Nancy Foner and George M. Fredrickson

Introduction

Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States: Social Constructions and Social Relations in Historical and Contemporary Perspective

The United States has seen two massive waves of immigration since the late nineteenth century: 27.6 million immigrants arrived between 1881 and 1930, and then, after a hiatus of more than three decades due to restrictive laws, depression, and war, more than 25 million came between 1965 and 2000, a flow that continues virtually unabated into the twenty-first century (Gerstle and Mollenkopf 2001, 1–9). The two great waves differ in how the race and ethnicity of the majority of the new arrivals have been perceived, but the contrast is not as sharp as is commonly believed. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most immigrants came from southern and eastern Europe. They were regarded as white under the law and came to think of themselves in the same way, but in the popular discourse of old-stock Americans they could be, and often were, considered racially “other.” Whether they were a genetically inferior subcategory of whites or an “in-between” people who did not quite qualify as white, they were considered different in ways that went beyond acquired cultural characteristics. The bulk of the immigrants in the new wave of the past forty years have been from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia, and most of these are classified as nonwhite or as “people of color,” both by themselves and by other Americans. In the last two decades alone, the percentage of Asians and Hispanics in the United States has doubled, with Asians representing 3.6 percent of the nation’s population and Hispanics 12.5 percent at the time of the 2000 census.

How we perceive the race or ethnicity of immigrants and the significance we attach to these categorizations cannot be considered apart from the color line that has existed in American society since the colonial period. When Europeans founded a new society in what was to become the United States, they appropriated the land of the indigenous peoples and imported slaves from Africa to work on their plantations and farms, thus creating a society in which privilege and pigmentation were closely correlated. With the arrival in large numbers of immigrants who differed significantly in culture or phenotype from the Americans who were descended from the original (mostly British) colonists, difficult questions arose as to where they might fit in the preexisting racial order.

This book brings together a distinguished group of social scientists (mostly sociologists and political scientists) with a roughly equal number of prominent historians to consider the relationship between immigration, race, and ethnicity in the United States
since the late nineteenth century. Several core questions frame the volume: How and with what consequences have the racial and ethnic identities of various groups been formed and transformed in the context of immigration in the past and the present? What have been the relationships between immigrant communities and existing or indigenous racial minorities, especially African Americans? How have the various racial and ethnic minorities related to each other?

Broadly conceived, the first three parts of the volume are concerned with the construction of race and ethnicity. Part I begins with a focus on general conceptual and historical issues; part II looks at the role of state policy, and part III considers the concept of panethnicity in relation to whites, Latinos, and Asian Americans. The chapters in part IV explore some of the important socioeconomic trends that have affected the development of ethno-racial identities and relations; finally, part V looks at the nature of intergroup relations in the past and present, in particular relations between immigrants and African Americans.

Some of the contributors take a “then and now” approach—they systematically compare immigrant experiences and interactions with other racial or ethnic groups in the two great periods of mass immigration. The essays in this volume suggest that systematic comparisons of then and now come more naturally to social and behavioral scientists (see especially part IV) than they do to historians. The latter are generally more interested in telling the story of how we got from then to now and analyzing the causes of the main developments. The tendency of social scientists to make theoretical generalizations and of historians to tell stories and emphasize particulars and ambiguities is evident to varying degrees in some of the essays. Yet we are even more struck by the cross-fertilization that is manifested here—that is, by the willingness of historians and social scientists to learn from each other. The more conventionally social scientific contributions are generally informed by a firm knowledge of the historical scholarship on race and ethnicity, and most of the essays by historians make substantial use of theories and concepts derived from the social sciences.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF RACE AND ETHNICITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Terminology is crucial to our enterprise, and we must therefore begin with an effort to determine what we mean by the key concepts of immigration, race, and ethnicity as used in this volume. “Immigration” is the least problematic of the terms, referring in this case to the quantifiable voluntary movement of people from elsewhere to the United States with the intention of residing there permanently, or at least for an extended period. “Race,” however, is a much more problematic concept. Geneticists tell us that the way we generally use the term is devoid of scientific validity. Race is a socially, culturally, and historically “constructed” category that usually has a close connection to “racism” as an ideology or attitude (Fredrickson 2002). It refers to the belief that socially significant differences between human groups or communities that differ in visible physical characteristics or putative ancestry are innate and unchangeable. When two or more such groups coexist in the same society, there is a strong tendency on the part of the more powerful group to use race as a criterion to justify a dominant and privileged position for itself. As Kwame Anthony Appiah (1990) has pointed out, it is logically possible to be a racial essentialist without endorsing a hierarchy of races. He calls such a viewpoint “racialism.” It is much more common, however, for such a sense of
deep, unalterable difference to be accompanied by the notion that “we” are superior to “them” and need to be protected from the real or imagined threats to our privileged group position that might arise if “they” were to gain in resources and rights. Here we have “racism” in the full and unambiguous sense of the term.

The concept of race entered American history in the seventeenth century, when the colonists began to identify themselves as “white” in distinction from the Indians whose land they were appropriating and the blacks they were enslaving. By the time of the first census in 1790, the distinctive and subordinate statuses of blacks and Indians were well established, and for reasons having to do with representation and taxation, racial taxonomy—along with classifications by gender and age—had become central to the enumeration and characterization of the American population (see Prewitt, this volume). This sense of race as white entitlement was also applied to immigration in 1790 when the first law passed by Congress to regulate the access of immigrants to citizenship limited the right of naturalization to “free, white, person[s].” In 1857, in the notorious Dred Scott decision, the Supreme Court declared that people of African descent born in the United States, whether free or slave, could not be considered citizens—that, in other words, they could not take advantage of the birthright citizenship available to all native-born whites. After the Civil War the Fourteenth Amendment extended birthright citizenship and the right of naturalization to blacks, but Indians born in the United States were not granted automatic citizenship until 1924, the Chinese remained ineligible for naturalization until 1943, and only in 1952 was naturalization extended to all Asians.

The formal exclusion of Asian immigrants, beginning with the ban on most Chinese in 1882, established a precedent for using race as a criterion for entering the United States that was eventually applied (albeit implicitly) to southern and eastern Europeans (see Lee, this volume). Immigrants from Europe were at all times legally white, although old-stock Americans from time to time expressed doubts as to whether some groups fully deserved this status. A different kind of racial hierarchy, one based on the notion that Europeans could be subdivided into superior Aryans or Nordics and inferior Mediterraneans and Slavs (primarily on the basis of head shape), influenced nativist advocates of immigration restriction in the early twentieth century and helped justify the discriminatory quota system put into effect in 1924. The belief, cited by Erika Lee in her essay on “gatekeeping,” that Poles and other Slavic peoples of eastern Europe were actually part Asian shows how the ideas of white supremacists about the color-coded “great races” and the ideas of nativists concerning the “little races” of Europe could be synthesized. In a similar fashion, the popular designation of Italian immigrants as “Guineas” conveyed the belief that they were part African in ancestry. The immigration policy in the United States between the 1920s and the abolition in 1965 of the quota system for Europeans and the remaining special bars to Asian immigration was clearly based on racial constructions.

Our other key term, “ethnicity,” can be distinguished from “race,” but not as easily or as unambiguously as scholars have sometimes maintained. Kenneth Prewitt shows in his essay that the census never officially racialized immigrants from Europe but rather classified them by nation of origin. It did, however, place Asians in a distinct racial category, and in 1930 it did the same for Mexicans. But after protests from the Mexican government, Mexicans were reclassified as white between 1940 and 1970, when the ethnic category “Hispanic” was introduced. In this context, “ethnic” referred to a multiracial group that shared a common cultural background or origin. Thus, without denying the reality or significance of race, the U.S. government for the first
time endorsed people’s right to consider cultural affinities more important than phenotypical characteristics in affirming their membership in a category regarded by the census takers as equivalent in importance to age and gender.

In his contribution to this volume, John Higham argues that ethnicity is “an analytically sharper” category than race. This may be true in the sense that ethnicity undoubtedly strikes many of us as having a substance and tangibility that race lacks. But the term itself is of relatively recent coinage, and disagreements persist on what “ethnicity” really means. One of the editors of this volume recalls that in the late 1960s, when he first taught the course that was later to be entitled “Race and Ethnicity in the American Experience,” he called it “Race and Nationality in American History,” thus making the association that was then common between national origin as a source of diversity and group identity in American society that could be clearly distinguished from the color consciousness associated with race. As the term “ethnicity” took hold, it was conventionally asserted that it referred to a group with common cultural characteristics as opposed to one associated with physical traits. But in the first essay in this volume, Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann revert to Max Weber’s classic conception by associating ethnicity with ancestry or descent rather than with culture per se. They argue that ethnicity as well as race is based on “primordialist claims.” Could one become Irish American, it might be asked, by converting to Catholicism and marrying a person of Irish descent? Or for that matter, would one cease to be ethnically Irish by marrying out and forsaking the religious identity usually associated with the group? To what extent does Jewish ethnicity depend on Judaism, and to what extent does it depend on having Jewish ancestors? Does a Gentile convert become Jewish in an ethnic as well as a religious sense? Does a person who was born a Jew and becomes non-religious or converts to another religion cease to be a Jew? Pondering such questions makes one aware that Cornell and Hartmann are right to question the reduction of ethnicity to alterable cultural characteristics such as religious belief. Their conception recalls the ethnic essentialism of Horace Kallen, the inventor of “cultural pluralism,” who contended that ethnic identity does not depend on cultural choice but on the one thing an individual can never change—the identity of his or her grandfather. For Cornell and Hartmann, the differences between the two assertions of group difference arise primarily from who is doing the asserting and for what purpose. Race, they argue, is a construction that is imposed on a group against its will and that serves to rationalize oppression and discrimination. Ethnic consciousness, on the other hand, is a self-construction that comes from the group itself and is embraced by it for its own purposes.

A further understanding of the difference between race and ethnicity in the American context can be derived from Victoria Hattam’s examination of how the term “ethnic group” was first used in the United States. Those who have claimed that ethnicity did not come into existence as a social science concept until World War II, or even later, have looked only for the noun and have ignored the longer history of the adjective. Hattam traces the concept of the “ethnic group” in American discourse back to the efforts of Jewish intellectuals in the period around the First World War to resist being assimilated into the melting pot while avoiding racialization. Very much aware of the American color line, Jewish thinkers like the philosopher Horace Kallen and the educator Isaac Berkson strove to legitimize difference without running the risk of being put on the wrong side of the great racial divide. Hattam contends that the recent construction of Hispanic ethnicity may serve similar purposes for some of its architects. Ethnicizers, we take her to be saying, want to validate their difference from the dominant
culture in a way that avoids being designated a nonwhite race. In America at least, the concept of ethnicity would seem to be understandable only in the context of differences defined as racial and efforts to avoid racialization.

Hattam uncovers an interesting difference between Kallen and Berkson that brings us back to the issues raised by Cornell and Hartmann. As indicated earlier, Kallen believed that ethnicity is inevitably a product of one’s ancestry. But Berkson took explicit exception to this viewpoint and made it his project (anticipating the social scientists criticized by Cornell and Hartmann) to root ethnic consciousness entirely in culture by de-essentializing it and making it purely voluntary. A strictly cultural ethnicity as advocated by Berkson remains theoretically possible, although as Cornell and Hartmann rightly point out, it is not what people normally understand ethnic identity to mean. Some communities that might be defined as ethnic (if we broaden the definition a bit) do not depend on having common ancestors but rather on a simple willingness to share the culture and embrace vicariously the collective memories of the group. When Abraham Lincoln (1992, 145–46) proclaimed in 1856 that one could venerate the Founding Fathers even if one’s ancestors were in Ireland or Germany at the time of the American Revolution, he expounded a notion of American nationality that does not depend on ancestry or kinship. Religious groups that form bounded cultural communities that function in many ways like ethnicities do not depend on ancestry. (The Mormons would be a good example except that they believe in universal immortality and thus consider themselves responsible for converting their ancestors to the faith.) Recent newspaper accounts of a woman with no Mexican or Latino ancestry whatsoever who became a leader in a Chicano community of northern California suggest that ethnic communities may differ in their willingness to incorporate outsiders. But for the purpose of realistic social analysis, we cannot afford to ignore either the Cornell-Hartmann view of ethnicity as a form of primordialism or the Berkson-Hattam view that it is a construction based on cultural distinctiveness. It could be said perhaps that putative ancestry or descent is usually what determines membership in an ethnic group, but that the primary indicator or sign of that membership is cultural rather than physical or genetic. The performance of ethnicity as group culture may be at least as important as real or imagined “blood ties” with the other members of the group.

It is at this point that John Higham’s enlargement of the concept of ethnicity and his hope that it could replace race as a central theme of American history needs to be taken into account. For Higham, all groups of people whose identity and solidarity are based on shared historical memories and cultural commitments that distinguish them from other groups in the society deserve to be considered ethnic. Although he does not say so explicitly, it does not appear that common descent is a sine qua non of ethnic membership. To extend the concept beyond immigrants to old-stock Americans normally identified with regions, such as the nineteenth-century New Englanders and post–Civil War southerners, he implicitly rejects the ancestry test. Yankees could and did become loyal southerners by embracing a southern view of the world, and New England Brahmins were receptive to the incorporation of new blood so long as it met certain cultural and intellectual standards. (Think of the great Harvard philosophers of the turn of the century: the Scotch-Irish New Yorker William James, the Californian Josiah Royce, and the Spaniard George Santayana.) In Higham’s scheme, everyone is ethnic but in different ways. Dividing the ethnicities into those of settlers, immigrants, and captives, he devotes much of his attention to the settlers, because he believes that the ethnic character of their experience has been ignored. The voluntary immigrants have been much studied, and Higham sees little need to focus on them. The mistake, he
suggests, has been to consider them the only Americans with ethnicity. His third category—captives—includes Native Americans and involuntary immigrants from Africa. The Puerto Rican experience, which he considers in some detail, constitutes for him a hybrid of captivity and immigration. If he had included Mexican Americans as part of his survey, he might have found another hybrid case, one that involves both the captivity resulting from conquest in the midnineteenth century and the later immigration from what remained of Mexico.

Higham's effort to extend the concept of ethnicity to white people who are not immigrants or the descendants of immigrants and to those whose incorporation into the society has been by force rather than consent is a bold effort to make ethnicity central to all of American history and to replace the emphasis on race, which he believes has outlived its usefulness. Extending it to groups of "settlers" with collective memories and myths of origin is a fresh and potentially fruitful insight. But, following Cornell and Hartmann's distinction between race and ethnicity, it could well be argued that race remains the appropriate characterization when we are referring to the identities of populations resulting from forced incorporation. Also, groups like Puerto Ricans and Chicanos may indeed represent mixed cases, but might it not be useful to think of their hybridity as one of race and ethnicity? Moreover, Higham's typology has no apparent place for voluntary immigrants of color, such as the Chinese and Japanese of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who were treated quite differently from the generic immigrants he describes.

Several of the essays in this volume go beyond race and ethnicity to confront the relatively new concept of panethnicity, which is what happens when a number of previously discrete ethnic groups seek to join together in reaction to the dominant group's tendency to homogenize them for the purpose of discriminating against them. From the Cornell-Hartmann perspective, panethnicity might be theorized as what happens when a "race" tries to make itself an ethnicity by embracing and reconstructing a previously imposed identity.

The most obvious recent example of panethnicity as a response to racialization is the development of an Asian American identity movement, as described and analyzed in this volume by Yen Le Espiritu. Without the construction by whites of a threatening "Mongolian" or "yellow" race that had to be barred from citizenship or kept out of the country, it is doubtful that Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Vietnamese (all from homelands with a history of mutual animosity) would have found much common ground in America. But Espiritu also posits an international basis for Asian American panethnicity. The disruptive effects of American expansionism in the Far East, she contends, created a basis for solidarity among the peoples who were uprooted and forced across the Pacific. But this clearly applies to some groups better than others—most obviously to Filipinos and Vietnamese, less clearly or not in the same way to Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans, and scarcely at all to Asian Indians. Espiritu acknowledges that differences in class status and educational attainments among Asian groups, and consequently in their ability to take advantage of American opportunities, make panethnic solidarity difficult to achieve. Asian Indians, Japanese, and Filipinos are among the most successful ethnic groups in American society, while the Hmong and Cambodians are among the least. Such examples of Asian American diversity "confirm the plural and ambivalent nature of panethnicity." It is striking and paradoxical that a major success of the Asian American movement was a campaign to force the U.S. Census Bureau to allow people of Asian ancestry to identify themselves by national origin or subgroup rather than simply as Asians.
Hispanic or Latino panethnicity, as discussed in the essays by José Itzigsohn and Neil Foley, seems to have somewhat different implications. If Asian American panethnicity takes a previously denigrated racial category and valorizes it, the Latino version has, at least in some of its formulations, sought to avoid racialization. It appears from both of their accounts, as well as from Victoria Hattam’s brief discussion of Hispanic ethnic identity, that maintaining distance from blacks and avoiding an unambiguous designation as nonwhites has at times been a motivating force in efforts to unify people of Latin American origin or derivation in the United States. In Foley’s formulation, Latinos in Texas have tried to straddle the color line. Penalized in the civil rights era by their legal categorization as white, Tejanos affirmed racial difference to the extent that it could justify legal action against discrimination but not to the point of accepting equivalence with African Americans as a racial minority. According to Itzigsohn, cooperating Latino groups in the Northeast have often revealed a strong resistance to any association with blackness. Latino pan-ancestry has thus challenged the white-black binary of American race relations. As we have seen, the post-1970 census categories of “non-Hispanic whites” and Hispanics who “may be of any race” constitute the Census Bureau’s first acknowledgment of an ethnic category that is distinguished from race.

But what is the actual basis of Latino panethnicity, and how strong a bond does it create? It is not devotion to the Spanish language, Itzigsohn reports, because many second- and third-generation Latinos speak only English. Not only is the Latino community variable in skin color, but there are also substantial cultural differences, although some Spanish heritage, if not necessarily language, would seem to be the common denominator. As with Asian Americans, different Latino groups have greatly differing socioeconomic profiles. The contrast between predominantly white and middle-class Cubans and poor people of black, Indian, or mixed race from parts of Central America and the Caribbean suggest the limits of pan-Latino solidarity. One version of Latino panethnicity especially favored by Mexican American activists features, in addition to culture, identity as a “brown” or mestizo people. Phenotypically distinctive Latinos, like Asians, have long been racialized—in practice if not in law—on the basis of pigmentation, especially in the Southwest. Affirmation of “brownness” has become a way to affirm an antiracist racial solidarity while at the same time remaining nonblack.

It would seem that Latinos, like Asians, are strongly attached to their more specific ethnic or national identities and come together only in situations where cooperation enables them to exert political influence to the common advantage of the participating nationalities. To the extent that the white or Anglo majority, nationally or locally, treats either Asians or Latinos as a single group and acts in ways that affect all or most of those so designated, panethnic identities and movements tend to emerge. Their function would seem to be primarily political rather than cultural, and reactive more than self-generating.

Has there also been a white panethnicity? David Roediger and James Barrett confront this issue in their essay on the role of the Irish in racializing the “new immigrants” of the period 1890 to 1930. What they call “an oppressive white panethnicity” emerged when Irish gang members tried to enlist Poles and Lithuanians in violence against blacks in the Chicago race riot of 1919. Another more benign form emerged when the Irish sought to cooperate with other European immigrant nationalities in opposing nativism and immigration restriction. The “others” for this panethnicity were Anglo-Americans, not blacks. But Irish Americans could also manifest disdainful and bigoted attitudes toward Italians, Poles, and other immigrant nationalities and even
seek identification with old-stock Americans. Catholicism was another path to the broadening of group sympathies and affiliations, as was the labor movement. But Roediger and Barrett give the general impression that the Irish remained intensely loyal to their narrower ethnic affiliation and embraced more inclusive identities in a more or less opportunistic or situational fashion. Even more than in the case of Asians and Latinos, panethnicity based squarely on whiteness was a function of specific relationships with people of color, especially blacks, and did not connote any deep cultural affinity or sense of kinship among those designated as white. It might even be asked whether panethnicity of this sort is a form of ethnicity at all. If a distinction between race and ethnicity is to be maintained, we might simply call it “white racism” and leave it at that. The one thing that “white panethnicity” might have in common with the arguably better grounded panethnicities of Latinos and Asians is the fact that it constitutes a political project and cannot be understood except in the context of interactions and power relationships with other ethnic or racial groups.

How does America’s principal non-immigrant minority, African Americans, fit into this mosaic? As we have seen, the special position of blacks has been an essential element in how ethnic or racial groups of immigrant origin define themselves and their position in American society. Has a history of special disadvantage—slavery, Jim Crow, ghettoization, and, most recently, massive incarceration—made the black experience different in kind from that of other minorities? Several of the essays in this book suggest that it has. Richard Alba and Nancy Denton show that blacks have been, and still are, more residentially segregated than the other groups. Joel Perlmann and Mary Waters demonstrate that they have been persistently less likely to marry outside the group than other racial and ethnic minorities. And according to Philip Kasinitz, “most evidence would seem to argue that the African American experience remains poles apart from that of other groups in the United States.” Blacks are the quintessentially racialized Americans. There would be no African American identity had it not been for a history of massive oppression and stigmatization.

How, if at all, do the concepts of ethnicity and panethnicity apply to blacks? Cornell and Hartmann use their way of distinguishing race and ethnicity to offer a partial answer to this question. Accepting the categorization imposed on them by whites, African Americans, they argue, turned it into a positive sense of “peoplehood.” “They thereby reconstructed themselves as an ethnic group, becoming both race and ethnic group at once.” It might seem curious, however, that blacks themselves seem to have been loath to describe the rise of group consciousness in these terms. Sociologists of the 1970s who wrote about the rise of black power and consciousness described it as a process of “ethnogenesis” (for example, see Taylor 1979), but we know of no African American public intellectuals who have embraced “ethnicity” as a model for their group self-consciousness. The reason for this reluctance to abandon race in favor of ethnicity can perhaps be found in Joe Trotter’s historical account of scholarly comparisons of black migration to the North and immigration from abroad. The notion, popular in the 1950s and 1960s, that black migrants were simply the “last immigrants” and could be expected to advance in northern urban society the way European newcomers had done earlier came under sharp attack in the 1970s for underestimating white racism and the obstacles it presented to black equality and opportunity. To embrace the notion that blacks were—or were in the process of becoming—an ethnicity seems premature to those who see racism as a persistent problem for blacks that requires special race-conscious responses.

Nevertheless, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that American society as a whole
would be better off if blacks could characterize themselves and be characterized by others as an ethnic group rather than a race. The combination of group memory, consciousness of common descent, and shared culture already constitutes a strong basis for black self-respect and, if racism could be truly overcome, would invite the respect of other Americans. But such an ethnicity might have one drawback. A normal degree of ethnic specificity might limit membership in the group to descendants of those who were enslaved in the southern United States, thereby excluding black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean, who have had somewhat different group memories, cultural traditions, and historical experiences. But a black panethnicity is already being constructed around the concepts of “the Black Diaspora” and the “Black Atlantic.” Panethnicities, as we have seen, are difficult to construct, but this one might have a brighter future than most.

SOCIAL RELATIONS

If many essays in this volume focus on the construction of race and ethnicity in the context of the changing character of immigration, others are concerned with social relationships between immigrants and established residents who are defined as racially or ethnically distinct. Indeed, there is a dialectical interplay between social constructions and interethnic or racial relations. Certainly, these relations are shaped by the way race and ethnicity are constructed in specific times and places; at the same time, day-to-day social relations—in communities, neighborhoods, organizations, and families—can play a role in altering the boundaries between ethno-racial groups and thus the very way in which the groups are defined and conceived. (In discussing the interactions among such groups, not all contributors have found it necessary to insist on the distinction between race and ethnicity that is stressed in the more theoretical and historical essays. The use of composite terms like “ethno-racial” becomes justified when what is being considered is simply the consciousness of members of one descent group or “people” that its differences from other groups—however they may be defined—create a basis for solidarity that is deep-seated, significant, and capable of transcending or overwhelming other actual or potential identities, such as those based on class, gender, or religion.)

In probing the dynamics of interethnic or racial relations, there is a risk, as John Lie cautions, of slipping into an essentialism that presumes the organic solidarity of ethno-racial groups and categories. Ethno-racial groups, he reminds us, are abstractions; groups do not interact, but people who are seen to “belong” to these groups do, and they have a variety of identities and allegiances that come into play in social relations and interactions. As Lie argues, we cannot assume the primacy of ethno-racial identities; what he calls, in an analytic nod to Marx, “ethnicity for itself” does not exist in all times and places. This said, the fact is that people’s race and ethnicity—in terms of how they are identified by others and how they identify themselves—have a powerful influence on a wide range of social relations in the United States, both today and in the past.

One of the main concerns of this book is to explore how immigration affects interethnic or racial relations and the contexts in which they develop as well as the very nature of these relations and their consequences. This of course is a vast topic, and the volume was not designed to cover all groups and all contingencies in either the past or the present. The essays in parts IV and V offer analyses of some of the important social trends and forces that have shaped, and continue to shape, ethno-racial relations—
residential segregation, intermarriage, and second-generation patterns of assimilation—as well as case studies, with both a historical and contemporary dimension, of the character of relations between African Americans and immigrants, in particular Asian and Hispanic groups.

**Segregation, Strain, and Conflict**

In actuality, relationships between immigrants and long-established minorities are often a complex tangle of conflict and cooperation, distancing and intermingling, tension and accommodation, yet for analytic purposes it is helpful to look at these opposing tendencies separately.

On one side, there are the trends toward, and instances of, segregation, strain, and conflict, which, as a number of the chapters note, have received considerable—some would say undue—attention. As we have already noted, Alba and Denton’s analysis of immigrant residential patterns at the beginning and end of the twentieth century points to the persistence of black-white segregation; people of African ancestry, native and immigrant alike, continue to be highly segregated from the white majority—much more so than Asians and lighter-skinned Latinos. Rates of out-marriage with whites show the same trend (Perlmann and Waters, this volume). Looking back in time, Alba and Denton point out that black-white residential segregation actually worsened in many nonsouthern cities in the second and third decades of the twentieth century—just when European immigrants and their children were moving away from ethnic enclaves and becoming less segregated from majority neighborhoods. In 1910 the newer European immigrants were often more segregated from native whites than were blacks; by 1920, in the early stages of the Great Migration of African Americans from the South, there was a reversal of this pattern, which has persisted into the current era. Although residential segregation certainly does not preclude interactions in other settings, certainly it limits opportunities for contact in neighborhoods and a host of neighborhood institutions, from schools to social clubs and churches.

There is also the fact that, whatever their race or ethnicity, many immigrants continue, in time-honored fashion, to cluster in ethnic neighborhoods, partly by choice but also owing to constraints, including poverty and discrimination. Admittedly, as Alba and Denton point out, such neighborhoods usually have not been ethnically exclusive. As they also note, residential space is less determining of strong ties than a century ago now that immigrants are less likely to work within walking distance of their homes and can maintain connections to kin and co-ethnics through telephones, automobiles, and computers. Nonetheless, with the heavy concentration of co-ethnics in many neighborhoods—and often in workplaces as well—many immigrants carry out most, sometimes virtually all, of their day-to-day interactions with people from their home countries and communities and are thereby isolated from people in other groups. In his memoir, Nancy Foner’s father, who grew up in an early-twentieth-century Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn, remembers that it was not until he was in high school (and his parents had been in the United States for twenty years) that a non-Jewish person—the Russian (non-Jewish) pitcher on his brother’s baseball team—came to his house. “Our neighborhood,” he reports, “was so Jewish that it wasn’t until we were practically adults that we were really aware of the larger culture around us” (Foner 2002, 6). No doubt, there are many similar stories today.

In this urban Jewish neighborhood a century ago there were no African Americans, Hispanics, or Asians—indeed, their number was tiny in all the northeastern and mid-
western cities experiencing massive immigration at that time. As Albert Camarillo notes in his chapter, intergroup relations in the early decades of the twentieth century in the nation's largest cities were largely defined by contact between native-born whites and European immigrants (and their offspring): “The patterns in the final decades of the century were earmarked, by contrast, more by interactions between nonwhite groups in cities, especially urban areas where minorities were beginning to form majorities. . . . Consequently relations among and between people of color increasingly define a new racial frontier in intergroup relations in the American metropolis and in many metropolitan suburbs.” Today African Americans are a significant proportion of the population in the cities where contemporary immigrants commonly settle, and a growing number of neighborhoods are a mix of blacks and Hispanics, and sometimes Asians and whites as well (Alba et al. 1995). Even in these multi-hued neighborhoods, however, newcomers and established residents may have quite limited contact. In his study of a multiethnic Queens neighborhood with a mix of Latino and Asian immigrants, African Americans, and whites, Michael Jones-Correa (1998, 32) speaks of communities that overlap but do not touch. In Houston apartment complexes, Nestor Rodriguez (1999, 430), writes, Latino immigrants and African Americans share a common settlement place but, besides casual encounters, live culturally and socially apart. Even in the county park, African American youth can be found on the basketball court while Latinos are on the soccer fields.

Social interactions in multiethnic workplaces and schools throughout urban America are also often characterized by ethnic separation as people gravitate toward those who share common cultural understandings, customs, and language and avoid those with whom they feel less comfortable or who they fear will reject them. Even if they work side by side with people in different groups, workers often eat lunch and take breaks with “their own kind.” Thus, Alex Stepick and his colleagues (2003) report that in the Miami apparel factory they studied virtually everyone sat in well-established spots in the cafeteria during lunch, talking only with those in their own ethnic group. In the New York nursing home studied by one of the editors of this volume, the small groups of nursing aides who socialized at meals and breaks were generally composed of co-ethnics; the women who lent each other a hand on the job were generally of the same ethnic background; and even the small groups of two or three who walked to the subway regularly after work each day were ethnically homogeneous (Foner 1994, 140–41). In many schools immigrants and native minorities sit next to each other in class, but informal social groups and extracurricular clubs and organizations are divided along ethno-racial lines (see, for example, Fass 1989 on New York City high schools in the 1930s and 1940s, and Olsen 1997 on a multicultural high school in contemporary California).

If maintaining distance from blacks is involved in contemporary pan-Latino identities, it is also true, as a number of historians have written, that in the past southern and eastern European immigrants and their children claimed membership in the racial majority by similarly setting themselves apart from blacks (see, for example, Guterl 2001; Jacobson 1998; Roediger 1994). Of relevance here is that distancing strategies—in particular the desire of immigrants in various groups to distinguish themselves from African Americans—can accentuate separation and exacerbate strains. Interestingly, immigrants who share a common African ancestry with or are closest in phenotype to African Americans—West Indians and dark-skinned Hispanics and South Asians—are the most active in drawing the divide as a way to avoid being mistaken for African Americans, especially poor African Americans. And it is among those who have the
least success in doing this and the most frequent interaction with African Americans in inner-city neighborhoods—West Indians—that relationships with African Americans are especially difficult and strained (see Foner 2001; Vickerman 1999).

As for actual conflict, we do not have to embrace what John Lie calls the conflict thesis—the view that conflict and discord characterize interethnic relations—to acknowledge that conflict occurs between immigrant minorities and African Americans. A broad range of locally specific circumstances determine the particular focuses, intensities, durations, forms of expression, and resolutions of individual conflicts. Yet what Ewa Morawska (2001, 84) calls basic hostility-generating factors can be identified for native blacks, including shared perceptions of numerical, residential, economic, or political encroachment by immigrants and competition with them in one or more arenas, combined with the belief that other groups have made their gains undeservedly and at the cost of blacks’ progress.

Already there are signs of escalating tensions between Hispanics and African Americans in many areas. Nationally, Hispanics, according to 2002 census figures, have surpassed blacks as the largest minority, and in a number of places Hispanic groups have numerically overtaken and begun to challenge African Americans’ newly won accession to positions of power and control. Moreover, Hispanics often make challenges for inclusion on grounds similar to those that African Americans have used before, such as past exclusion and discrimination. In general, competition for political influence, jobs, housing, and other resources is at the root of African American–Hispanic conflicts, although negative stereotypes and factors such as language divisions also usually come into play.

In his chapter, Neil Foley notes that in cities in Texas and elsewhere in the Southwest where Hispanics have recently outnumbered African Americans, the two groups are in direct competition for representation on school boards and city councils and in other local arenas of power. South Central Los Angeles is another area where black-to-brown residential succession has been taking place in many neighborhoods (Johnson, Farrell, and Guinn 1999). In Compton, the lower-income Los Angeles community that Albert Camarillo describes here in detail, African Americans finally achieved power after a long struggle, only to see their position contested by a growing Latino population that is almost exclusively of Mexican origin. Some black leaders have rejected the legitimacy of Latinos’ calls for affirmative action, arguing that it was created to redress the wrongs of slavery, not to benefit immigrants, and that Latinos are latecomers who did not engage in civil rights struggles. For their part, Latinos complain of lack of access to municipal jobs and leadership positions in local government as well as African American school officials’ and teachers’ biases against Latinos and insensitivity to Latino students’ special language needs (see also Johnson et al. 1999; McLain and Tauber 2001; Mindiola, Niemann, and Rodriguez 2002). There is a different twist to African American–Latino strains in Miami, where a large and established black minority now find themselves living in a city dominated demographically, politically, and economically by Latinos. Tensions between Miami’s African Americans and Cubans, in the words of Guillermo Grenier and Max Castro (2001, 155), “are seething constantly and fuming periodically”—with the two communities divided by space, class, political party, ideology, and language. African Americans regard Cubans as their “new masters” who, among other things, give preferential governmental treatment to Hispanics and are indifferent to African American concerns.

The other arena of conflict discussed in this volume, that between Asians and African Americans, is based in the dynamics of merchant-customer relations. “Entre-
preneurially-induced” conflicts (Johnson et al. 1999), as Steven Gold shows in his essay, have a long history and have involved various groups of immigrant merchants and inner-city minority residents over the past century. In the 1930s and 1940s conflicts between Jewish business owners and African American customers were in the news; now it is strains between Koreans and inner-city blacks. Among the factors involved today that are mentioned by Gold and Lie in their respective chapters are language and cultural barriers, co-ethnic hiring, and political efforts by urban African Americans to demand economic empowerment and social dignity. And as Gold notes, group-specific, local, and contextual issues contribute to and shape the contours of particular conflicts. Gold argues, however, that at base, patterns of racial, ethnic, and economic inequality and boundary maintenance in American society are to blame—and that as long as these endure at least some fraction of entrepreneurs and customers are likely to be embroiled in conflicts.

**Cooperation, Accommodation, and Tolerance**

Interethnic and racial relations, of course, are not all about conflict, and several of the chapters warn against overlooking the many instances of cooperation, accommodation, and tolerance. Indeed, Lie contends that undue emphasis on and media attention to violent outbreaks can fan the flames of dissension and heighten ethnic-based identities and group mobilization. Peaceful coexistence is often the rule between immigrants and African Americans, and even if some members of the groups are in conflict, others may live in harmony. It is thus wrong, Lie argues, to assume, for example, that merchant-customer tensions between some Koreans and African Americans imply that all of them are inevitably at loggerheads.

As for merchant-customer conflicts themselves, Gold makes it clear that the vast majority of interactions between immigrant entrepreneurs and their customers are conflict-free. Among other things, owners and customers realize their mutual dependence and generally make an effort to maintain civil relations. Even when immigrant businesses have been attacked or looted, they have often just been accessible targets in times of social disorder rather than the focus of public outrage.

In residential communities like Compton, Camarillo argues, an exclusive focus on African American–Latino conflict misses the many examples of cooperation and coalition building. While Compton’s leaders were struggling over issues of political representation and access to institutional resources, black and Latina mothers were supporting each other across ethno-racial group lines in their day-to-day interactions—looking after each other’s children and working together on projects to keep the streets clean.

Although ethnic distancing and segregation are often the rule in multiethnic schools and workplaces, we need to be sensitive as well to the friendships that develop in classrooms and playgrounds among African American, immigrant, and white students (see Goode, Schneider, and Blanc 1992) and to the patterns of cooperation and personal friendship that emerge on the job (Stepick et al. 2003). In her chapter, Hattam mentions the class-based political and labor coalitions of African Americans and “white ethnics” in the 1930s and 1940s. In the present era African Americans and immigrant minorities may come together in political alliances on certain issues and electoral campaigns; the structure of the local political system and political traditions play a key role in determining whether and how such alliances develop (see McKeever 2001; Mollenkopf 1999; Rodriguez 1999; Sanjek 1998). And if immigrants resort to distancing strategies to differentiate themselves from African Americans, this does not
mean that distancing characterizes all of their relations; on some occasions they may identify and align with native blacks, the case of West Indians being especially noteworthy in this regard. Indeed, the longer West Indians live in the United States, and thus the longer they are exposed to the same kind of racial discrimination that African Americans experience, the more they identify with African Americans (see Vickerman 1999, 2001).

Moreover, much of the action today, in terms of day-to-day cooperation, coalition building, and culture creation, is taking place among members of the second generation, who are growing up in multiethnic neighborhoods and cities with no clear racial majority. In New York, Philip Kasinitz, John Mollenkopf, and Mary Waters (2002) report that second-generation youth have more contact with each other and native minorities than with native whites and that new cultural hybrids are emerging in the interaction between the various first- and second-generation immigrant groups and native minorities: African American young people dance to Jamaican dance hall music, and Dominican and Haitian second-generation boys are enmeshed in a street culture that is in large part African American and Puerto Rican. Members of the second generation are learning to be “New Yorkers” in colleges, labor unions, and offices, where they interact with each other, native minorities, and native whites. Indeed, to the second generation the very definition of “New Yorkers” could include “immigrant groups, native minority groups, or . . . Italians, Irish, Jews, or the like” (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters 2002, 1034). Beyond (and including) New York, an added dynamic is that in post–civil rights America what Kasinitz in his chapter calls African American–inspired models of racial difference and racial politics are more salient for nonblack nonwhites than in the past. For example, one study he cites reports that Asian American professionals feel moderate levels of kinship with African Americans and Latinos because these minority communities provide role models in fighting racism. Indeed, Kasinitz suggests that one difference from the past is that an earlier second generation fought for inclusion despite being members of previously racialized and excluded groups, while the current second generation at least has the option of fighting for inclusion because they are members (or resemble members) of previously excluded groups.

Although there is plenty of evidence of anti-immigrant feeling today on the part of non-Hispanic whites and strains with new Asian and Hispanic arrivals, particularly in communities where whites have long been a dominant presence, several chapters in the volume note trends in the current period that bode well for relations between whites, Asians, and Latinos and present a more optimistic scenario regarding black-white relations. In that most intimate of arenas, the family, significant numbers of second-generation Asians and Hispanics have non-Hispanic white spouses or partners, and their children are being raised in mixed-origin homes. In what Perlmann and Waters describe as a “very strong hypothesis” predicting intermarriage patterns, the fourth- and fifth-generation descendants of the Hispanic and Asian immigrants of our time will be almost all of mixed origin, and almost all will also be the descendants of non-Asians and non-Hispanics. In this scenario, clearly the very conceptions of racial and ethnic categories will undergo a sea change, and a key question, once again, concerns how blacks will fit in, since black-white intermarriages, though rising in frequency, are still relatively rare.

The residence patterns outlined in the chapter by Alba and Denton also suggest the potential for growing intermingling with non-Hispanic whites for many second-generation Hispanics and Asians. Despite continued large-scale immigration in the 1980s and 1990s, Asians and Hispanics remain only moderately segregated from non-Hispanic
whites. For both Asians and Latinos, the most powerful determinant of residential location is socioeconomic position—the greater their income and the higher their educational status, the larger the percentage of non-Hispanic whites in their neighborhood. Living in the same neighborhood, as we have noted, does not tell us about the quality of interaction, yet as Alba and Denton suggest, even if immigrants keep to their own kind, their children in suburban communities are likely to develop ties with whites and members of other groups in schools, playgroups, and other local arenas.

And while the evidence shows that blacks remain more isolated from whites than Asians and Hispanics, Gerald Jaynes’s conceptual scheme suggests that class can trump race in structuring intergroup relations so that middle-class blacks today often can avoid stigmatization by whites in everyday interactions by making their class position clear. In Jaynes’s account, the growth of the black middle class in post–civil rights America and the mass immigration of people of color who occupy diverse class positions have made race a less reliable guide for identifying the dependent poor. Without evidence to the contrary, middle-class Americans generally assume that blacks and other people of color belong to the “underclass.” For Jaynes, this presumption—or calculated prejudgment—is now rebuttable by better-off and better-educated blacks (and other minorities); once they avoid being seen as belonging to the “underclass,” their relations with middle-class whites “are likely to be equalitarian.” This analysis fits in with other predictions that foresee increased intermingling among the black and white middle and upper-middle classes based on common class and occupational status, school ties, contacts at work, and other social connections. Whatever the future of intergroup relations, Jaynes’s chapter makes clear that class is an integral part of the process that must be considered in understanding the ever-changing nature of ethno-racial relations, boundaries, and identities.

FUTURE RESEARCH

As immigration continues to change the United States, it is reshaping the way Americans think about race and ethnicity—the very definitions of groups and categories, the boundaries between them, and the identities that develop—as well as the nature of relations among people in different ethno-racial groups. This is not a new process. We might say that it has been part of the fabric of American society since the very beginning, yet as this book makes clear, there are many new dimensions in the current era. In bringing together historians and social scientists, the chapters in this volume, taken together, chart trends and changes since the end of the nineteenth century, make comparisons between the present and last great immigration periods, and bring out the particularities and ambiguities of specific times, groups, and places at the same time as they identify broad general processes and patterns. In many ways this is a beginning book, and the essays raise questions pertaining to the past, present, and future that suggest a host of directions for additional research.

We still have a lot to learn about the reformulation of group boundaries and identities in the context of immigration. We also have yet to determine whether—and in what ways—the experiences of European immigrants and their descendants in the past are a guide to what is happening today and to what may happen in the years ahead among new arrivals and their children. In their chapter, Steven Cornell and Douglas Hartmann lay out some crucial questions: Which groups have the freedom to construct themselves, and why? Which groups find themselves caught in inescapable categories
constructed by others, and why? Which groups are moving from one situation to another? Why and how are they doing so? Which groups get combined together, and which are seen as separate and distinct?

And as Victoria Hattam, Erika Lee, and Kenneth Prewitt lead us to ask, what is the role of the state? State policy—including immigration policy itself—both reflects and shapes the construction of race and ethnicity. Building on Lee’s historical analysis, we can ask whether, and how, gatekeeping regulations that decide who can or cannot legally enter the country will continue to influence, and be influenced by, notions of racial and ethnic difference. Also looking ahead, there is the potentially transformative role of the new multiple-race option in the census, used for the first time in 2000. Prewitt’s analysis makes it clear that state measurement systems have an independent effect on racial discourse and on which groups people see themselves as belonging to—yet we can only speculate at this point about the impact of the new multiple-race option. Among the possibilities he mentions are continuing pressures from advocacy groups to expand the number of primary groups in the racial classification system. How this process unfolds is a critical topic for study. So is the continuing “active, self-conscious politics of sorting and classifying” as different groups seek to position themselves in terms of the racial taxonomy and how they wish to be counted.

Panethnicity is clearly influenced by state classification systems, yet panethnic identities are not simply imposed from above. They are also actively created by individuals and groups as a basis for forging alliances and asserting solidarity. Following Itzigsohn, one challenge for the future is to investigate whether and in what ways people adopt a panethnic identity, the meanings they attribute to it, the political projects constructed around it, and the sites in which these identities and projects are constructed. There is also the question of how panethnic identities—and indeed, racial and ethnic identities generally—vary by national origin, class, phenotype, gender, sexuality, immigrant status, and generation. As Philip Kasinitz notes, many of the second generation who are seen as nonwhite feel they are not “American,” or not “American enough,” yet they are also not immigrants culturally. Among the questions he raises: Will the children of Koreans and Chinese become “Asian American”? Will the children of Peruvians, Colombians, and Dominicans become “Hispanic”? And building on Perlmann and Waters’s analysis, how does intermarriage fit into the picture? How, among other things, are the children of various types of “mixed marriages” identifying themselves—and how are they identified by others (see, for example, Williams-Leon and Nakashima 2001)?

With regard to intermarriage, Perlmann and Waters call for studies that take into account the role of national origin, class background, and phenotype to help clarify how the experiences of contemporary Asians and Hispanics compare to those of Europeans in the past. The role of gender also needs to be included in any full-scale analysis of immigration, race, and ethnicity. Why, for example, are Asian American women today more likely to marry whites than their male counterparts, while the reverse pattern is found among African Americans (see Jacobs and Labov 2002)? How does this compare to gender patterns in the past? And what are the implications for ethno-racial identities and relations? In general, do the ethno-racial identities of the contemporary second generation differ by gender? Was this true among the second generation of earlier eras, and if so, in what ways? Gender also comes into play in interethnic relations; Camarillo’s study raises the question of how common it is to find the kind of bridge building and cooperation that he reports among African American and Latina women in Compton. By contrast, for instance, Tatcho Mindiola, Yolanda Flores
Niemann, and Nestor Rodriguez (2002) found in their Houston study that black and Hispanic women were more hostile to each other’s groups than their male counterparts.

Camarillo’s study also highlights the need to explore the differences among local communities, cities, and regions—specifically, to assess how the construction of race, ethnicity, and intergroup relations has been shaped over time by the unique characteristics of particular places and their distinctive immigration flows. To be “Hispanic” or “Latino” means something quite different in New York City, with its large Spanish-speaking Caribbean population, than in Los Angeles, where Latinos are mostly of Mexican and Central American origin, or in Miami, where Cubans dominate, just as one hundred years ago being Jewish was very different in New York City than in small midwestern and southern cities. Following Roediger and Barrett, we can also examine the host groups in different places from whom immigrants learn about race, both in the past and in the present, and of course what in particular they learn.

We need to compare not only the meaning and content of ethno-racial identities in different communities, cities, and regions but also the nature of political mobilization and the conflicts that develop along ethno-racial lines. Will Latinos displace African Americans from positions of power in areas where they outnumber African Americans? Are the conflicts in Compton a harbinger of things to come elsewhere? And what countervailing forces come into play that can bring different groups together, as well as tear them apart, in particular urban contexts? Additional insights can come from comparing relations between immigrants and established residents in previous historical periods and also, following Joe Trotter’s lead, from considering the experiences of African American migrants as they settled in northern cities in the industrial era.

Our focus has been on relations between immigrant minorities and African Americans, yet relations between immigrants and native whites also require further study. Tensions are often rife today in many formerly all-, or nearly all-, white communities receiving large numbers of nonwhite immigrants. To mention one example, at the beginning of 2003 the small city of Lewiston, Maine, which had experienced an influx of over one thousand Somali immigrants, was the site of demonstrations after the mayor issued a public letter asking the Somali elders to stop the inflow. In what ways does this response parallel (or differ from) reactions in the same city to Irish and French Canadian immigration in earlier eras? Or to contemporary Latino and Asian immigration into virtually all-white communities elsewhere in the country? Detailed studies by historians of the complex dynamics of interethnic relations in communities in the past and over time can help us understand the elements involved in both creating and reducing (or preventing) conflicts then as well as now—just as on-the-ground ethnographic studies can tease out the countervailing forces for conflict and cooperation that operate today.

And finally, we come back to an underlying issue that is at the heart of any discussion of immigration and race in America: how today’s Latino, Caribbean, and Asian immigration will affect the future of the color line. The essays in this volume offer different prognoses—Kasinitz pointing to evidence that the central cleavage will be black-nonblack; Prewitt suggesting that “white” may become the catchall category for most new immigrants; and Jaynes predicting that as the number of poor Asians and Latinos grows, the tradition of “confounding poverty and dependency with being African American” will die. Whatever the outcome, one thing is clear: immigration will continue to alter the construction of race and ethnicity in the United States and the contour of intergroup relations. The frameworks and analyses in this volume, with their attention to contemporary and historical scholarship, theories, and concepts, provide
new insights and ways of thinking about immigration, race, and ethnicity that, in the end, are fundamental to our understanding of what American society is, has been, and will be.

REFERENCES


McLain, Paula D., and Steven C. Tauber. 2001. “Racial Minority Group Relations in a Multira-


