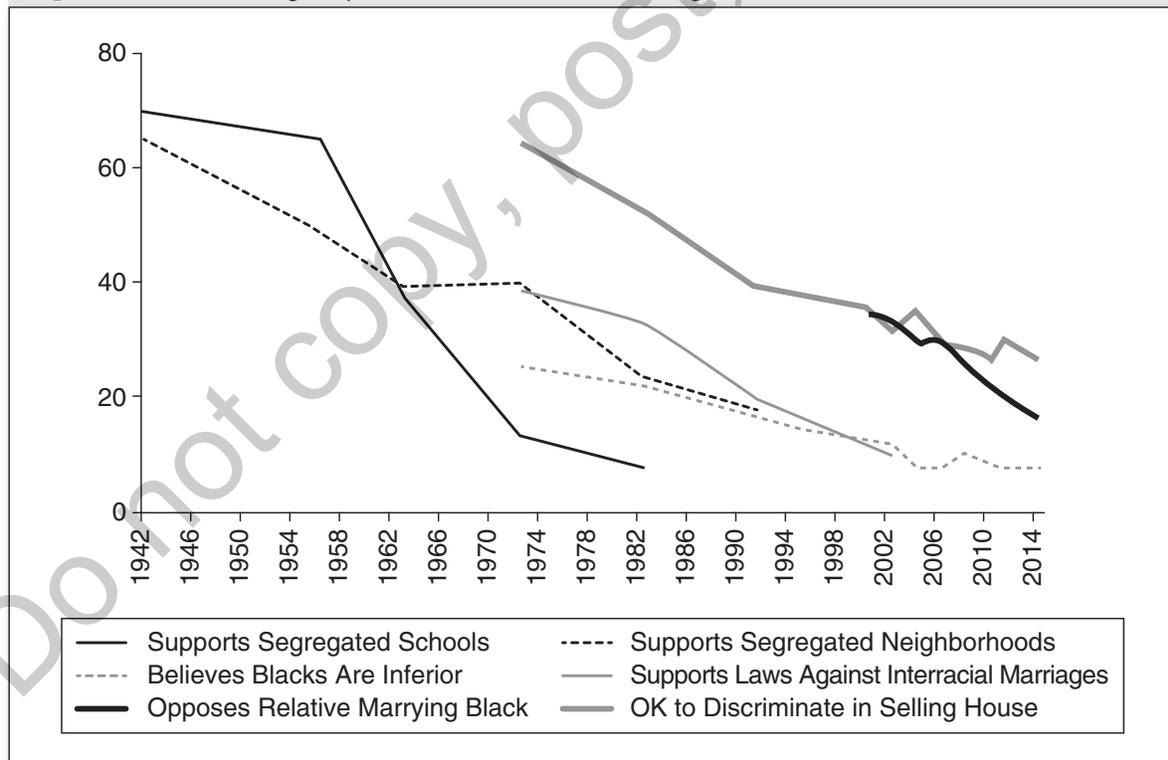
### Traditional Prejudice and Modern Racism

Public opinion polls and other sources of evidence document a dramatic decline in traditional, overt, anti-black prejudice since the mid-20th century. Figure 5.6 displays this trend using a number of survey items administered to representative samples of U.S. citizens. In 1942, the huge majority—more than 70%—of white Americans thought that black and white children should attend different schools. Forty years later, in 1982, support for separate schools had dropped to less than 10%. Similarly, support for the right of white people to maintain separate neighborhoods declined from 65% in 1942 to 18% in the early 1990s. In more recent decades, the percentage of white respondents who support laws against interracial marriage decreased from almost 40% in the early 1970s to about 10% in 2002, and the percentage that believe that blacks are inferior fell from 26% to less than 10% between the early 1970s and 2014.

The overall trend is unmistakable: There has been a dramatic decline in support for prejudiced statements since World War II. In the early 1940s, most white Americans supported prejudiced views. In recent years, only a small minority expresses such views.

These trends document changing American prejudice, but we should not accept these changes at face value and take them as proof that racial prejudice is no longer

**Figure 5.6** Declining Prejudice of White American Against African Americans, 1942–2014



Sources: For data for 1942, 1956, and 1963, Hyman & Sheatsley (1964); 1972 through 2014, National Opinion Research Council (1972–2014).

a problem in society. First, these survey items also show that prejudice has not vanished. A percentage of the white population continues to endorse highly prejudicial sentiments and opinions. Second, the polls show only what people *say* they believe and think, which can be different from what they truly believe. Figure 5.6 may document a decline in people's willingness to admit their prejudice as much as it does a genuine improvement in intergroup attitudes and feelings.

An additional possibility is that the figure is misleading and that prejudice remains substantial but has taken on new forms and modes of expression. We raised this possibility in Chapter 1 when we introduced the concept of modern or color-blind racism. A number of researchers have been pursuing this more subtle, complex, and indirect way to express negative feelings toward minority groups and opposition to change in dominant–minority relations (see Bobo, 1988, 2001; Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2006; Kinder & Sears, 1981; Kluegel & Smith, 1982; McConahy, 1986; Sears, 1988; for a review, see Quillian, 2006).

People affected by modern racism have negative feelings (the affective aspect of prejudice) toward minority groups but reject the idea of genetic or biological inferiority and do not think in terms of the traditional stereotypes. Instead, their prejudicial feelings are expressed indirectly and subtly. The attitudes that define modern racism tend to be consistent with some tenets of the traditional assimilation perspective discussed in Chapter 2, especially human capital theory and the Protestant ethic—the traditional American value system that stresses individual responsibility and the importance of hard work. Specifically, modern racism assumes

- There is no longer any serious or important racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination in American society;
- Any remaining racial or ethnic inequality is the fault of members of the minority group, who are simply not working hard enough; and
- Demands for preferential treatment or affirmative action for minorities are unjustified. Minority groups (especially African Americans) have already received more than they deserve. (Sears & Henry, 2003)

Modern racism tends to “blame the victim” and place the responsibility for change and improvements on minority groups, not on society.

To illustrate the difference between traditional prejudice and modern racism, consider the results of a recent public opinion survey administered to a representative sample of Americans (National Opinion Research Council, 2014). Respondents were asked to choose from among four explanations of why black people, on the average, have “worse jobs, income, and housing than white people.” Respondents could choose as many explanations as they wanted.

One explanation, consistent with traditional anti-black prejudice, attributed racial inequality to the genetic or biological inferiority of African Americans (“the differences are mainly because blacks have less inborn ability to learn”). About 9% of the white respondents chose this explanation. A second explanation attributed continuing racial inequality to discrimination, and a third to the lack of opportunity for an education. Of white respondents, 32% chose the former and 46% chose the latter.

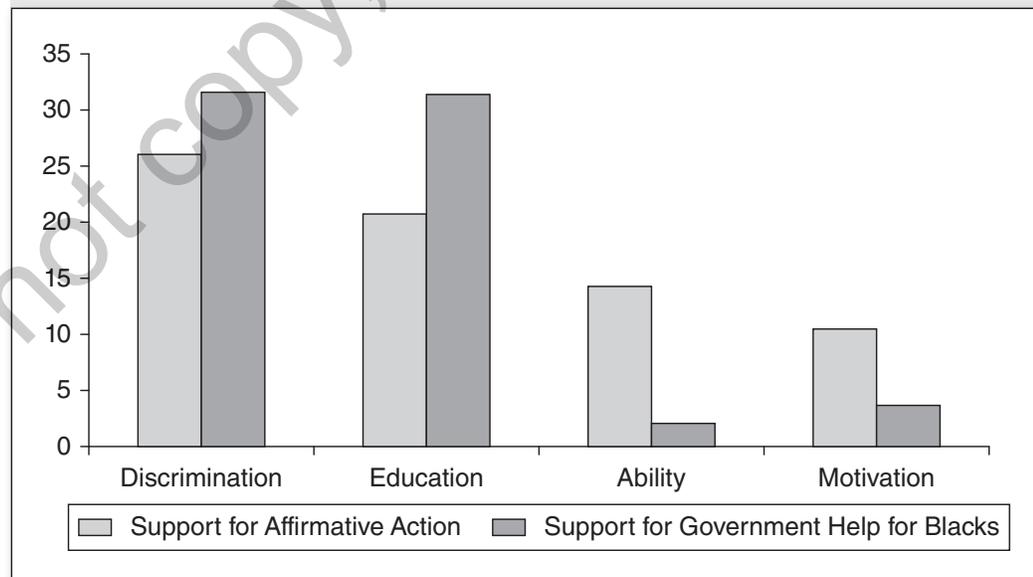
A fourth explanation, consistent with modern racism, attributes racial inequality to a lack of effort by African Americans (“the differences are because most blacks just don’t have the motivation or willpower to pull themselves up out of poverty”). Of the white respondents, 49% chose this explanation, the most popular of the four. Thus, modern racism—the view that the root of the problem of continuing racial inequality lies in the black community, not in society as a whole—has a great deal of support among white Americans.

What makes this view an expression of prejudice? Besides blaming the victim, it deflects attention away from centuries of oppression and continuing inequality and discrimination in modern society. It stereotypes African Americans and encourages the expression of negative feelings against them (but without invoking the traditional image of innate inferiority).

Researchers consistently have found that modern racism is correlated with opposition to policies and programs intended to reduce racial inequality (Bobo, 2001, p. 292; Quillian, 2006). In the survey summarized earlier, for example, respondents who blamed continuing racial inequality on the lack of motivation or willpower of blacks—the “modern racists”—were the least likely to support affirmative action and were comparable to traditional racists (those who choose the “inborn ability” explanation for racial inequality) in their opposition to government help for African Americans (see Figure 5.7).

In the view of many researchers, modern racism has taken the place of traditional or overt prejudice. If this view is correct, the “report card” on progress in the reduction

**Figure 5.7** White American’s Support for Affirmative Action and Government Help for Blacks by Explanation of Racial Inequality, 2014



Source: National Opinion Research Council (1972–2014).

of racial hostility in the United States must be rather mixed. On one hand, we should not understate the importance of the fading of blatant, overt prejudice. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the evidence that anti-black prejudice has changed in form rather than declined in degree. Subtle and diffuse prejudice is probably preferable to the blunt and vicious variety, but it should not be mistaken for its demise.

How can the pervasive problems of racial inequality be addressed in the present atmosphere of modern racism, low levels of sympathy for the urban poor, and subtle but powerful institutional discrimination? Many people advocate a color-blind approach to the problems of racial inequality: The legal and political systems should simply ignore skin color and treat everyone the same. This approach seems sensible to many people because, after all, the legal and overt barriers of Jim Crow discrimination are long gone and, at least at first glance, there are no obvious limits to the life chances of blacks.

In the eyes of others, however, a color-blind approach is doomed to failure. To end racial inequality and deal with the legacy of racism, society must follow race-conscious programs that explicitly address the problems of race and racism. Color-blind strategies amount to inaction. All we need to do to perpetuate (or widen) the present racial gap is nothing.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

14. What are the key differences between modern racism and traditional prejudice? Which is the more challenging to identify and measure? Why?

## Assimilation and Pluralism

In this section, we will use the major concepts of the Gordon model of assimilation to assess the status of African Americans. Of course, we will not be able to address all aspects of these patterns or go into much depth, so these sections should be regarded as overviews and suggestions for further research.

### Acculturation

The Blauner hypothesis states that the culture of groups created by colonization will be attacked, denigrated, and, if possible, eliminated, and this assertion seems well validated by the experiences of African Americans. African cultures and languages were largely eradicated under slavery. As a powerless, colonized minority group, slaves had few opportunities to preserve their heritage even though traces of African homelands have been found in black language patterns, kinship systems, music, folk tales, and family legends (see Levine, 1977; Stuckey, 1987).

Cultural domination continued under the Jim Crow system, albeit through a different structural arrangement. Under slavery, slaves and their owners worked together,

and interracial contact was common. Under de jure segregation, intergroup contact diminished and blacks and whites generally became more separate. After slavery ended, the African American community had somewhat more autonomy (although still few resources) to define itself and develop a distinct culture.

The centuries of cultural domination and separate development have created a unique black experience in America. African Americans share language, religion, values, beliefs, and norms with the dominant society, but have developed distinct variations on the general themes.

The acculturation process may have been slowed (or even reversed) by the Black Power movement. On the one hand, since the 1960s, there has been an increased interest in African culture, language, clothing, and history, and a more visible celebration of unique African American experiences (e.g., Kwanzaa) and the innumerable contributions of African Americans to the larger society. On the other hand, many of those traditions and contributions have been in existence all along. Perhaps all that really changed was the degree of public recognition.

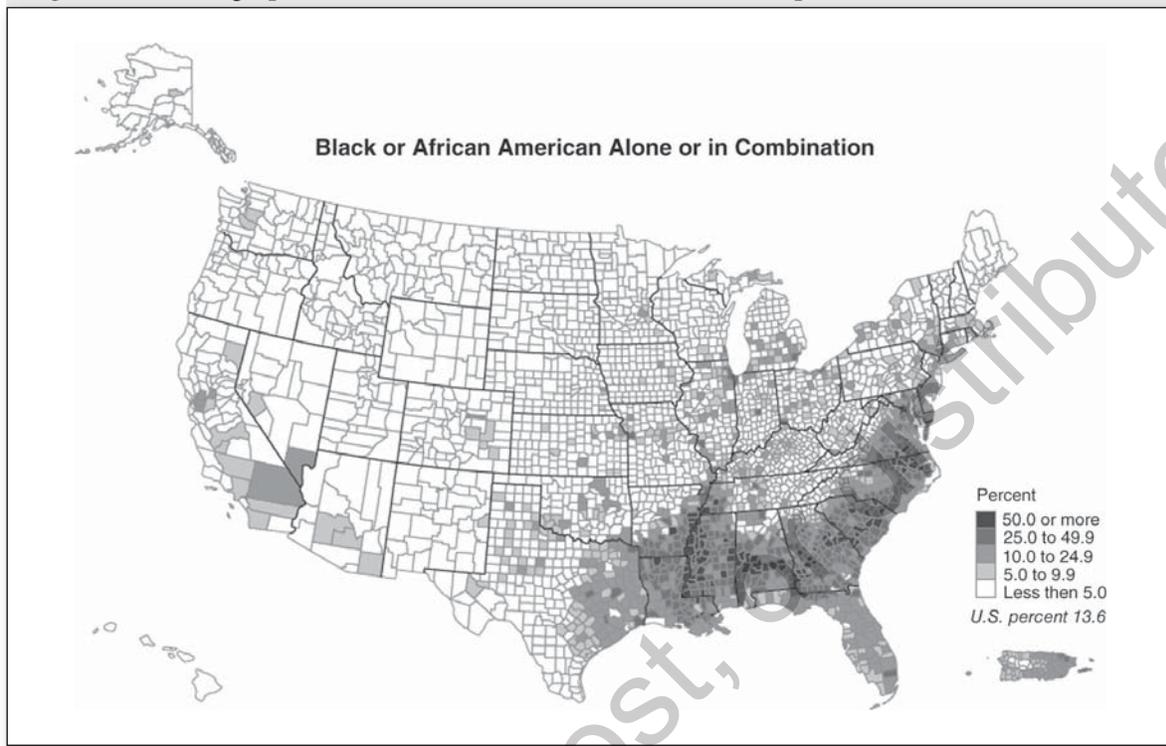
### Secondary Structural Assimilation

Structural assimilation, or integration, involves two different phases. Secondary structural assimilation refers to integration in more public areas, such as the job market, schools, and political institutions. We can assess integration in this area by comparing residential patterns, income distributions, job profiles, political power, and levels of education of the different groups. These areas are addressed in the next sections. We will then discuss primary structural assimilation (integration in intimate associations, such as friendship and intermarriage).

**Residential Patterns.** After a century of movement out of the rural South, African Americans today are highly urbanized and much more spread out across the nation. As we saw in Chapter 4 (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2), about 90% of African Americans are urban, and a slight majority of African Americans continue to reside in the South. About 35% of African Americans now live in the Northeast and Midwest, overwhelmingly in urban areas. Figure 5.8 clearly shows the concentration of African Americans in the states of the old Confederacy; the urbanized East Coast corridor from Washington, D.C., to Boston; the industrial centers of the Midwest; and, to a lesser extent, California.

Residential segregation between blacks and whites peaked toward the end of the Jim Crow era, in the 1960s and 1970s, and has decreased in recent decades (Logan & Stults, 2011). This pattern is displayed in Figure 5.9, which shows levels of residential segregation between white and black Americans for the past four census years. Scores for residential segregation between white and Hispanic Americans and white and Asian Americans are also included in the graph. We will focus on black Americans here and discuss the other groups in Chapters 7 and 8, respectively.

Figure 5.9 uses a statistic called the **dissimilarity index**, which shows the degree to which groups are *not* evenly spread across neighborhoods or census tracts.

**Figure 5.8** Geographical Distribution of African American Population, 2010

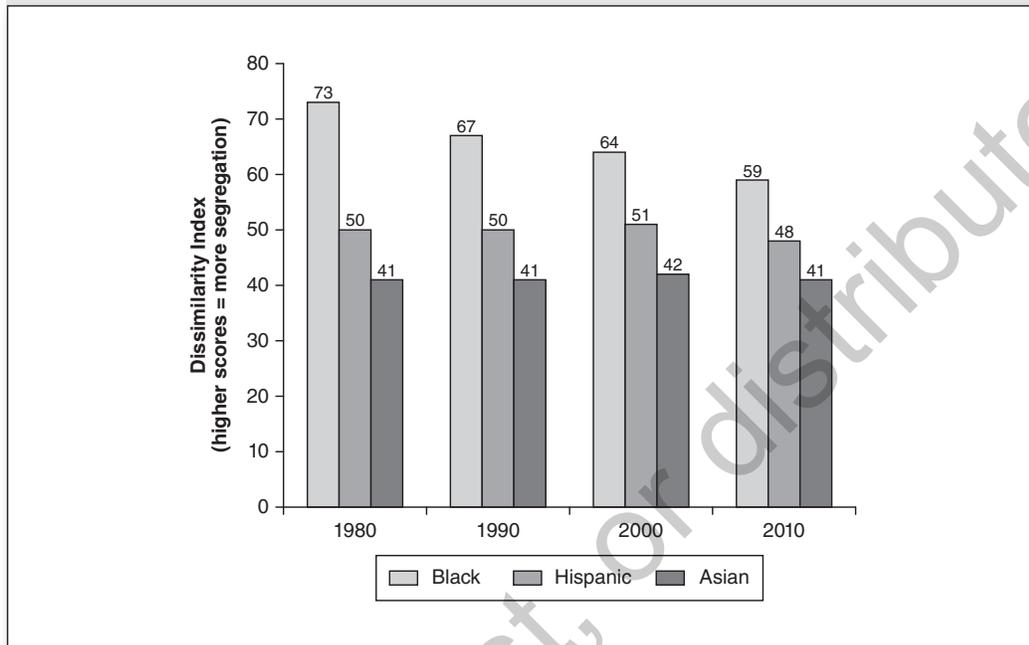
Source: Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel, and Drewery (2011, p.11).

Specifically, the index is the percentage of each group that would have to move to a different tract to achieve integration. A score above 60 is considered to indicate extreme segregation.

Those seeking evidence of improving relations between blacks and whites (“the glass is half full”) will note the falling scores for racial residential segregation between 1980 and 2010 and, especially, that the dissimilarity index actually dipped to slightly below 60 in the most recent year. However, those with a more negative frame of mind (“the glass is half empty”) might point out that the graph shows that racial residential segregation continues to be the norm and that blacks are much more segregated from whites than are the other two groups.

As we saw in Chapter 4 and earlier in this chapter, the continuing patterns of residential segregation are reinforced by a variety of practices, including racial steering (guiding clients to same-race housing areas) by real estate agents and barely disguised discrimination. Contrary to a popular belief among whites, an African American preference for living in same-race neighborhoods plays a small role in perpetuating these patterns. For example, studies generally find that African Americans prefer to live in areas split 50/50 between blacks and whites but that whites much prefer neighborhoods with low percentages of blacks or Latinos (e.g.,

**Figure 5.9** Residential Segregation for Black, Hispanic, and Asian Americans, 1980–2010 (Dissimilarity Index)



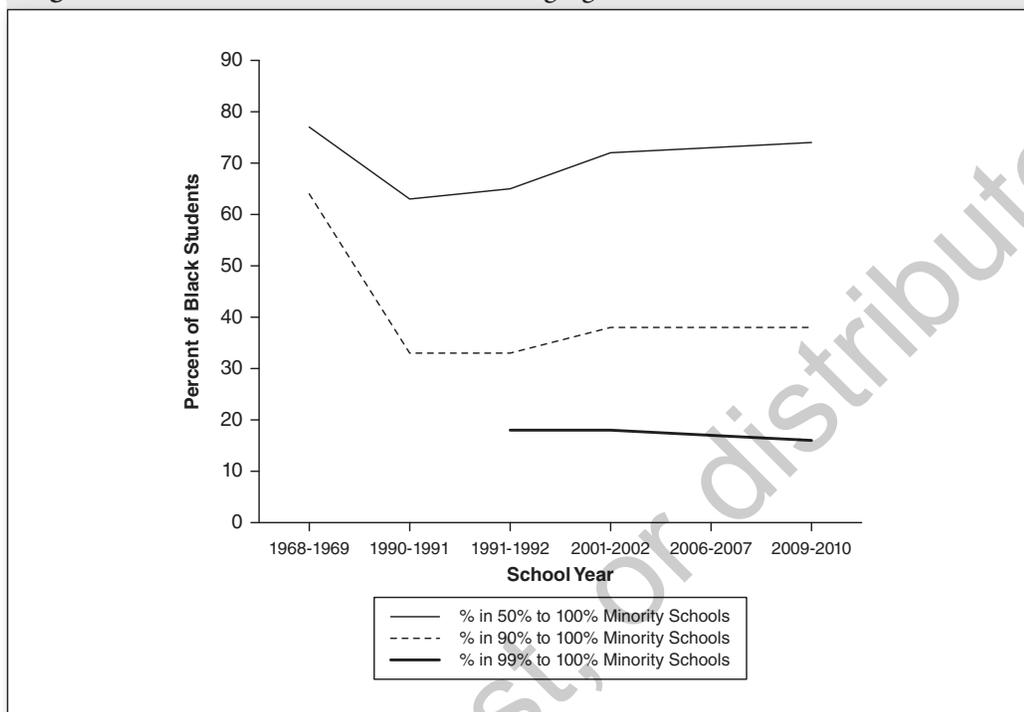
Source: John R. Logan and Brian Stults. 2011.

see Krysan & Farley, 2002, p. 949; Lewis, Emerson, & Klineberg, 2011). The social class and income differences between blacks and whites are also relatively minor factors in perpetuating residential segregation, as the African American middle class is just as likely as the African American poor to be segregated (Stoll, 2004, p. 26; see also Dwyer, 2010).

**School Integration.** In 1954, the year of the landmark *Brown* desegregation decision, the great majority of African Americans lived in states operating segregated school systems. Compared with white schools, Jim Crow schools were severely underfunded and had fewer qualified teachers, shorter school years, and inadequate physical facilities. School integration was one of the most important goals of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, and, aided by pressure from the courts and the federal government, considerable strides were made toward this goal for several decades.

In recent decades, however, the pressure from the federal government has eased, and school integration is slowing and, in many areas, has even reversed. Figure 5.10 displays some of these trends for the nation as a whole for six school years, stretching from the late 1960s to the 2009–2010 school year.

The top line in the graph shows that the percentage of black students in “majority-minority” schools declined until the early 1990s and then began to rise, almost returning to the level of the late 1960s. The middle line in the graph shows a dramatic drop

**Figure 5.10** Three Measures of School Segregation for Black Students

Source: Data from Orfield, Gary, Kuesera, John, & Siegel-Hawley, Genevieve. 2012. "E Pluribus . . . Segregation: Deepening Double Segregation for More Students." The Civil Rights Project, UCLA. p. 19.

between the 1960s and early 1990s, and then a gradual rise and leveling off, in the percentage of black students attending schools that are 90% to 100% minority. The bottom line shows a slight decrease since the early 1990s in the percentage of black students attending schools that are virtually all minority.

Figure 5.10 clearly shows that the goal of racial integration in public schools has not been achieved. What accounts for this slow progress? One very important cause is the declining number of whites in the society as a whole (see Figure 1.1) and in public schools in particular. In the 2009–2010 school year, whites were barely a majority of students (54%), down from almost 80% in the early 1970s (Orfield, Kuesera, & Siegel-Hawley 2012, p. 15).

Another cause is the widespread residential segregation mentioned previously. The challenges for school integration are especially evident in those metropolitan areas that consist of a largely black-populated inner city surrounded by largely white-populated rings of suburbs.

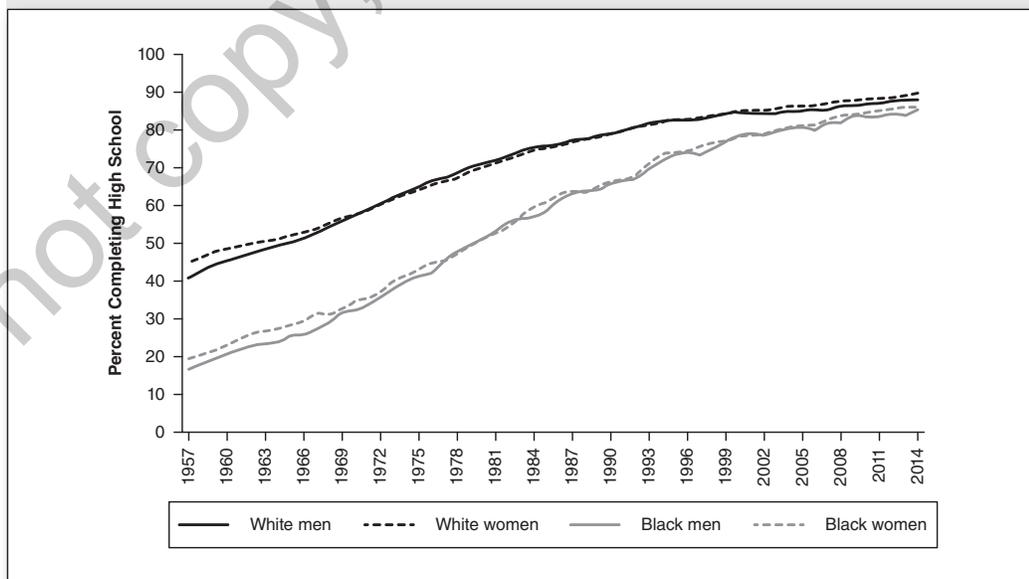
Without a renewed commitment to integration, American schools will continue to resegregate. This is a particularly ominous trend, because it directly affects the quality of education. Years of research demonstrate that the integration of schools—by social class as well as by race—is related to better educational experiences and improved test scores (e.g., see Orfield et al., 2012).

In terms of the quantity of education, the gap between whites and blacks has generally decreased over the past several decades. Figure 5.11 displays the change from 1957 to 2014 in the percentage of the population older than 25 years, by race and gender, with high school diplomas; there is a dramatic decline in racial differences. Given the increasing demands for higher educational credentials in the job market, it is ironic that the nation has nearly achieved racial equality in high school education at a time when this credential matters less.

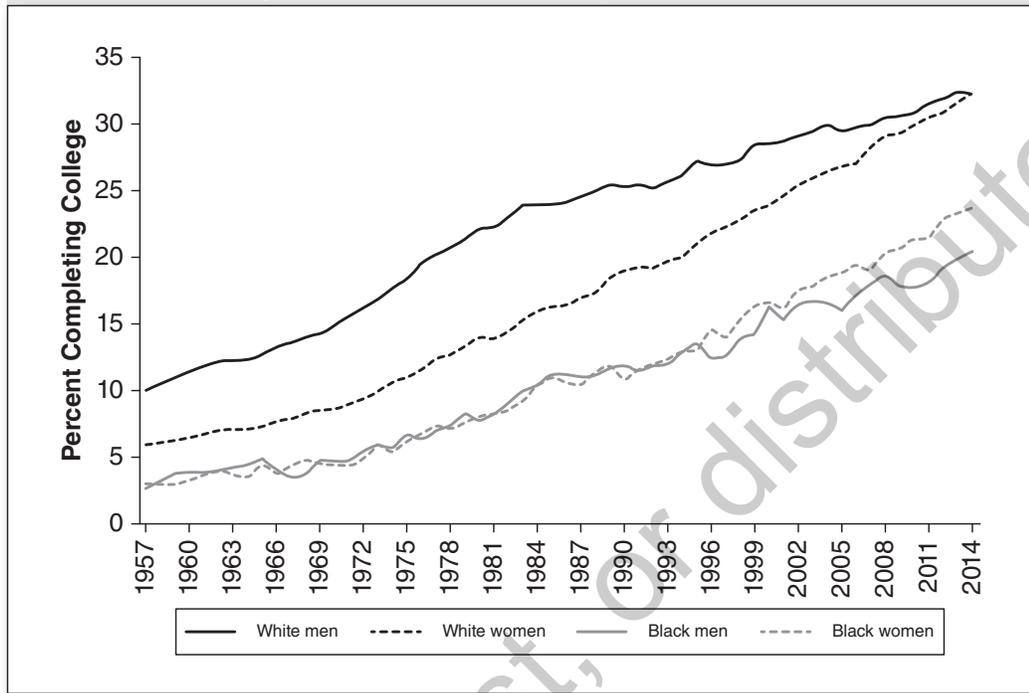
At the college level, the trends parallel the narrowing gap in levels of high school education, as shown in Figure 5.12. In 1957, white men held a distinct advantage over all other race/gender groups: they were about three times more likely than African American men and women to have a college degree. By 2014, the advantage of white men had shrunk, but they were still about 1.5 times more likely than black men and women to have a college degree. These racial differences grow larger with more advanced degrees, however, and differences such as these will be increasingly serious in an economy in which jobs more frequently require an education beyond high school.

**Political Power.** Two trends have increased the political power of African Americans since World War II. One is the movement out of the rural South, a process that concentrated African Americans in areas in which it was easier for them to register to vote. As the black population outside the South grew, so did their representation at the national level. The first African American representative to the U.S. Congress (other than those elected during Reconstruction) was elected in 1928, and by 1954, there were

**Figure 5.11** High School Graduation Rates of People 25 Years of Age and Older, 1957–2014



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2015d).

**Figure 5.12** College Graduation Rates for People 25 Years and Older, 1957–2014

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2015d).

still only three African American members in the House of Representatives (Franklin 1967, p. 614). In 2013, there were 44 (Manning, 2013, p. 8), still less than the proportional share of the national population (13%).

When Obama was elected to the Senate in 2004, he was the third African American senator since Reconstruction to serve in that body. Since 2004, two African Americans have served as senators, and in the fall of 2013, Corey Booker of New Jersey was elected to the Senate.

The number of African American elected officials at all levels of government increased from virtually zero at the turn of the 20th century to more than 9,000 in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, p. 258). In Virginia in 1989, Douglas Wilder became the first African American to be elected to a state governorship, and both Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice have served as secretary of state, the highest governmental office—along with Supreme Court justices and excluding the presidency—ever held by African Americans.

African American communities are virtually guaranteed some political representation by their high degree of geographical concentration at the local level. Today, most large American cities, including Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, New York, and Washington, DC, have elected African American mayors.

The other trend that has increased black political power is the dismantling of the institutions and practices of disenfranchisement that operated during Jim Crow

segregation (see Chapter 4). As we discussed earlier, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 specifically prohibited many of the practices (poll taxes, literacy tests, and whites-only primaries) traditionally used to keep African Americans politically powerless.

Since the 1960s, the number of African Americans in the nation's voting-age population has increased from slightly less than 10% to about 13%. But this increasing potential for political power has not always been fully mobilized in the past, and actual turnout generally has been lower for blacks than for whites. In the hotly contested presidential races of 2000, 2004, and 2008, however, a variety of organizations (such as the NAACP) made a concerted and largely successful effort to increase turnout among African Americans. In these years, black turnout was comparable to that of whites, and in the 2012 presidential election, the black turnout (66.2%) was slightly larger than the white turnout (64.1%) (File, 2013).

Overall, black American political power has tended to increase over the past several decades on the national, state, and local levels. One potentially ominous threat to this trend is the growth of restrictions on voting in many states in recent years. Well over half the states have considered or have passed various measures that could decrease the size of the electorate in general and disproportionately lower the impact of the African American vote. For example, many states may require voters to show a government-issued photo ID—such as a driver's license—before allowing them to cast a ballot.

Proponents of these restrictive measures argue that they prevent voter fraud, and the new laws do not, of course, mention African Americans or other minority groups, as is typical of modern institutional discrimination. The result may be a dramatically lower turnout on Election Day for groups that are less likely to have driver's licenses, passports, or similar documentation, including not only African Americans, but also other minority groups of color, low-income groups, senior citizens, and younger voters (see Brennan Center for Justice, 2013, for a list of efforts to restrict voting).

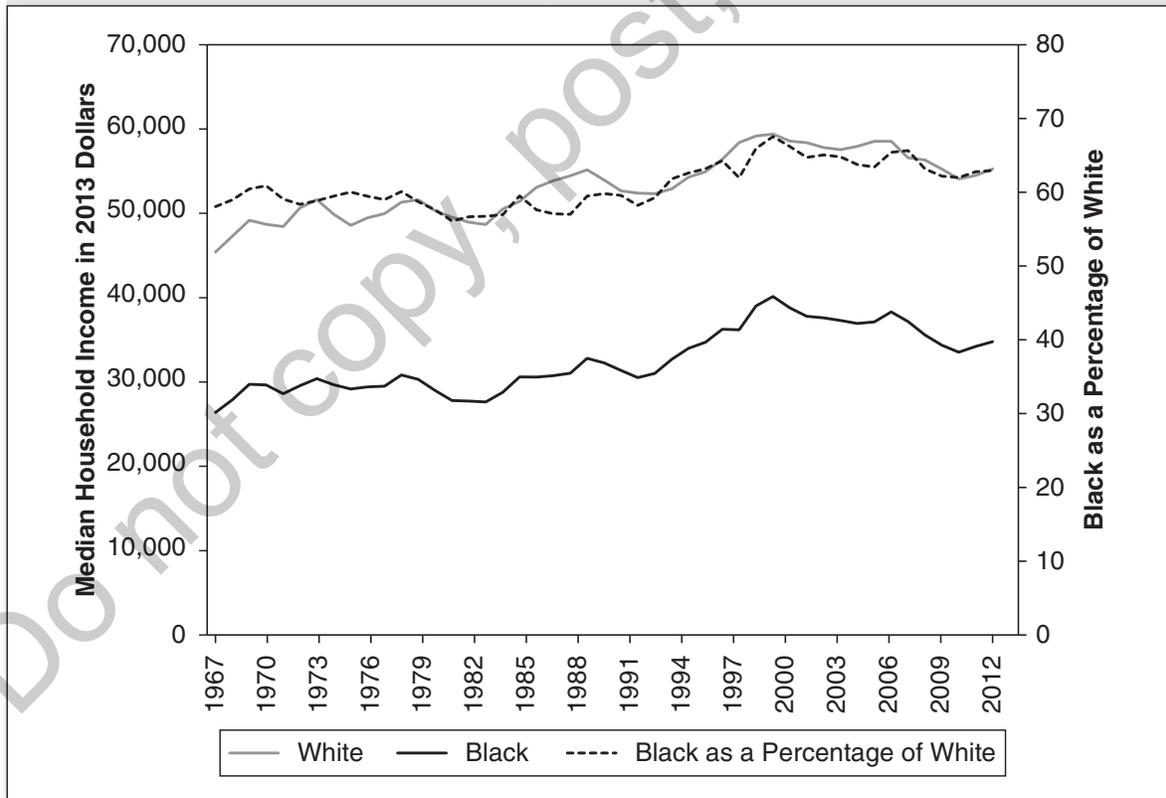
**Jobs and Income.** Integration in the job market and racial equality in income follow the trends established in many other areas of social life: The situation of African Americans has improved since the end of de jure segregation but has stopped well short of equality. Among men, whites are much more likely to be employed in the highest-rated and most lucrative occupational areas, whereas blacks are overrepresented in the service sector and in unskilled labor (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013a). One comprehensive analysis of race/gender employment trends found that, after some gains in the years following the passage of the landmark legislation of the mid-1960s, employment gains for black men and women (and white women) have been slight, and that white men continue their disproportionate hold on better jobs (Stainback & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012, pp. 155–177).

Although huge gaps remain, we should note that the present occupational distribution represents a rapid and significant upgrading, given the fact that as recently as the 1930s the majority of African American men were unskilled agricultural laborers (Steinberg, 1981, pp. 206–207). A similar improvement has occurred for African American women. In the 1930s, about 90% of employed African American women

worked in agriculture or in domestic service (Steinberg, 1981, pp. 206–207). The percentage of African American women in these categories has dropped dramatically, and the majority of African American women are employed in the two highest occupational categories, although typically at the lower levels of these categories. For example, in the top-rated “managerial and professional” category, women are more likely to be concentrated in less well-paid occupations, such as nurse or elementary school teacher (see Figure 4.4), whereas men are more likely to be physicians and lawyers.

Figure 5.13 depicts the racial income gap in terms of the median, an average that shows the difference between “typical” white and black families. It reflects racial differences in education and jobs as seen in a persistent racial income gap. The graph presents two kinds of information: the median household incomes for blacks and whites (in 2013 dollars) over the time period (read these from the left vertical axis) and the percentage of black to white household income (read this from the right vertical axis). Additionally, Figure 5.13 shows that median incomes for black and white households generally moved together over the recorded time period and that both trended upward until the turn of this century. At that point, both lines flattened and then fell, a reflection of hard economic times since 2000 and especially since 2007.

**Figure 5.13** Median Household Income by Race, 1967–2013

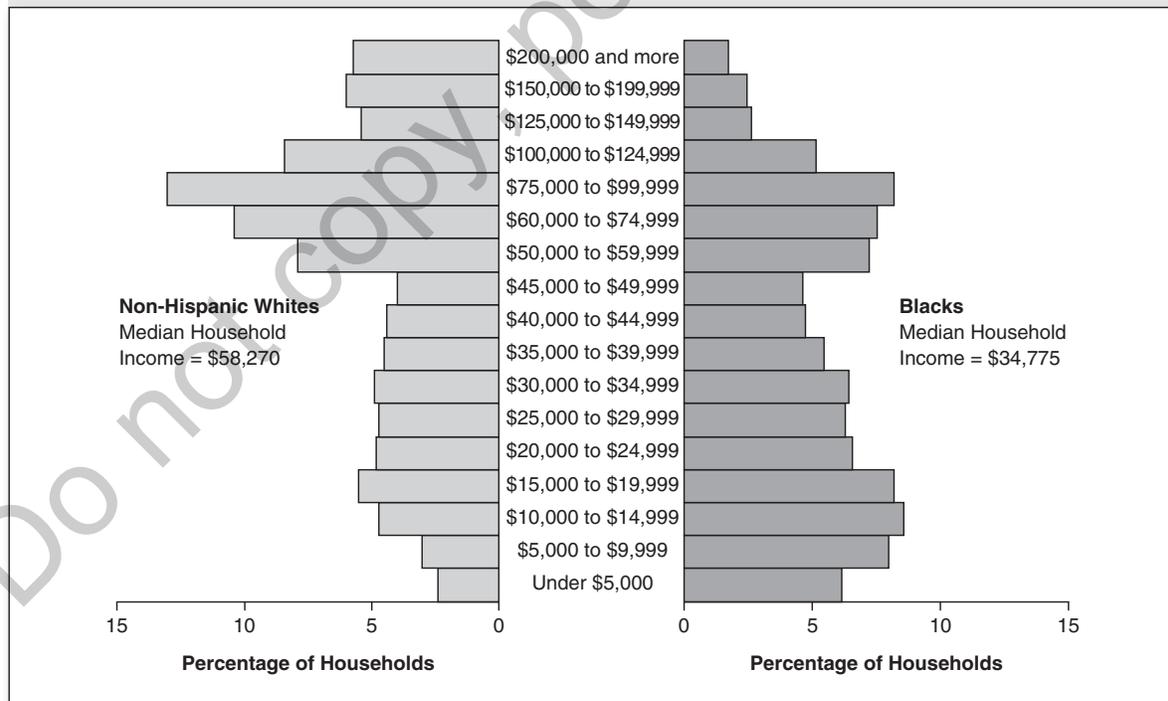


Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2013c, Table H-5).

Also note that incomes for black households remained well below those of white households. In the late 1960s, black household income was about 58% of white household income. The gap remained relatively steady through the 1980s, closed during the boom years of the 1990s, and, since the turn of the century, has widened again. The gap was smallest in 2000 (68%) and, in the most recent year, has grown to 63%, reflecting the differential effects of the recession on minority groups of color, as we discussed previously.

Figure 5.14 supplements this information by comparing the distribution of income within each racial group for 2013 and highlights the differences in the percentage of each group in low-, middle-, and upper-income categories. To read this graph, note that income categories are arrayed from top to bottom and that the horizontal axis has zero points in the middle of the graph. The percentage of white households in each income category is represented by the bars to the left of the zero point, and the same information is presented for black households by the bars to the right of the zero point. Starting at the bottom, note that the bars representing black households are considerably wider than those for white households. This reflects the fact that black Americans are more concentrated in the lower income brackets. For example, 14.7% of black households were in the lowest two income categories (less than \$10,000); this figure is 2.7 times greater than the percentage of white households (5.4%) in this range.

**Figure 5.14** Distribution of Household Income for White and Black Americans, 2013



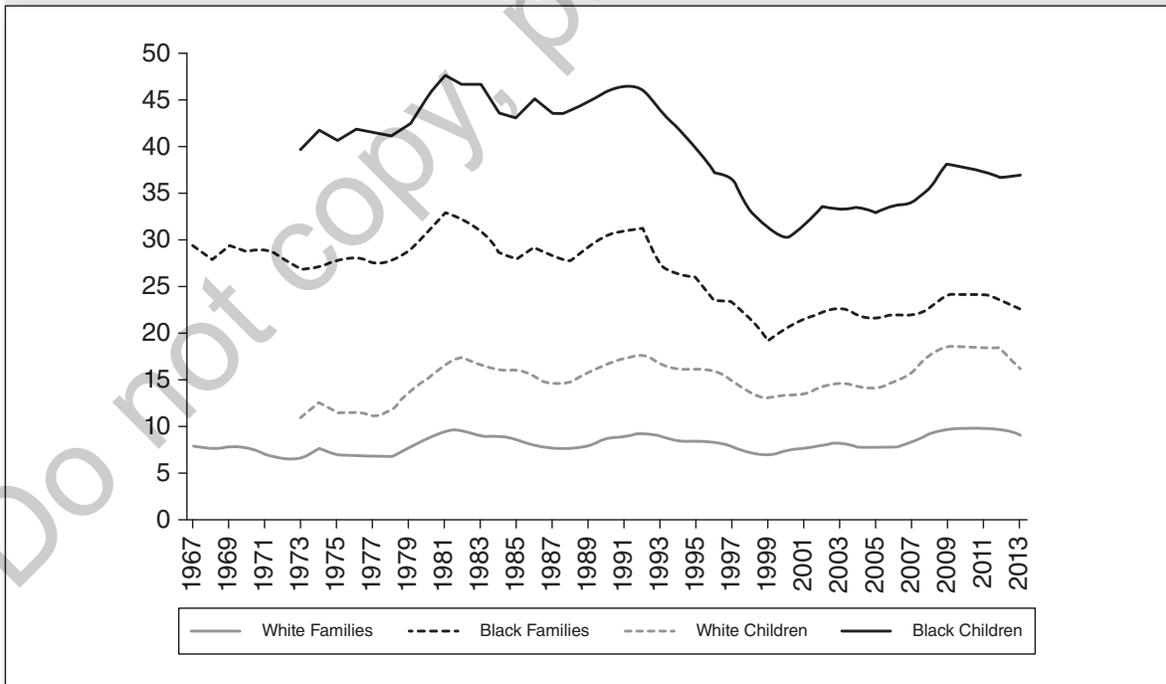
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2015a).

As we move upward, notice the clustering of black and white households in the \$50,000 to \$124,000 categories, income ranges that would be associated with an upper middle-class lifestyle. In this income range, however, white households are overrepresented: 39% of white households versus only 28% of black households had incomes in this range. The racial differences are even more dramatic in the two highest income ranges: About 11% of white households had incomes greater than \$150,000 versus only 3.6% of black households. While African Americans can be found at all income levels, graphs such as this convincingly refute the notion, common among “modern racists” and many other Americans, that there are no important racial inequalities in the United States today.

Finally, poverty affects African Americans at much higher rates than it does white Americans. Figure 5.15 shows the percentage of white and black American families living below the federally established, “official” poverty level from 1967 through 2013. The poverty rate for African American families runs about 2.5 to 3 times greater than the rate for whites.

Note the dramatic decrease in black poverty during the 1990s, followed by an even more sudden rise after 2000. Tragically, the highest rates of poverty continue to be found among children, especially African American children. Like Figures 5.13 and 5.14, this graph refutes the notion that serious racial inequality is a thing of the past in the United States.

**Figure 5.15** Families and Children Living in Poverty by Race, 1967–2013



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2013d).

### Primary Structural Assimilation

Interracial contact in the more public areas of society, such as schools or the workplace, is certainly more common today. As Gordon's model of assimilation predicts, this has led to increases in more intimate contacts across racial lines. To illustrate, one study looked at changing intimate relationships among Americans by asking a nationally representative sample about the people with whom they discuss "important matters." Although the study did not focus on black-white relations per se, the researchers did find that the percentage of whites that included African Americans as intimate contacts increased from 9% to more than 15% between 1984 and 2004 (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006). While this increase would be heartening to those committed to a more integrated, racially unified society, these low percentages could also be seen as discouraging because they suggest that about 85% of white Americans maintain racially exclusive interpersonal networks of friends and acquaintances.

Another interesting study (Fisher, 2008) looked at interracial friendships on a sample of 27 college campuses across the nation. First-year students were interviewed at the end of their second semester and asked about the group membership of their 10 closest friends on campus. The study found that cross-group friendships were common but that white students had the least diverse circles of friends. For whites, 76% of their friends were also white, a much higher percentage of in-group exclusiveness than Asian students (51%), Hispanic students (56%), and black students (27%).

Obviously, these percentages reflect the racial composition of the campuses (all were majority white), but it is significant that cross-group choices were positively related to more tolerant attitudes and a history of having a friend from another group in high school. Most interesting, perhaps, was that cross-group choices were positively related to greater diversity on campus. This finding supports the contact hypothesis and Gordon's assertion that integration at the secondary level leads to integration at the primary level.

Consistent with the decline in traditional, overt prejudice, Americans are much less opposed to interracial dating and marriage today. One national poll, for example, reports that 83% of a nationally representative sample approve of black-white dating (up from 48% in 1987) and 66% approve of black-white marriage (Wang, 2012, pp. 35-36). Approval of interracial dating and marriage appears to be especially high among younger people: In a 2009 poll, 88% of Americans in the 18 to 29 age range approved of interracial marriage, as opposed to 36% of those aged 65 and older (p. 38).

Behavior appears to be following attitudes as the rates of interracial dating and marriage are increasing. A number of studies find that interracial dating is increasingly common (see Wellner, 2007), and marriages between blacks and whites are also increasing in number, although they are still a tiny percentage of all marriages. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 65,000 black-white married couples in 1970 (including persons of Hispanic origin), about 0.10% of all married couples. By 2010, the number of black-white married couples had increased by a factor of 8.5, to 558,000, but this is still less than 1% (or 0.9%) of all married couples (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b, p. 54).

Finally, a study comparing intermarriage based on the 1980 and 2008 censuses found a slight trend toward decreasing in-marriage, particularly for black men. The results are summarized in Table 5.1. Most black men who married outside their race were married to whites (14.4%) and Hispanics (4.8%). Black women who married outside their group showed a similar pattern: 6.5% were married to whites and 2.3% to Hispanics.

**Table 5.1** Percentage Married to a Person of the Same Race, 1980 and 2008

Year	Whites		Blacks	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
1980	96%	95%	93%	97%
2008	93%	92%	77%	88%

Source: Qian and Lichter (2011, p. 1072). Copyright © 2011 National Council on Family Relations. Reprinted with permission.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

15. This section examines a variety of dimensions of acculturation and integration for African Americans. Which is most important? Why?
16. In which of these areas has there been the most progress over the past 50 years? Explain.
17. What evidence can you cite for the claim that "black–white relations are the best they've ever been"? What evidence can you cite against this claim?

### FOCUS ON CONTEMPORARY ISSUES: Does the Election of President Obama Mean That America Is Postracial?

The election of President Barack Obama in 2008 led many people to conclude that the United States had finally and decisively rejected racism and had become "postracial," or a society in which race was irrelevant. Others warned that reports of the death of racism were vastly exaggerated and that the triumph of one person—even one as significant as

(Continued)

(Continued)

the president—had little relevance for the situation of black Americans in general or for other minority groups.

Which view is more sensible? We won't be able to fully address the issue in these few paragraphs, but consider a few important points that suggest that American society is far from being postracial.

First, race figured prominently in the presidential campaign, although its effects tended to be below the surface. The Obama campaign knew that they had to avoid the third rail of American racism if their candidate was to be successful. They deemphasized his racial identity and presented him as a serious candidate who happened to be black, not as "the black candidate." Obama avoided racially charged issues (e.g., civil rights, affirmative action, or the war on drugs), and stressed issues that were of broad concern (e.g., the economy, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and health care). His strategy was to discuss race "only in the context of other issues" (Ifill, 2009, p. 53).

This strategy, of course, could not defuse all of the concerns, fears, and anxieties triggered by Obama's race. Given the traditional stereotypes about whites and blacks, the mixed-race Obama had to be seen as "more white" and the negativity associated with his blackness had to be contained. The most potentially disastrous racial episode during the campaign linked Obama with the flamboyant Pastor Jeremiah Wright, the minister of a Chicago church that Obama had attended. A YouTube video, in which Wright strongly condemned the United States for its treatment of blacks and other people of color (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hPR5jnjtLo>), surfaced and threatened to sink Obama's candidacy by associating him with the angry, militant rhetoric of the African American outsider. Forced to confront American racism openly, Obama crafted an elegant speech in which he acknowledged racism past and present but rejected Reverend Wright's views as distorted, saying that Wright elevated "what is wrong with America above all that we know is right with America" (Obama, 2008). The speech successfully defused the immediate issue, but race continued to lurk in the background of the campaign. There was a persistent tendency to see Obama as something other than a "true American"—as a Muslim, a Kenyan, an outsider, a terrorist, a revolutionary, or just an angry black man. His campaign was ultimately successful because it was able to portray him as "white-assimilated, acceptable, mixed-race, and thus less black (or not really black)" (Wingfield & Feagin, 2010, p. 219). The first president of color in American history owed his success to the perception of many that he wasn't "really" black.

Second, support for Obama on Election Day was highly racialized. The candidate built a broad coalition of supporters that included the young, first-time voters, low-income voters, liberals, Democrats, and women. However, his staunchest support came from the black community. Obama actually lost among white voters by a considerable margin (55% voted for McCain, the Republican candidate) but attracted 95% of black voters.

Furthermore, since his election, the perceptions of Obama's effectiveness have been highly racialized. Weekly surveys show that the percentage of whites who approve the job the president is doing varies between 30% and 40%, while the percentage of approval among blacks runs between 80% and 90% and sometimes exceeds 90% (Gallup, 2012). Thus, his support in the black community is roughly two to three times his support in the white community.

Finally, and most detrimental to the argument that the United States is postracial, the racial gaps that existed when Obama took office have persisted, and may have grown larger (see the figures in this chapter); racial issues regularly animate public discourse. U.S. race relations are arguably the best they have ever been but, given a history that features slavery and segregation, they are far from "postracial."

### Is the Glass Half Empty or Half Full?

The contemporary situation of African Americans is perhaps what might be expected for a group so recently "released" from exclusion and subordination. The average situation of African Americans improved vastly during the latter half of the 20th century in virtually every area of social life. As demonstrated by the data presented in this chapter, however, racial progress has stopped well short of equality.

In assessing the present situation, one might stress the improved situation of the group (the glass is half full) or the challenges that remain before full racial equality and justice are achieved (the glass is half empty). While African Americans can now be found at the highest level of the society (including the Oval Office and the Supreme Court), a large percentage of the African American population has merely traded rural peasantry for urban poverty and faces an array of formidable and deep-rooted problems.

The situation of African Americans is intimately intermixed with the plight of our cities and the changing nature of the labor force. It is the consequence of nearly 400 years of prejudice, racism, and discrimination, but it also reflects broader social forces, such as urbanization and industrialization. Consistent with their origin as a colonized minority group, relative poverty and powerlessness has persisted for African Americans long after other groups (e.g., the descendants of the European immigrants who arrived between the 1820s and the 1920s) have achieved equality and acceptance. African Americans were enslaved to meet the labor demands of an agrarian economy, became rural peasants under Jim Crow segregation, were excluded from the opportunities created by early industrialization, and remain largely excluded from the better jobs in the emerging postindustrial economy.

Progress toward racial equality has slowed since the heady days of the 1960s, and in many areas, earlier advances seem hopelessly stagnated. Public opinion polls indicate that there is little support or sympathy for the cause of African Americans. Traditional prejudice has declined, only to be replaced by modern racism. In the court of public

opinion, African Americans are often held responsible for their own plight. Biological racism has been replaced with indifference to racial issues or with blaming the victims.

Of course, real improvements have been made in the lives of African Americans. Compared with their counterparts in the days of Jim Crow, African Americans today on average are more prosperous and more politically powerful, and some are among the most revered of current popular heroes (the glass is half full). However, the increases in average income and education and the glittering success of the few obscure a tangle of problems for the many, problems that may well grow worse. Poverty, unemployment, a failing educational system, residential segregation, subtle racism, and continuing discrimination continue to be inescapable realities for millions of African Americans. In many African American neighborhoods, crime, drugs, violence, poor health care, malnutrition, and a host of other factors compound these problems (the glass is half empty).

Given this gloomy situation, it should not be surprising to find in the African American community significant strength in pluralistic, nationalistic thinking, as well as resentment and anger. Black Nationalism and Black Power remain powerful ideas, but their goals of development and autonomy for the African American community remain largely rhetorical sloganeering without the resources to bring them to actualization.

The situation of the African American community in the early 21st century might be characterized as a combination of partial assimilation, structural pluralism, and inequality—a depiction that reflects the continuing effects, in the present, of a colonized origin. The problems that remain are less visible (or perhaps just better hidden from the average white middle-class American) than those of previous eras. Responsibility is more diffused; the moral certainties of opposition to slavery or to Jim Crow laws are long gone. Contemporary racial issues must be articulated and debated in an environment of subtle prejudice and low levels of sympathy for the grievances of African Americans. Urban poverty, modern institutional discrimination, and modern racism are less dramatic and more difficult to measure than an overseer's whip, a lynch mob, or a sign that says "Whites Only," but they can be just as real and just as deadly in their consequences.

### Main Points

- At the beginning of the 20th century, the racial oppression of African Americans took the form of a rigid competitive system of group relations and de jure segregation. This system ended because of changing economic and political conditions, changing legal precedents, and a mass protest movement initiated by African Americans.
- The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) was the single most powerful blow struck against legalized segregation. A nonviolent direct action campaign was launched in the South to challenge and defeat segregation. The U.S. Congress delivered the final blows to de jure segregation in the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.
- Outside the South, the concerns of the African American community had centered on access to schooling, jobs, housing, health care, and other opportunities. African Americans' frustration and anger were expressed in the urban riots of the 1960s. The Black Power movement addressed the massive problems of racial inequality remaining after the victories of the civil rights movement.
- Black-white relations since the 1960s have been characterized by continuing inequality, separation, and hostility, along with substantial improvements in status for some African Americans. Class differentiation within the African American community is greater than ever before.

- The African American family has been perceived as weak, unstable, and a cause of continuing poverty. Culture of poverty theory attributes poverty to certain characteristics of the poor. An alternative view sees problems such as high rates of family desertion by men as the result of poverty, rather than the cause.
- Anti-black prejudice and discrimination are manifested in more subtle, covert forms (modern racism and institutional discrimination) in contemporary society.
- African Americans are largely acculturated, but centuries of separate development have created a unique black experience in American society.
- There have been real improvements for many African Americans, but, the overall secondary structural assimilation of African Americans remains low. Evidence of racial inequalities in residence, schooling, politics, jobs, income, unemployment, and poverty is massive and underlines the realities of the urban underclass.
- In the area of primary structural assimilation, interracial interaction and friendships are rising. Interracial marriages are increasing, although they remain a tiny percentage of all marriages.
- Compared with their situation at the start of the 20th century, African Americans have made considerable improvements in quality of life but the distance to true racial equality remains enormous.

### APPLYING CONCEPTS

The table below lists 10 metropolitan areas from across the nation in alphabetical order. Based on what you have learned in this chapter and Chapter 4, which ones do you think have the highest levels of racial residential segregation? Cities in the South? Cities in the Northeast or the West? Cities with a higher or lower black population?

What's your best guess? Rank order the cities from 1 (most segregated) to 10 (least segregated).

	<i>City</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Percentage Black, 2010*</i>	<i>Rank</i>
1	Atlanta, Georgia	South	32%	
2	Baltimore, Maryland	Border	29%	
3	Boston, Massachusetts	Northeast	7%	
4	Dallas–Fort Worth, Texas	Southwest	15%	
5	Kansas City, Kansas	Midwest	13%	
6	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	Northeast	8%	
7	Richmond, Virginia	South	38%	
8	San Diego, California	West	5%	
9	San Francisco, California	West	8%	
10	Washington, DC	South/border	26%	

\*Percentage in entire metropolitan area, including suburbs. Data from U.S. Census Bureau (2012c, p. 31).

TURN THE LAST PAGE OF THIS CHAPTER TO SEE THE ACTUAL RANKS AND SCORES.

## Review Questions

1. What forces led to the end of de jure segregation? To what extent was this change a result of broad social forces (e.g., industrialization), and to what extent was it the result of the actions of African Americans acting against the system (e.g., the Southern civil rights movement)? By the 1960s and 1970s, how had the movement for racial change succeeded, and what issues were left unresolved? What issues remain unresolved today?
2. Describe the differences between the Southern civil rights movement and the Black Power movement. Why did these differences exist? How are the differences related to the nature of de jure versus de facto segregation? To what degree do these movements remain relevant today? How?
3. How does gender affect contemporary black-white relations and the African American protest movement? Is it true that African American women are a “minority group within a minority group”? Explain.
4. According to an old folk saying, “When America catches a cold, African Americans get pneumonia.” Evaluate this idea using the information, data, and analysis presented in this chapter. Is it true? Exaggerated? Untrue? What other kinds of information would be needed for a fuller assessment of the quote? How could you get this information?
5. What are the implications of increasing class differentials among African Americans? Does the greater affluence of middle-class blacks mean that they are no longer a part of a minority group? Will future protests by African Americans be confined only to working-class and lower-class blacks?
6. Regarding contemporary black-white relations, is the glass half empty or half full? Considering the totality of evidence presented in this chapter, which of the following statements would you agree with? Why? (1) American race relations are the best they’ve ever been; racial equality has been essentially achieved (even though some problems remain); or (2) American race relations have a long way to go before society achieves true racial equality.

## ANSWERS TO APPLYING CONCEPTS

Here are the 10 metro areas listed from most to least segregated. Many American cities are more segregated than Pittsburgh; some are less segregated than San Diego. These 10 cities were selected to represent a variety of regions and race relations histories, and are not, of course, representative of the society as a whole.

	<i>City</i>	<i>Score (Dissimilarity Index)</i>
1	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	64.9
2	Baltimore, Maryland	62.2
3	Kansas City, Kansas	57.7
4	Boston, Massachusetts	57.6

	City	Score (Dissimilarity Index)
5	Washington, D.C.	56.1
6	Atlanta, Georgia	54.1
7	San Francisco, California	50.5
8	Richmond, Virginia	49.6
9	Dallas–Fort Worth, Texas	47.5
10	San Diego, California	38.6

Source: Data from Glaeser and Vigdor (2012).

### Group Discussion

In groups of four to six people, compare your ranking of the cities with those of others. Explain the rationale for your ranking. How well did everyone do? What lessons can you take away from this activity?

### Internet Activities

Listen to or watch the following. Take notes on what's interesting or useful to you. Note ideas that relate to what you've learned in this (or other) chapters.

1. Watch the six-minute clip “The House We Lived In” from the excellent documentary *Race: The Power of an Illusion* at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mW764dXEI\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mW764dXEI_8). It explains how the post–World War II housing boom, funded by government support, made houses a mass, affordable good. However, lending and purchasing practices excluded families of color. How does this clip relate to ideas from this or other chapters? For example, how does this practice relate to institutional discrimination? Additionally, given that home ownership is the major source of wealth for most families, to what degree do you think these historic practices influence African American families today? Think about issues of inheritance, tax deductions for mortgage interest, the impact on children's school districts, and the ability to take out college (or other) loans using one's house as collateral.
2. For a modern look at discrimination in housing, listen to “House Rules” from the podcast *This American Life* at <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/512/house-rules?act=0#play>. Much of the story features Nikole Hannah-Jones, a reporter whose series on fair housing laws can be found at <http://www.propublica.org/series/segregation-now>. What was most interesting or relevant to you from this episode? What did you learn that was new that builds on ideas from this and prior chapters? What needs clarifying?
3. Watch this short TED Talk about race and incarceration featuring Bryan Stevenson, award-winning human rights lawyer and founder and director of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI): at <http://www.eji.org/>

TED. You may wish to look around the EJI website, too, and watch the interesting video at <http://www.eji.org/slaveryevolved>, which offers information about slavery in the United States. It argues that the social construction of race, specifically the idea of real racial difference between whites and blacks, allowed for the creation and maintenance of slavery. Further, it argues that these ideas have merely changed and that vestiges of these ideas are embedded in our criminal justice system and contribute to disproportionate arrest and sentencing of African Americans, especially boys and men.

4. For a more in-depth view of racial inequality in the criminal justice system, watch this talk by Bryan Stevenson based on his book best-selling book, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQHe6AxX1zo>. This talk by Michelle Alexander, a civil rights lawyer and associate professor of law at Ohio State University, is based on her groundbreaking book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gln1JwDUI64>.

### Learning Resources on the Web

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