

Chapter 1



Introduction

Ethnic diversity in the United States has increased substantially in recent years as a result of immigration from abroad and differential birthrates across ethnic groups within the United States. The management of diversity and the assurance of equal opportunity for all Americans across political, educational, and judicial sectors remain hotly debated issues in contemporary American society. While in decades past equality of opportunity at lower levels of education aroused the most debate, in the past twenty years the focus has shifted to diversity in higher education. Attempts to achieve greater ethnic diversity on college and university campuses began in the mid-nineteenth century with the goal of increasing knowledge, understanding, and harmony among people of different groups and backgrounds (Rudenstine 2001). Although these efforts granted entry to small numbers of new immigrants and some African Americans, significant increases in the diversity of student bodies did not occur until the end of World War II, with the passage of the GI Bill in 1944. Unfortunately, although the bill was successful in increasing access to higher education for many returning veterans, this access was limited primarily to whites and to blacks outside the South. Black veterans in the South still faced significant barriers as a result of discriminatory policies that remained in place at many traditionally white colleges and universities.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 effectively removed explicitly discriminatory policies in admissions to institutions of higher education that received

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federal funding. The removal of explicit barriers, however, did not remove all barriers to equal opportunity for underrepresented ethnic minorities. To remedy this situation, legislators developed active programs, such as affirmative action, to stimulate the participation of ethnic minority groups, especially African Americans, in higher education. Many of these affirmative action programs, originating in the 1960s and 1970s, were subsequently challenged in courts of law and by public opinion.

In 1978 the affirmative action program at the Medical School of the University of California at Davis was reviewed by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*. This case presented a challenge to the special admissions program of the UC Davis Medical School, which was designed to ensure the admission of a specified number of students from particular minority groups. In this landmark case, the Supreme Court ruled that race might be taken into account as one factor among many in university admission decisions if necessary to promote a “substantial interest,” but it prohibited the setting aside of minority places and the use of differential cutoff points for admission. Therefore, although the judgment invalidated the medical school’s special admissions affirmative action program, it also allowed race to be taken into account as a factor in future admissions decisions. As such, the benefits of exposing students to diverse experiences and ideas—and the necessity of a critical mass of students from any group to achieve these benefits—were acknowledged.

It was on the basis of the *Bakke* decision that colleges and universities continued to consider race in college admissions. Many of these efforts focused on the inclusion of African American students rather than on other minorities. It was not until the mid-1980s that increases in immigration changed the focus from a singular focus on the inclusion of African Americans to a focus on the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in higher education more generally. One result of this shift was a change in focus from the specific issues faced by black students to a more general focus on the issues faced by underrepresented minorities in general.

Although increases in minority admissions stagnated during the economic downturns of the mid-1970s to the 1980s, a resurgence of minority recruitment followed in the latter half of the 1980s. By this time, African American students were competing with large numbers of Asian and Latino American students for university admission. As a result, the percentages of black college students in two- and four-year colleges have

remained relatively stable over the last two decades, while those of Asian and Latino students have increased. For example, excluding nonresident aliens, minority enrollments at two- and four-year colleges increased from 17 percent of all undergraduate students in 1976 to 26 percent by the fall of 1995 (National Center for Education Statistics 2001). This rise was due primarily to the increased enrollment of Asian/Pacific Islander and Latino students. In the fall of 1976, African Americans accounted for 10 percent of undergraduate enrollments, including 2 percent at historically black colleges (HBCs); Latinos made up 5 percent, Asians/Pacific Islanders 2 percent, and American Indians/Alaskan Natives 1 percent. By 1995 African American undergraduate enrollment had increased to only 11 percent (including 1.7 percent at HBCs), American Indian/Alaskan Native enrollment remained at 1 percent, and undergraduate enrollment for Latinos and Asians/Pacific Islanders each increased by 4 percent (National Center for Education Statistics 2001).

These changing demographic patterns, combined with the concerns of minority students and their parents for cultural inclusiveness in college structures and curricula, have convinced many colleges and universities to develop forms of education that are pluralistic in orientation and positively embrace multiethnic and multicultural perspectives (Modgil et al. 1986). This multicultural education is designed not only to broaden students' educational base, but also to foster self-esteem and positive intergroup relations by emphasizing multicultural ideals and respect for people from different ethnic traditions (McHugh, Nethers, and Gottfredson 1993). The fundamental assumption of multicultural education—an assumption we hope to test empirically in the pages of this book—is that increased intergroup contact, combined with increasing knowledge about other groups' histories and cultures, leads to more cooperative intergroup relations.

The degree to which this assumption is actually correct has been hotly debated, with opponents of the multicultural perspective insisting that such emphasis on multiculturalism merely creates educational and societal balkanization (D'Souza 1991; Ravitch 1990; Schlesinger 1998; Shivani 2002). In contrast, proponents of the multicultural perspective claim that the only way to move forward in a multiethnic society is, in fact, by moving toward greater cultural inclusiveness (Banks 1986; Glazer 1997). Thus, one of the most urgent questions we address here is this: does a multicultural educational experience contribute to increased or reduced intergroup tension?

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This question mirrors crucial theoretical concerns within the very active domain of intergroup relations research. A major theoretical concern is whether ingroup identification and attachment necessarily result in outgroup denigration and the consequent undermining of wider community attachment (see, for example, Turner 1999). These are examples of both theoretical and practical concerns that the research presented in this volume is designed to address.

Overview of the Book

The chapters in this book represent the cumulative effort of a large team of scholars whose original core members were Marilyn Brewer, Shana Levin, David O. Sears, Jim Sidanius, Stacey Sinclair, Pamela Taylor, and Colette van Laar. In the summer of 1996, we began a large-scale longitudinal study of the entering freshman class at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). We surveyed these students every year until most of them graduated four or five years later. The theoretical approaches we use to examine this rich data set draw on several different paradigms, depending on the fit between the question being examined and the theoretical perspective. The theoretical frameworks guiding most of our work are contact theory, symbolic politics theory, social identity theory, and social dominance theory.

The chapters of the book are divided into four broad parts. Part I comprises the first three chapters, which frame and set up the substantive material that follows. Chapter 1 provides the overall rationale for the project and gives a brief overview of the book. Chapter 2 introduces the four major themes explored in the book and gives an overview of the major theoretical perspectives within the intergroup relations literature that have informed much of the research discussed here. Chapter 3 sketches the historical and political context in which this research was done, details the methodology employed (for example, the size and composition of the sample, the sampling procedures), and briefly describes the variables used and the manner in which these variables were operationalized.

The four chapters that make up part II begin the first substantive discussion of the major themes raised in the book. This discussion addresses the general questions of the crystallization of students' sociopolitical attitudes—specifically, the degree to which students enter college with adult-like political identities and political ideologies and how these

initial ideologies and identities vary by ethnic group (chapter 4); the degree to which these initial political ideologies change during college for members of different ethnic groups (chapter 5); and the degree to which the ethnic identities of students from the “new-immigrant” groups (recent immigrants to the United States) are initially defined and subsequently change over the course of university exposure (chapter 6).

While chapters 4, 5, and 6 address the issues of ethnicity and multiculturalism largely through the analytic prism of symbolic politics theory, chapter 7 explores the issue of multiculturalism within the framework of social dominance theory. Social dominance theorists have argued that when there are power and status differences between ethnic and racial groups in societies such as the United States, members of dominant ethnic groups (for example, white Americans) feel a greater sense of ownership of, and attachment to, the nation-state than do members of subordinate groups (such as Latino, and African Americans). This also implies that there is a more positive relationship between ethnic and national identification among members of dominant groups than among members of subordinate groups (see Sidanius et al. 1997; Sidanius and Petrocik 2001). For example, ethnic and American identification are more positively related among whites than among Latinos and blacks in the United States. However, if the welcoming and multicultural environment of UCLA is operating as expected, there should be none of the asymmetry found in the relationship between university and ethnic identification across different ethnic groups that we find in the relationship between national and ethnic identification. That is, members of all ethnic groups should feel equal attachment to the university, and this identification with the university should relate to ethnic identification in similar ways for members of all ethnic groups.

The four chapters of part III address themes and issues that have been part of the multiculturalism and intergroup contact debates on American campuses for some time. Perhaps the most central issue here concerns the degree to which different forms of contact between various ethnic-racial groups actually improve intergroup relations or merely reflect initially positive attitudes between groups (chapters 8 and 9). A related—and up to this point poorly studied—issue within the broader multiculturalism debate is whether ethnically oriented and largely segregated student organizations help to alleviate ethnic and racial tension on campus or only aggravate it (chapter 10). Chapter 11 takes a closer look at some of the special problems and barriers facing students from

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underrepresented minority groups when they try to adjust to the challenges of academic and social life within the context of a multiethnic educational environment. As many other studies have shown (Pascarella and Terenzini 1991; Sedlacek 1989; Tracey and Sedlacek 1985), students from the two most stigmatized ethnic groups in the United States—Latinos and African Americans (see Smith 1991)—enter the university with generally lower levels of academic preparation, obtain generally lower grade point averages in college, take longer to graduate, and have lower graduation rates than their white and Asian American counterparts. Although academic preparation is related to academic success in college for members of all ethnic groups, the major thrust of chapter 11 is an examination of the non-academic factors associated with academic success for students from stigmatized versus nonstigmatized groups.

Finally, in part IV (chapter 12), we review the major themes addressed throughout the book, summarize the nature of the findings with respect to each of those themes, and integrate these findings into several overall conclusions. In exploring the analyses contained in this book, we hope not only to provide the reader with an up-to-date snapshot of the dynamics of intergroup relations as played out on the modern, multiethnic American campus but to deepen the reader's theoretical understanding of the dynamics of intergroup relations in general and practical understanding of the specific ways in which relations among ethnic and racial groups might be improved.