

— Chapter 1 —

The Sociology of Race in the United States

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AERICAN SOCIOLOGY IS generally thought to have been founded at the University of Chicago early in this century and to have come of age during the 1920s, when visionaries like Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, and Louis Wirth invented modern social scientific research. Grounded in European social theory, Chicago sociologists sought to apply concepts derived from a close reading of Weber, Marx, Durkheim, and others to describe the social organization of industrial urbanism. In contrast to their European counterparts, however, American sociologists sought to test and extend theoretical ideas through a relentless process of empirical investigation that embraced any and all means of data collection. Using the city of Chicago as their laboratory, they combined quantitative and qualitative data, conducted both ecological and individual-level analyses, paired ethnographies with sample surveys and statistics, and married documentary sources to census data, all in an effort to build a comprehensive picture of contemporary urban society (see Bulmer 1984).

The trouble with the standard account of American sociology's birth is that it happened not at the University of Chicago in the 1920s, but at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1890s; rather than being led by a group of classically influenced white men, it was directed by W. E. B. Du Bois, a German-trained African American with a Ph.D. from Harvard. His 1899 study, *The Philadelphia Negro*, anticipated in every way the program of theory and re-

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search that later became known as the Chicago School. Although not generally recognized as such, it represented the first true example of American social scientific research, preceding the work of Park and Burgess by at least two decades. Were it not for the short-sighted racism of Penn's faculty and administration, which refused to acknowledge the presence—let alone the accomplishments—of a black man or to offer him a faculty appointment, the maturation of the discipline might have been advanced by two decades and be known to posterity as the Pennsylvania School of Sociology. Instead, Du Bois went on to a distinguished career as a public intellectual, activist, and journalist, and the University of Chicago, not the University of Pennsylvania, came to dominate the field.

Fundamental among the subjects studied by the early Chicago sociologists was the issue of race. Robert Park theorized his relations cycle, Ernest Burgess documented patterns of black segregation and neighborhood succession, and E. Franklin Frazier undertook detailed studies of the ecology and social life of the ghetto. It was not until 1945, however, with the publication of St. Clair Drake's and Horace Cayton's *Black Metropolis*, that the University of Chicago produced a study of the black community matching the depth, rigor, and sophistication achieved nearly fifty years earlier by Du Bois in *The Philadelphia Negro*.

An important legacy of the Chicago School's influence was that the sociology of race was thoroughly grounded in human ecology, at least through the 1960s. Indeed, according to Robert Park's widely cited dictum, social relations *were* spatial relations. Thus in building theories and conducting research, American sociologists concerned themselves fundamentally with understanding how ecological factors shaped and constrained interpersonal behavior and social structure. No analysis of racial stratification was complete without describing the ecological configurations of class, race, and ethnicity or outlining how their intersection influenced the life chances and social worlds experienced by individuals.

One of the most important structural settings considered by sociologists was the neighborhood. From the early writings of Park and Burgess through the later work of Frazier, Janowitz, Blau, Duncan, and Lieberman, neighborhoods were seen as fundamental to the broader system of American stratification. Sometime around 1970, however, sociological interest in the connection be-

tween spatial location and social position began to wane. As the status attainment model came to dominate American sociology, the study of stratification became progressively despatialized. Socioeconomic outcomes were conceptualized as individual-level processes constrained only by family circumstances.

The predominance of the status attainment model stemmed from both technological and theoretical imperatives. Technologically, computers grew more powerful and allowed the development of sophisticated methods for collecting, manipulating, and analyzing large amounts of information, yielding a proliferation of social surveys. The resulting data sets included detailed information on individuals, families, and households, but little, if anything, on the places where they lived.

Concomitant with computerization, sociology came under increasing pressure from economics, with economists seeking to project their rational theoretical calculus into domains hitherto dominated by sociologists. Whereas some responded by rejecting rationality and quantification outright, others sought to bolster themselves and their discipline by out-quantifying the economists. Thus researchers of status attainment employed sophisticated survey data in complicated new analyses that traced the influence of family background on individual attainment, both within and between generations. Although spatial concerns did not disappear entirely from the literature, they were pushed aside by a new generation of studies using structural equations, path analyses, and log-linear methods, enabling sociologists to compete with economists for scientific respectability.

During the 1970s, the status attainment paradigm seemed to sweep aside everything in its path and soon came to dominate the major sociology journals. Despite early insights and conceptual advances, however, the paradigm eventually reached a point of diminishing returns. Technical sophistication was no substitute for original thinking about the changing nature of social structure and its effects on individual lives. By the mid-1980s, sociologists were employing ever more complicated models to push around a fixed amount of variance in ever smaller ways. Increases in complexity brought diminishing marginal returns in terms of sociological insight, and the explanatory power of status attainment models remained stubbornly stuck.

The key event that broke the conceptual and empirical log-

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jam, and brought ecology forcefully back into the study of racial stratification, was provided by another Chicago sociologist, William Julius Wilson. His 1987 book, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, argued that urban poverty was transmitted and perpetuated not simply through individual- and family-level mechanisms but also through a series of structural transformations playing out ecologically within cities and across neighborhoods. The spatial intensification of joblessness and the accompanying concentration of poverty isolated poor African American men from employment and created an unfavorable marriage market for black women that undermined family stability.

He argued that whatever disadvantages African Americans might experience by virtue of growing up and living in poor families, they incurred *additional* penalties for growing up and living in poor neighborhoods. Thus ecological context mattered in fundamental ways that went well beyond individual characteristics or family circumstances. Wilson was the first American sociologist to realize that the world had changed and that poverty had become much more *geographically concentrated* since 1970. He coined the term *concentration effects* to describe the additional disadvantage—above and beyond individual and family problems—that poor people incurred by virtue of growing up and living in areas of concentrated poverty.

Thus space came to matter a great deal to sociologists once again, and there was a sudden rush to specify, model, and estimate “neighborhood effects” on various outcomes related to poverty and race. At about the same time, sociology as a whole began to move away from the strident, self-defeating debates of the 1970s, which had pitted extreme epistemological positions against one another as if they were mutually exclusive and logically incongruent—quantitative versus qualitative, theoretical versus empirical, survey versus ethnography, individual versus aggregate. Instead, a growing number of sociologists recognized the compensating strengths and weaknesses of diverse methodologies, different levels of analysis, and complementary theories and sought to *integrate* them in the course of their ongoing investigations. During the 1980s, a new generation of multimethod, multi-level, multisite studies came to the fore.

Through a series of fortuitous circumstances, many of these

currents converged at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1990s. Exactly one century after Du Bois published his landmark work on black Philadelphia, Penn's sociology faculty housed a diverse array of scholars working on various aspects of race and using a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches. The prevailing zeitgeist moved them beyond arguments about which methodological approach was "better" or which theoretical concepts were more "sociological." Instead, they worked to develop new ways to combine methods and theories so as to produce sociological knowledge with greater validity than would be possible using any single method or theory alone.

Over the past decade, these sociologists have been in the forefront of developing multimethod approaches that blend, often within a single study, ethnographies and surveys, statistics and content analyses, and census data with historical records to analyze systematically both textual and numerical data; and those faculty members who do not combine quantitative and qualitative styles in their own studies nonetheless remain open and sympathetic to the full range of research methodologies represented in the discipline.

Given the unusually diverse array of sociologists working on one issue in one department at the same time, we resolved to organize a conference that would allow Penn sociologists to share their insights on the issue of race within a formal integrative structure and to make the resulting synthesis of knowledge available to a wider public. The chapters included in this volume are the product of that conference. Across them, one sees a dedication to the scientific principles first exemplified in the work of Du Bois and later institutionalized at the University of Chicago: a marriage of mutual respect between quantitative and qualitative methods, a lively interplay between theory and research, an emphasis on the ecological foundations of intergroup relations, a healthy respect for empirical data as the best way to discern between competing theoretical visions, and a focus on the structures and mechanisms of stratification.

Inspired by Du Bois's widely quoted dictum that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line," each of the substantive chapters of this book examines a different aspect of race in late-twentieth-century America. In a way that we hope

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might please Du Bois and posthumously redress the great injustice done to him by the university a century ago, each of the chapters is written by a member of Penn's standing faculty, which now includes three African Americans. The contributions are organized so as to take up, in turn, a logical progression of issues with respect to race—theoretical, demographic, ecological, and, finally, the socioeconomic issues of work and school.

Randall Collins leads off the volume and the theory section by situating the social construction of ethnic identity in macro-historical perspective, reminding us that conceptualizations of race are ultimately rooted in broader state structures and geopolitical relations. In a similar spirit, Ewa Morawska argues that black-immigrant relations in contemporary U.S. cities are governed not simply by a group's objective deprivation and its subjective sentiments about itself and other groups but also by historically grounded judgments that vary from setting to setting. A full understanding of intergroup relations therefore requires an understanding of how general social processes are filtered through local contexts and structures to determine specific outcomes.

Robin Leidner's contribution focuses on the problems and issues that surface when a movement organized on the basis of one characteristic—gender—seeks to integrate and mobilize women who are simultaneously heterogeneous with respect to other traits, such as race and class. Even in radical sectors of the feminist movement, the dilemmas of class and particularly racial integration can prove quite difficult. Ivar Berg concludes our conceptual analysis by situating the emotional issue of affirmative action historically, pointing out that affirmative action is hardly the first instance of group-based rights built into U.S. law. Indeed, he argues that a great many of today's "winners" are the descendants of persons who benefited from group-based rights granted in the past. Minorities have the burden of having to *earn* group rights that have long been accorded to majority members, including the ubiquitous status of *persona ficta*.

Penn houses one of the nation's leading population research centers, and its faculty contains three past presidents of the Population Association of America. It is appropriate that this volume explores the social demography of race in some detail. Tukufo Zuberi links our theoretical understanding of racial identity to con-

crete issues of data and measurement, exploring how the creation of racial data itself can play a role in racial stratification and the perpetuation of difference. He traces the implications for both theory and measurement of the growing diversification of the U.S. population through massive immigration.

Any study of racial stratification requires data, of course, and demographers are nothing if not careful (some might say obsessed) about the quality of the information they use. For a variety of reasons having to do with the unique position of African Americans in the United States, historical data on race suffer from a variety of systematic defects that make it difficult to reconstruct accurately the demographic history of the African American population. Irma Elo and Samuel Preston use the classic methods of demography to correct these data problems and for the first time present an accurate summary of the demographic history of the African American population. Before trying to explain something as complex and charged as race, it is best to get the facts straight.

One of the fundamental demographic processes is nuptiality, and Frank Furstenberg's chapter explores the retreat from marriage that has unfolded in America's inner cities. He argues that the precarious employment situation lies at the core of the phenomenon. Economic uncertainties make marriage a less desirable, predictable, and permanent social form, and children learn not to expect male-female relations to endure. These apprehensions are reinforced during adolescence as both men and women experience fleeting and often unsatisfactory relationships. A culture of gender distrust emerges as men and women increasingly live in separate spheres. The cultural climate of the urban poor creates extravagant fantasies and expectations, bitter disappointments and discontents, and a reliance on maternal kin. Each of these conditions, in turn, renders the conjugal unit less dependable and sturdy as a social form.

Central to the demography of race is the high degree of mortality experienced by African Americans. Linda Aiken and Douglas Sloane document one of the myriad micro-mechanisms accounting for the persistent black-white gap in death rates. Using AIDS care as a model to explore how access to health care varies by race, they show that African Americans constitute a higher percentage of AIDS patients in public than private hospitals and a

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considerably smaller percentage of patients in magnet and exemplary private hospitals. The fact that black patients have a lower probability of entering dedicated AIDS units is of concern since research has clearly established that these units have beneficial health outcomes.

The third section considers the unique ecological situation of African Americans, who remain the most segregated group in the United States. Camille Charles shows that black segregation is far higher than that experienced even by the most recent arrivals in the multiethnic metropolis of Los Angeles—Asians. And even though Hispanic segregation is higher, it never reaches the heights experienced by blacks, and mostly it can be explained by socioeconomic status and nativity. The same cannot be said for African Americans, however, who remain hypersegregated within the metropolitan area irrespective of socioeconomic status and despite their clear preferences for integration.

Janice Madden examines variation in the degree of residential segregation of African Americans across metropolitan areas. She finds that places with more African Americans are more highly segregated and have poverty more concentrated in their central cities and that current discrimination, not lower productivity, is primarily responsible for racial differentials in income, poverty, and earnings. Finally, Douglas Massey considers the consequences of racial segregation by linking it to ecological conditions that promote the code of violence described elsewhere by Anderson (1999). He shows how residential and economic structures interact to produce neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, which, in turn, yield harsh and violent social conditions to which ghetto residents must adapt by deploying coded displays of ritualized violence.

The fourth and final section considers specific processes of racial stratification, focusing on employment and education. In the United States, blacks and whites are segregated not only by neighborhood but also by occupation. Jerry Jacobs and Mary Blair-Loy show, however, that occupational segregation by race is nowhere near as high or as consistent as occupational segregation by gender. As a result, whereas the percentage of women in an occupation operates to lower significantly the wages of male and female incumbents, the percentage of blacks in an occupation has no

such effect. Wage discrimination against African Americans occurs primarily because blacks are paid less for the same work than equally qualified whites, whereas wage discrimination against women also incorporates a systematic devaluation of work considered to be "female." In the United States of the late twentieth century, few occupations remained socially labeled as "black."

Kathryn Edin and Timothy Nelson continue the analysis of race and employment by studying the work done by low-income fathers in Philadelphia. They find that work for unskilled inner-city fathers has not disappeared, but gone underground, in the sense that they are engaged in a lot of work that is not likely to be captured by official employment statistics. In this underground or informal economy, however, they find persistent racial differences between blacks and whites, reflecting intergroup differences in the mechanisms of job acquisition and recruitment. In contrast to low-income whites, African American men almost never mention communal and family ties as a source for jobs, leading to decidedly inferior outcomes. At the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum, Elijah Anderson examines the situation of black executives working in white corporate environments. Using ethnographic data, he documents the difficulties and issues involved when a stigmatized group comes to penetrate an elite institutional environment formerly forbidden to them.

The volume concludes with a nod toward the future, for the roots of tomorrow's economic uncertainties lie partially in today's educational problems. Grace Kao shows how peer influences differ between racial and ethnic groups to produce divergent educational achievements. She finds that pressures of loyalty to one's own group, the desire to find others similar to oneself, and the prevalence of racially segregated activities and classes work together to reinforce race-ethnicity as a primary filter in selecting friends, yielding very different sorts of peer groups. Friends of Asian youth are more oriented to school and less oriented to social activities than their white counterparts. Their friends also are less likely to have dropped out of high school and are more likely to plan to go to college than friends of white youth. Although the friends of blacks are oriented more toward school and less toward social activities than the friends of whites, they also are more concerned with working, more likely to have dropped out of school,

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and less likely to aspire to a four-year university. Thus black students have greater exposure to others who have already experienced school failure, suggesting that modeling is far more important than normative influences on student academic performance.

Ultimately, this volume brings sociology at Penn full circle. A century after *The Philadelphia Negro*, it offers a comprehensive look at “the problem of the century” by a multiracial group of sociologists working together in one department using diverse methodologies, theories, and levels of analysis. Rather than privileging one approach over another, we, like Du Bois, seek to combine data, methods, and concepts to construct a more comprehensive vision of race in the twentieth century. In doing so, we seek to develop a new sociology of race that uses diverse methods and theories to describe racial stratification as a multilevel process in which individual behavior is shaped by social structures that are firmly rooted in space. If this sounds like the old Chicago School of Sociology, it is not. It is the Penn School of Sociology that should have been founded by W. E. B. Du Bois decades before Robert Park or Ernest Burgess joined the Chicago faculty.

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