

NOT JUST
BLACK AND WHITE

Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on
Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity
in the United States

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Chapter 1

Conceptual Confusions and Divides: Race, Ethnicity, and the Study of Immigration

First, a story—a brief anecdote that captures, symbolically at least, the core issue that motivates this chapter. The year was 2000. The place: an academic conference on race, ethnicity, and immigration in the United States. Scholars on a panel on Asian American studies were making a set of formal presentations on the contribution of the field to the study of U.S. immigration. For the most part, the presentations framed Asian immigration in terms of, among other things, a broad critique of American racial categories and the processes by which those categories have been constructed and applied.

At the conclusion of the presentations, a member of the audience—a senior scholar with a significant record of research on ethnicity in American life—commented that this was all very interesting, but, he asked, with some frustration, What about the Poles? What about the Germans? What about the Jews? What did all of this have to offer in trying to understand *their* experience, in trying to understand what happened to *them*?

At one level, the questioner—and others in the audience who echoed these sentiments—might be dismissed as merely wanting something the panelists had no obligation to provide or even to consider in light of their own particular interests. Or perhaps the question was simply an effort to clarify differences within the universe of American immigrant processes and populations.

We think the questioner's reaction to the panel points to something more. His question illustrates a deep conceptual divide in the study of intergroup relations in the United States. The questioner seemed to detect—and to be frustrated by—a disjunction in the larger discussion of immigration and intergroup relations. Immigration has long been a topic of analytical interest in the United States. It could hardly be otherwise: surely immigration has been among the most important formative processes in the shaping of American society. Its enormous and changing effects continuously ripple—or noisily rumble—through the American economy, American social life, and American cultural development.

Yet it sometimes seems as if the people who study immigration or race or ethnicity—or all of these together—inhabit two different intellectual worlds. They not only study different groups and times—in the exchange described here the panelists were concerned largely with Asian Americans in the latter part of the twentieth century, the questioner largely with European Americans half a century or more before—but also bring to the study of these groups different assumptions and conceptual tools. Until quite recently, for example, few students of European immigration to the United

States paid much attention to today's racial categories, much less to their contingent and changing nature.¹ And most of those who have been concerned with racial categories in recent years have paid relatively little attention to the kinds of local community processes and analyses that long preoccupied earlier students of immigration.² There was a sense at this particular conference of two groups of scholars who, though united in their concern with immigration, were divided in their intellectual interests, assumptions, and approaches and were thus speaking past each other. Indeed, the panelists in this particular case, perhaps doubting the likelihood of a productive exchange, did not directly address the questioner's remarks, and the opportunity for engagement across the conceptual divide was lost.

That divide is the topic of this chapter. We are interested in its genealogy, its consequences, the possibilities of building bridges across it, and how such bridges might inform and advance the study of immigration. We are concerned with lost opportunities and with what these two groups might usefully learn from each other. Ultimately, we are concerned with how to turn this conceptual divide into a site not only of connection and dialogue but of theoretical creativity and empirical insight that will substantively advance the study of immigration and intergroup relations. We also are concerned with the conceptual confusions that often complicate discussions of race and ethnicity and hinder more productive intellectual exchange.

It would be presumptuous of us to claim that we alone can close such a divide or clear up such confusions in the space of this chapter—or, perhaps, anywhere else. But we hope that in exploring how studies of race and ethnicity do and do not converge, we can suggest some useful avenues of advance while illuminating the issues themselves and providing a vantage point for considering the more empirical work presented in this book.

IMMIGRATION AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS

Migration is a common human activity as old perhaps as any other. It is the mechanism by which human beings originally peopled the globe, and one of the ways they have responded to opportunity or crisis—or just plain restlessness—ever since. Of course not all migrations are voluntary. The trans-Atlantic slave trade is perhaps the most prominent instance of coerced migration, but it is hardly an isolated one. States, for example, have used migration variously as a weapon in war, as a tool for the management of labor shortages, and as a means to resolve intergroup conflict (see, among others, Burawoy 1976; McGarry 1998).

As a broad human phenomenon, migration has changed over time. In the last century and a half it has become increasingly frequent, involved unprecedented numbers of persons, covered distances that once were unfathomable to most people, and been subject to patterns of movement—such as circular migration—that once were much less common. But wherever and however it happens, migration precipitates change: in those who move, in the societies they leave, and in the societies that receive them.

This is readily apparent in the United States, where highly variable but more or less continuous immigration has led to extraordinary changes, reorganizing politics, redistributing resources, transforming groups, and challenging national identity. The pattern of urban politics through much of U.S. history, for example, is incomprehensible with-

out paying attention to immigration and internal migration, and the same could be said of, among other things, the historical fortunes of black Americans.³ The very notion of “whiteness,” which found such resonance and controversy within the academy in the 1990s, has little meaning without the category “nonwhite” or its variants. This category itself was born of immigration, first by northern Europeans into the lands of indigenous Americans, then by others into lands that had become dominated by earlier arrivals. Students of race and ethnicity cannot help but be students of immigration too—at least in the United States. Oscar Handlin went so far as to write, in his classic study *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migration That Made the American People* (1951, 3): “Once I thought to write a history of immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants *were* American history.”

Even the concepts of race and ethnicity, as realized in American history and life, are largely products of immigration. A distinguishing feature of both concepts is their preoccupation with difference, that is, with the classification of human beings into groups and with the bases of such classifications. Classification—both formal and informal—is set in motion by contact and mixing, and immigration inherently involves both. In the United States group classification not only has helped sustain race and ethnicity as organizing concepts in social, economic, and political life but also has shaped the ways those concepts have been transformed, applied, and experienced over time.

A full genealogical study of the origin and evolution of these terms, in either popular or scholarly usage, has yet to be written, and this obviously is not the place to undertake so imposing a task.⁴ But at least two points need to be made. First, in American history and culture it is largely the language of race that has provided the terms of social differentiation. Werner Sollors (1986) observes that the modern concept of ethnicity did not make its way into the scholarly lexicon or public usage until well into the twentieth century, having seldom been heard until the 1940s. When Robert Park, the Progressive Era Chicago sociologist who provided much of the conceptual framework for modern studies of ethnicity in the United States, suggested that there is a recurrent trajectory in intergroup relations, he called it a “race relations cycle” (1926/1950), despite the fact that the great exception to his model of eventual accommodation and assimilation was the group occupying the core of the American racial classification system—African Americans. According to David Roediger (2002), when ethnicity finally did begin to emerge as a distinct analytical term, it did so in the context of larger debates about nationality and immigration—and race.

Second, the meanings of these terms and the relationships between them have been plagued by inconsistency, ambiguity, and confusion. “Race” and “ethnicity” sometimes have been treated as referring to the same things, sometimes as referring to very different things, sometimes as referring to subcategories of each other—and their meanings have changed over time. In immigration studies, for example, this variability sometimes has resulted in debates over which of the two terms is more appropriate to the analysis (see, for example, Gjerde 1999; Sánchez 1999; Foner 2000; Portes 1997), while a common approach in the more general study of intergroup relations has been to subsume one to the other. Thus, for example, Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) privilege race over ethnicity, while David Hollinger (1995), Joane Nagel (1994), and Ashley Doane (1997) treat ethnicity as the broader and more useful category.

In the absence of any ultimate authority to adjudicate such definitional disputes, social science has tended either to rely on the sometimes idiosyncratic definitional preferences of individual scholars or, more commonly, to accept uncritically a convention

that says race has to do with physical difference and ethnicity has to do with cultural difference.⁵ For reasons noted later in the chapter, we find this convention inadequate.⁶

PREVAILING CONCEPTIONS AND THEIR PROBLEMS

Race and ethnicity seem to have something in common, but what is it? They also seem not to have everything in common, but what are the differences between them?

Leaving commonalities aside for the time being, we see two dimensions of difference. First, race and ethnicity generally have been used to refer to different, if sometimes overlapping, empirical phenomena. Second, they have stimulated very different, if in some ways complementary, analytical approaches.

We take up the empirical issues in this and the following section. We then turn to the analytical approaches that have come to be associated with each of these concepts over the last half-century or so. In subsequent sections, we explore ways to bring these analytical approaches together and suggest what such a synthesis might offer to the study of immigration.

Four tendencies characterized much of the empirical treatment of race and ethnicity during the last four decades of the twentieth century. The first was a tendency to reduce race and ethnicity to characteristics of individual persons, rather like age or sex, and then to focus the inquiry largely on how these characteristics, in effect, sort persons into different positions in stratification systems. The second, already noted, was a tendency to see race as a social construction based on physiological difference and ethnicity as a social construction based largely on cultural difference. "Races" became physically distinct groups; "ethnic groups" became culturally distinct groups. The third was a tendency to subsume one concept under the other: either to treat race as one of the factors—along with language, provenance, customs, and so on—that support or make up ethnic identity or categorization (ethnicity is everything) or to treat ethnic phenomena, such as the rise or fall in the salience of ethnic identities, as by-products of tension and change within racial relations (race is everything). The fourth was a tendency to see an instrumentalist, interest-based logic as determining racial and ethnic categorization and group formation (see, for example, Steinberg 1981; Olzak 1992; Roosens 1989). Not all empirical work displayed these tendencies, either singly or in combination, and they often were only implicit, but they were broadly apparent in much of the study of intergroup relations in late-twentieth-century social science.

There are several problems with these largely complementary tendencies. First, treating race and ethnicity as primarily characteristics (however constructed) of individual persons leaves the power, salience, and meaning of racial and ethnic categories unexplained. It examines measurable, individual-level outcomes of racialization and ethnicization but tends to ignore the processes themselves, their deeper societal roots, and their less easily measured consequences.

This has changed to some degree in the last two decades as scholars in history, legal studies, cultural studies, and sociology have paid growing attention to race as—in many societies and certainly in the United States—both a foundational principle of social order and a comprehensive system of meanings that informs and shapes action (see, for example, Essed and Goldberg 2002). In this sense race and even ethnicity can be seen as part of a society's "deep structure," by which we mean, in part, culture: that

set of deeply embedded, taken-for-granted understandings through which, often unconsciously, much of social process moves and social outcomes are constructed. This approach, while still embracing the daily experience of inequality, grants to ethnicity and race a greater independence, power, and significance than traditional approaches have done, and it suggests that, analytically, race and ethnicity should be treated not so much as subfields within stratification or social psychology but as central and independently consequential social phenomena or forces and as key organizing concepts in the study of societies.

Second, the instrumentalist assumption that particular racial and ethnic categories and identities are prominent because they are useful reduces them to by-products of circumstantial dynamics, precipitates of material conditions. Yet these categories often appear to carry enormous and remarkably durable moral or emotional power. At various times and in various places, they have generated both ecstasies of self-glorification and paroxysms of lethal violence. Many of these categories and identities also survive substantial changes in material conditions; if they are merely products of circumstances, the coupling between the two often seems peculiarly loose. And finally, circumstances frequently throw up multiple possibilities for collective identification. A black, female textile worker, for example, has several alternative bases on which to organize self-concept and action—or on which to be conceived and acted upon. Why do race and ethnicity so often gain pride of place? In short, circumstances alone often seem incapable of explaining the power and persistence of these phenomena. Circumstances may at times account for the emergence of specific categories and identities, but they are much less able to account for the durability of race and ethnicity or for what people actually do in their names. Missing from much of the analysis of these phenomena has been an adequate account of why race and ethnicity, under hugely variable and discontinuous circumstances, have retained their apparent privilege and power as bases of identity, social organization, and collective action and as the grounds on which many groups, in effect, *choose* to interpret and pursue their interests.

Third, the focus on culture as the basis of ethnicity has turned ethnicity into an analytically clumsy concept. Much depends on how we define culture, but it seems safe to say that most societies generate numerous groups that share cultural distinctions of one kind or another. Many of those groups defy our commonsense conception of ethnic groups: for example, the professoriate, the working class, New Age enthusiasts, Deadheads, firefighters, upper-middle-class teenagers, and so on. How are these groups different from ethnic groups? And if, given their cultural distinctiveness, these *are* ethnic groups, then most of us are members of far more ethnic groups than we ever realized. Furthermore, even within commonly perceived ethnic groups, the degree and nature of shared culture not only vary but change over time. If shared culture is the basis of ethnicity, at what point does a group cease to be an ethnic group? Acculturation proceeds apace in many cases, yet numerous acculturated groups—indistinguishable behaviorally from the mainstream of the society of which they are a part—continue to see themselves and to be seen as ethnic. Are some more ethnic than others? All of which begs a larger question: if culture is not the distinguishing feature of ethnicity, what is?

Finally, the tendency to subsume one of these concepts within the other has obscured both their differences and their commonalities and reduced their analytical utility. It either promotes a split into separate fields of study or collapses the study of one into the study of the other.

DISENTANGLING RACE AND ETHNICITY AS EMPIRICAL PHENOMENA

Dissatisfied with the common distinction between race and ethnicity—the conventional conception of race as a matter of physical difference and of ethnicity as a matter of cultural difference—how would we modify it? Yes, these phenomena have something in common; no, they are not the same. Empirically, we see the following key points.

First, at the heart of both race and ethnicity as social categories or common usages lies the assumption that human origins are uniquely powerful in determining differences between social groups. Race focuses on genes as the critical dimension of origins: it is genetics and their manifestations in human bodies—especially through skin color or other visible physiological features—that are given power in racial conceptions. Ethnicity, in contrast, while still turning to origins as the imputed basis of difference, focuses on descent and homeland: it is kinship and provenance that are given power in ethnic conceptions.⁷

Second, by focusing on origins, both claim, in effect, to be “natural” categories—in some sense ordained by the circumstances of birth—and each typically is accompanied by a language or idiom of essentialism or primordiality. It is this claimed primordiality that most importantly distinguishes race and ethnicity from most other bases of social organization, identity, and collective action.

Third—and paradoxically, given their essentialist pretenses—both are characterized by empirically traceable processes of social construction. In the case of race, the construction process tends to focus on comprehensive categories within the organization of society as a whole; in the case of ethnicity, it focuses on localized identities. In neither case does construction depend on some objective determination of facts. Races and ethnic groups are based on presumption: what matters is not the actual extent of, for example, genetic or kinship links among persons, which may be entirely fictive; what matters is that people think there are such links, and furthermore, that they think those links are important. It is processes of social construction that make race and ethnicity “real.”

Fourth, though it would be easy to overstate the case, these construction processes typically take somewhat different forms, driven by differently situated and empowered groups. Race is largely the product of the assignment to others of biological difference: powerful groups, wishing to draw a boundary between themselves and others, define those others as racially distinct. The critical issue for race is who *they* are and how *they* are fundamentally different from *us*. By sorting people into particular “races,” more powerful groups specify the position of the less powerful and thereby maintain their own power, status, and authority.⁸

In contrast, ethnicity is largely (although not exclusively) a product of self-assertions of collective identity and blood ties, based on descent or homeland: the community claims such an identity for itself, asserting its own distinctiveness or peoplehood. The critical issue for ethnicity is who *we* are. Power differentials typically play a lesser role in the process, although those who assert a particular ethnic identity may find themselves in conflict with racial or other classification schemes within which they are being assigned a very different identity.⁹

Fifth, race is more exclusive and less flexible than ethnicity. In most systems, categorization in one race precludes categorization in another, and categorical entry and exit are difficult. In the United States, for example, the racial system has had an under-

lying exclusivity originating in black-white relations. Racially, you could not be both white and something else; by virtue of being something else, you were necessarily not white. Ethnicity, on the other hand, is more tolerant of split categorizations and multiplicity, and categorical entry and exit are easier.

Sixth, race typically implies differential valuation on moral, aptitudinal, or other grounds—in other words, differential merit or ability—and is skeptical of the possibilities of change in group characteristics or group position. The typical racial dichotomy opposes the civilized or worthy or capable to the uncivilized or unworthy or incapable, and its biological essentialism suggests permanence in such descriptors. Ethnicity is celebratory and typically ethnocentric, but it is less inclined to link origins with inherent worth and less dependent for its vitality on assertions of fundamental differences. Ethnicity tends to be more optimistic about change, through either pluralism or assimilation.

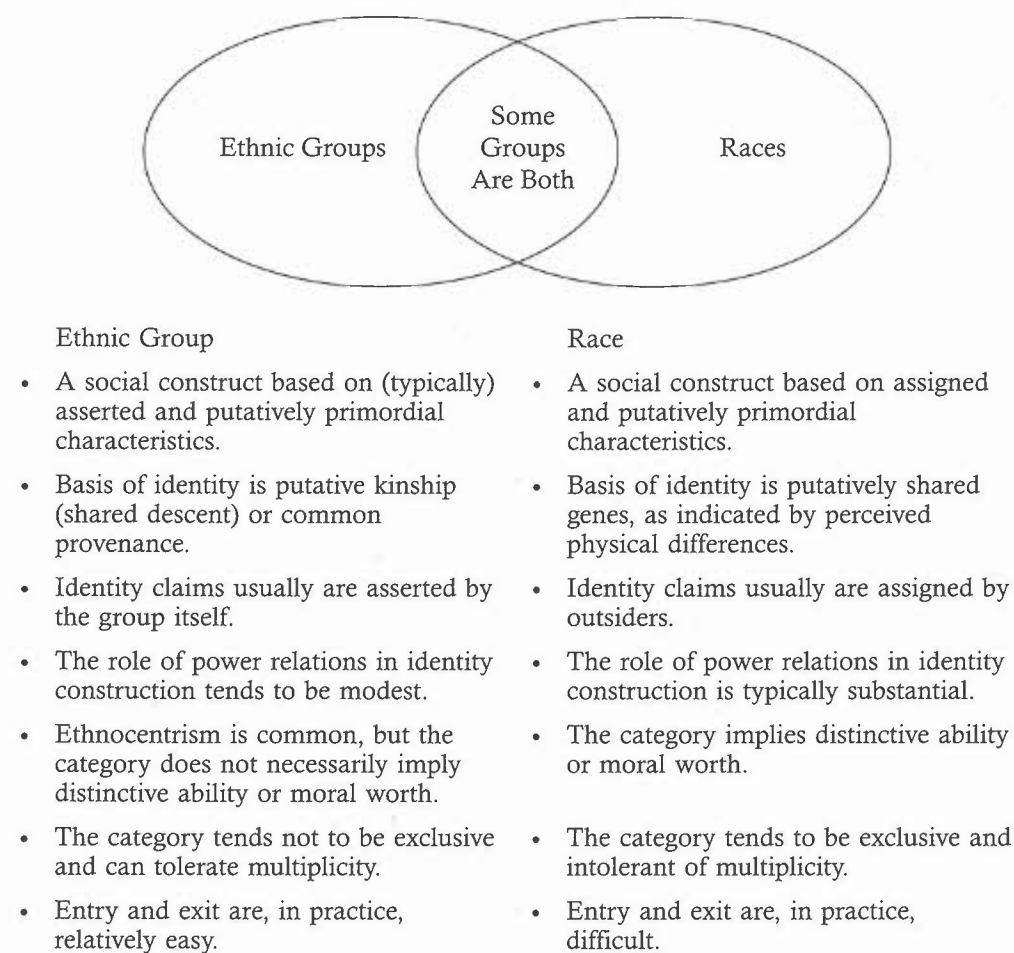
In summary, both race and ethnicity are constructed social categories based on primordialist claims regarding differences between persons. The critical distinctions between the two terms have to do with the claimed nature of those differences (genes versus kinship or provenance), with who typically is making the claims (outsiders versus insiders), with the moral implications of those claims (more significant in the case of race versus less significant in the case of ethnicity), and with the role of power in the construction process (racial constructions are more power-dependent; ethnic constructions are less so).

It should also be clear from this discussion that a single population could be at the same time, in our terms, both a race and an ethnic group, or at least it could have both racial and ethnic characteristics (see figure 1.1). An example would be early Irish immigrants to the United States, who, some historians claim, were assigned a nonwhite racial status but at the same time claimed for themselves a distinctive identity based on common provenance and kinship, broadly conceived.¹⁰ Also, a group could move from one category to another. For example, Europeans and Euro-Americans placed Africans in a single, physically distinct category, thereby “creating” a race, and assigned them a racial identity that—for Europeans at least—took social precedence over the diverse group boundaries that actually organized African lives. Enslaved and thrown into the New World, large numbers of these Africans found their lives radically reorganized along racial lines. Over time, however, the experience of racial categorization persuaded some of them to think and act on the basis of the assigned distinction. Abandoning less inclusive identities and adopting the racial boundary as their own, they began also to attach their own meanings to that boundary and asserted their own conception of themselves, a conception in which kinship and common provenance became part of the idiom of peoplehood and, in conjunction with other things, the basis of a claim to a distinctive identity and culture. They thereby constructed themselves as an ethnic group, becoming both race and ethnic group at once.

TWO ANALYTICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF INTERGROUP RELATIONS

Race and ethnicity not only have referred in common social science usage to different, if somehow related, empirical phenomena; they also have generated different analytical approaches to the study of intergroup relations—different lenses through which such relations are approached and analyzed. We can think of these as an “ethnicity” ap-

FIGURE 1.1 Ethnic Groups and Races



Source: Adapted from Cornell and Hartmann (1998, 35). Copyright © 1998 by Pine Forge Press. Reprinted by permission of Sage Publications, Inc.

proach and a "race" approach. This overstates the case somewhat; some works would be difficult to classify as falling wholly into either approach, and the line between the two is often fuzzy. But as we suggested with our opening anecdote, there is a conceptual and analytical divide within the broad field of intergroup relations. What follows, though admittedly formalistic and a generalization, is our attempt to characterize that divide.

The Ethnicity Approach

This approach dominated much of twentieth-century American social science in the fields of both intergroup relations and urban studies, and it remains important in studies of immigration today. Its central characteristics include the following:

- It has historical and empirical roots in studies of immigration and settlement, especially in cities.
- The primary unit of analysis is groups or communities within a larger population, with national borders typically constraining the reach of the research.
- It conceives ethnicity as a property of groups and communities indicated by cultural patterns, behaviors, and expressed identity (who "we" are or are not).
- It is empirically concerned with individual or community experience, community social organization, and individual assimilation (or the lack of it), as measured by language use, family structure, intermarriage, labor market integration, and the like.
- Its orientation is implicitly comparative, although the empirical work often takes the form of community studies with the experiences or fortunes of group members as the primary objects of research.
- Categorical and group boundaries are seen as mutable but are not typically objects of critical inquiry in and of themselves.
- If there is a political focus in such studies, it tends to be largely on the pursuit of community interests and on conflict over societal resources.
- Its central problematic is assimilation and mobility, and it has expectations of eventual societal integration.

The Race Approach

This approach came to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s and now dominates the study of intergroup relations in the United States. Among its central characteristics:

- It has historical and empirical roots in the study of slavery, black-white relations, and colonialism around the world.
- The primary unit of analysis is the social system, and it often conceives the system as transnational or even global.
- It conceives race as an organizing principle that is deeply embedded in culture and social structure and has profoundly shaped both intergroup relationships and society as a whole.
- It is empirically concerned with stratification systems, with the sociocultural construction of difference and the reproduction of racial categories and hierarchies, and, to a lesser degree, with the study of attitudes.
- Its orientation is less comparative and more systemic or relational, focusing on social processes (such as migration, globalization, and development) that reflect or create racialized categories and structures.

- Categorical and group boundaries are conceived as constructed, contested, and as critical objects of inquiry in their own right.
- It typically has a more explicit political focus on the contested construction of categories and on the assignment of persons to those categories—and on the maintenance of power and privilege that goes along with both.
- Its central problematic is power, and it assumes that conflict and inequality are endemic aspects of the social order.

While admittedly schematic, we think this summary captures something of importance that was captured as well, in microcosm, in the interaction anecdotally described in the introduction to this chapter. "What about the Poles?" was an ethnicity-approach question caught in a race-approach discussion.

But once we laid it out, another aspect of this summary immediately struck us: these two analytical approaches are far more complementary than contradictory. Strengths in one seem to correspond to weaknesses in the other. Where the race paradigm emphasizes systemic phenomena and effects but tends to ignore localized processes of group formation and agency, the ethnicity paradigm does the reverse. Where the ethnicity paradigm is concerned largely with group social organization, culture, and change but tends to ignore system-level categories, assumptions, and change, the race paradigm does the opposite. One emphasizes the evolution and experience of particular racial or ethnic communities, while the other emphasizes the racialization of societal structures, including culture, within which community evolution and experience proceed. One seems concerned more with what happens in individual lives while the other is concerned more with what happens in the life of society. The ethnicity paradigm is more likely to be concerned with subordinate group conceptions—for example, with how subordinate groups conceive themselves and what they are trying to do—while the race paradigm is more likely to be concerned with where the repertoire of available self-concepts comes from, with societywide conceptions of categories and boundaries, and with how large-scale structures shape action. The community orientation of the ethnicity approach offers us a window on the localized processes of group formation and the felt power of ethnic identity, while the systemic orientation of the race approach offers us a more subtle and complex analysis of power, one that can generate critical insights not only into contemporary social relations and processes within and between nation-states but into the context in which ethnic assertions occur and take their form.

Such complementarities suggest an opportunity for constructive engagement between these two approaches, an engagement with potential benefits for the study of immigration. They suggest a way of thinking about immigration that recognizes the social formations we generally refer to as ethnicity and race as distinct, if related, empirical phenomena, but that then joins the respective strengths of these analytical approaches to produce a more comprehensive and integrated picture of the intergroup relations at the core of the immigration experience and of the broader significance of immigration itself.

TOWARD A SYNTHESIS

Of course, complementarity does not necessarily translate into compatibility. In this case at least, we need some broader theoretical framework or conceptual vision within

which to integrate these different empirical phenomena and the analytic orientations and insights that have grown up around them. We believe the commonalities and overlaps between race and ethnicity as discussed here suggest such a framework or vision: the substantial—if often ignored or minimized—set of shared empirical characteristics that, for all the confusion it presents, makes pairing them seem almost natural and inevitable. We refer to their common primordialist claims and their substantially similar sociostructural dynamics of construction and reproduction.

As we have argued, racial and ethnic phenomena are distinguished, respectively, by their appeals to perceived, systematic, physical difference (broadly: genes) and to perceived, shared descent or common provenance (broadly: kinship). Although clearly these claims are not the same, both identify origins as privileged and somehow fundamental. Both rely on a rhetoric of primordialism to generate the deeply felt experience and social power of the categories, and it is this appeal to origins that not only unifies race and ethnicity but helps account for their surprising power and persistence in the modern world. Where so much of social life appears to be mere by-product of historical contingencies, vast social forces, and instrumental action, the appeal to origins generates an emotional attachment and experiential resonance that seems to many to be natural and authentic, beyond the contingencies of history and human agency. Race and ethnicity are what we have called "constructed primordialities" (Cornell and Hartmann 1998, 89)—social products given power by their (sometimes only implicit) essentialist appeals.¹¹

Many questions remain as to why and how categories that are so obviously socially constructed and historically contingent come to be felt and understood as somehow beyond history and agency.¹² Certainly this paradox calls for more substantial exploration, but what is important for present purposes is the simple fact that these categories are so often expressed and experienced this way. This, we believe, is what makes them so consequential, and it binds them conceptually to each other.

They are bound to each other as well by substantially similar processes of boundary construction (compare Barth 1969). We argued earlier that race and ethnicity are distinguished not only by the nature of the claims each term represents but by the claimants themselves, by who the driving force typically is in the process of social construction. Ethnic categories, in this scheme, are largely the product of subordinate or minority group agency and activity, while racial categories typically are imposed by a dominant group on a less powerful one, with self-categorization as an unspoken by-product of this process. But "largely" and "typically" are critical terms in this distinction, for in practice these construction processes are inevitably interactive. As Joane Nagel (1994) has pointed out in a discussion focused largely on ethnicity, ethnic and racial categories are always products *both* of the actions and intent of the actors who inhabit these categories *and* of the external forces and social others they encounter. Our point is that the drivers in racial constructions tend to be dominant groups who are categorizing others, while the drivers in ethnic constructions tend to be minority populations categorizing themselves. But in each case these are more likely than not to be contested processes in which both human actors and impersonal conditions construct group boundaries for inclusionary and exclusionary purposes.

This fact underlines the need for synthesis. Not only do race and ethnicity share a constructed primordality; they also require and would benefit from a more comprehensive analytical strategy, one that draws on the respective strengths of both analytical approaches to capture the complexities of category, group, and boundary formation and of intergroup dynamics. Such a strategy would draw on the ethnicity paradigm's concern with group formation, felt experience, and the power of constructed primor-

diality as a basis of community and action. It would draw on the race paradigm's concern with the impact of social structure (including not only patterns of power but what we referred to earlier as "deep" structure or foundational cultural assumptions), with social context, and with the consequences of structure and context in shaping life experience. From the study of race it also would draw a more nuanced analysis of power and of the impacts of the social forces, such as expanding capitalism, globalism, and transnationalism, that increasingly drive the movement and mixing of populations all over the world. In other words, putting race and ethnicity together is not just a disciplinary convention—it is a necessary analytical move.

ILLUSTRATIONS AND ELABORATIONS

We believe the parameters and benefits of such a synthesis are apparent in the study of what is commonly known as panethnicity. Panethnicity typically begins as what is commonly thought of as race, as a category developed by dominant populations to describe those they perceive as fundamentally different from themselves. In the history of the United States and its precursor colonies, for example, the various indigenous peoples of North America were combined as "Indians"; slave populations of multiple African origins became "Negroes" or "blacks"; and immigrants from hugely diverse Asian societies became "Orientals" or "Asians." Those who constructed such categories were not necessarily oblivious to the differences among the peoples they thus combined, but they tended to see differences within the category as of minimal significance next to perceived differences between the category and themselves. From the point of view of racial categorizers, the fact that others are not like "us" is far more important than the fact that they are not like each other.

It is here that both primordiality and differential worth—two of the key characteristics of racial classifications—exert their profound influence. Racial categorization is about the supposedly incomparable power of biological origins to shape human characteristics and about the differential worth of the human results.

But while the terrain of panethnic group formation has been—in the United States at least—first and foremost a racial terrain, it cannot be adequately understood within only a racial paradigm. It also has to be addressed from within the categorized population—that is, from a perspective that is conventionally understood in ethnic terms. Categories have consequences, and one of the likely consequences of social organization through racial categories is that the categories become bases of identification on the part of the categorized groups. Over time they begin to use the category not so much at first to define boundaries (one of the purposes of the category's originators) but to contest the meanings and the differential worth assigned to the category (the originators' other purpose), and then, once new meanings are in hand, to contest the uses to which the boundaries are put.

Earlier we offered the example of African Americans who seized the racial identity imposed on them by the dominant society and made it the basis of their own ethnic assertions. Another example can be found in the evolution of American Indian identity, known to some scholars as "pan-Indianism" (for example, Thomas 1968; Hertzberg 1971). As usual, the "panethnic" identity begins as a racial phenomenon, a European category that embraces multiple peoples held to be commonly different from Europeans, and is used to support their differential treatment. Again, the category becomes in time a basis not only of dominant-group assignment but of subordinate-group assertion, as people from an assortment of Indian nations begin to claim an American

Indian identity as their own, attach their own meanings to the category, and organize and act within it (Cornell 1988, 1990; Nagel 1996).¹³

These processes of adoption of the category as a basis of identity, assertion of new meanings to be attached to the category, and use of the category for political purposes are classically ethnic processes involving a claiming not of who "they" are but of who "we" are. They remain primordialist but resist both differential worth and its presumed genetic basis. And they move forward, typically, through the kinds of community processes and perceptions that the ethnicity paradigm outlined in these pages has long addressed.

Of course not all panethnic categorizations lead in this direction. Some groups, and for a variety of reasons, resist racial classification. One of the most interesting recent explorations of these dynamics—albeit using both different terms and a different framework from ours—is Mary Waters's (1999) examination of West Indian immigrants to New York City. These immigrants enter a racialized system in which they are assigned a black identity. But they soon discover that this assignment to a black American category has heavy costs in discrimination and downward mobility. One response has been to struggle to preserve and assert West Indian identities against the negative consequences of racial assignment. In a reversal of the assimilationist model that has long dominated American thinking about immigration, these immigrants and their children find that the more they assimilate to the racial category black, the more barriers to mobility they encounter.¹⁴ This conflict over boundaries and meanings is made even clearer by class distinctions. As Waters notes, less well-off and mobile immigrants, sharing social worlds for the most part with similarly disadvantaged black Americans, tend to accept the categorizations of the larger society so as not to be perceived by other blacks as "acting white." Waters (1999, 324) writes that "the more socially mobile the individual, the more he or she clings to ethnic identity as a hedge against racial identity" (see also Foner 2001). From our point of view, the critical point has less to do with whether these identities are ethnic or racial than with the conflict between immigrant assertions of who—for various purposes—they want to be and the assignments being made by the society at large.

As this suggests, various groups in American life have found themselves embedded in consequential intergroup dynamics, but not all have responded in the same ways.¹⁵ One group, however, generally has been thought to escape much of this process, or at least to have been more the organizer than the object of it: whites. As the dominant racial population in American life, whites also have dominated processes of racial classification, yet their own identity has been largely unspecified. To be white has been to occupy the unspoken, taken-for-granted, benchmark category—the "hidden ethnicity," as Ashley Doane (1997) calls it—against which racial and ethnic "others" are classified. Some whites may assert particular ethnic identities, such as Italian American or Polish American, at different times, and some—such as the Irish—may have struggled early on to be classified racially as whites, but once within the dominant classification, no further assertions have been necessary. The seat of power need not describe itself.

In recent decades, however, as the privileges of whiteness have been challenged, and as whites increasingly have been subjected to unaccustomed processes of racialization and objectification, their identities and worth being defined by others, this has changed.¹⁶ Certain whites have been driven to take up the tasks of ethnic assertion, claiming an explicitly white identity, struggling to control the meanings attached to that category, and defending the traditional entitlements of whiteness. In the process they are transforming racial whiteness into white ethnicity.

This has two results. First, it contributes to the ongoing transformation and blurring of the analytical boundary between ethnicity and race. Second, it further reveals the constructedness of yet another category of identity and belonging: nation. In the United States at least, the conventional distinctions between race and ethnicity seem to turn on the naturalized or taken-for-granted category of "the nation." If being white means being American and being "ethnic" indicates the possibility of becoming American, being "racial" signals an identity that is problematic and somehow less American. In American life, ethnicity has indicated a sort of belonging-in-progress, while race has indicated not really belonging at all.¹⁷

What we are most interested in, however, is not whether whites—or any other group—are best understood through the paradigm of race or through the paradigm of ethnicity. Our interest instead is in the boundaries that they are asserting and contesting, the meanings and identities that are contained within these boundaries, and the broader implications of such boundary making and meaning making.

Immigration is deeply embedded in these activities. First, it is a vehicle of contact and mixing that sets in motion the very processes of boundary construction that we have been talking about. Second, it tends to give those processes a certain urgency. When it happens on a substantial scale, as it often has in the history of the United States, immigration is a disruptive force. Not only does it cause rupture in quotidian social relations through its impacts on labor markets, residential space, and the like, but it also causes rupture in received notions of nationhood. Who qualifies for American nationhood, and whose nation is it?

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF IMMIGRATION

Are immigrants, then, racial outsiders whose fates will be determined by powerful, external others? Or are they ethnic agents free to choose their own identities and futures? Surely they are both. To try to force them into one category or the other is to lose an appreciation for the complexity of the immigration experience. A comprehensive study of immigration and of its intersections with race and ethnicity requires both the localized focus of the ethnicity paradigm and its understanding of the felt power of primordialist claims at the group level and the comprehensive penetrations of the race paradigm and its understanding of the hegemonic structure and power of primordialist claims and assumptions at the system level. We have tried to suggest that this can best be accomplished by de-emphasizing the "is it race or is it ethnicity?" debate and concentrating instead on the construction of group boundaries and identities within the context of American nationalism.

So, to return to our beginning: what about the Poles? We see this question as an opportunity for productive exchange rather than as the challenge it might appear to be if race and ethnicity are understood as separate phenomena to be differently addressed. Scholars of Asian immigration to the United States might use such an opportunity to explain the changing historical forces that have precipitated a succession of migrations of Asian populations who were very different in origin, class composition, and cultural orientation; the categorical schemes—including racial ones—and structural barriers these different migrations encountered when they arrived; and the consequent shape of their communities and the patterns of their integration, tracing an analytical strategy with potent comparative power for scholars of European immigration to the United States.

Meanwhile, the latter group of scholars might point to the ways in which European immigrants struggled with—and sometimes took advantage of—the different but related categorical schemes they encountered on American shores, launching transformations not only in their own communities but in those schemes, transformations that eventually had consequences for later arrivals, including Asian ones. And both sets of scholars might conceive American immigration as a long, ongoing, historical process that, while hardly seamless, has continually reorganized communities, categories, American society, and the very idea of the American nation, with racialization happening here, ethnogenesis happening there, sometimes both happening at once, in recurrent cycles of reproduction and transformation.

There is nothing particularly radical or innovative in these suggestions. Rather, they form a framework for facilitating interaction, communication, and exchange about immigration and its consequences in the racial and ethnic landscape—a way to elucidate general commonalities and particular differences. The key, as always, is the questions to be asked: Which groups have the freedom to construct themselves? Which groups find themselves caught in inescapable categories constructed by others? Which groups are moving from one situation to the other? How do both our definitions of groups and the groups themselves change when populations are moving to a society in which both ethnicity and race are prominent categories? Who gets combined together, and who is seen as separate and distinct? How do racialization and ethnogenesis progress, and how do they affect each other? And what is happening to an America that has relied for much of its national self-concept on the racialization of others when immigration presents it with so many claims by groups that insist on being, in effect, *American ethnics*—that is, on sharing a broad American commonality while retaining a narrower ethnic identity and rejecting the racial categorizations that have been fundamental to the American way of dealing with immigration?

This is an approach to the study of immigration that is less concerned with individual outcomes than with the recurrent reconstitution of intergroup relations and the social order itself. Among other things, it is concerned with how that order can accommodate one set of identity claims ("we are Americans, but we are also a people in our own right") without organizing power and privilege through another set of such claims ("you are racially 'other'"). It is an approach that can help us better understand not only present immigration and its consequences in American life but also past immigration and its role in producing the social worlds of the present.

NOTES

1. The last decade and a half, however, has seen a burst of such work; see, for example, Barrett and Roediger (1997), Ignatiev (1995), Jacobson (1998), Roediger (1991, 1994), Rogin (1996), and Waters (1990).
2. Again, there are exceptions, including some of those cited in note 1; see also Hartigan (1999).
3. The literature is vast, but see, for example, Kasinitz (1992), Katznelson (1973), Erie (1988), Foner (2001), Waldinger (1996), Waters (1999), and Waters and Eschbach (1995).
4. Elements of such a discussion, however, can be found in Russell Kazal's (1995) treatment of the evolution of the concept of assimilation in American ethnic history.
5. This distinction is widespread. For example, a popular reader in the field (Yetman 1999, 3) states: "Whereas an *ethnic group* is distinguished by *cultural* characteristics, *race* refers to a social category that is defined on the basis of *physical* characteristics" (emphasis in original).

- College texts likewise often follow the same convention. See the discussion in Cornell and Hartmann (1998, 16–18).
6. We should make a third point as well. Race and ethnicity are far from the only sources of group formation and collective identity in the modern world. Class, religion, language, gender, and sexuality also have organized much of personal and social life, a topic explored in depth by scholars working on intersectionality (for example, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Lowe 1996). But race and ethnicity have been particularly powerful in American society and in the immigrant experience. Among the reasons for this are the inequalities attached to race and ethnicity and the power of appeals to blood and kin as sources of authenticity in the modern world (see Cornell and Hartmann 1998, 91–94)—points to which we return later. Indeed, this may explain why some groups not traditionally conceived as racial or ethnic turn to the language of race and ethnicity in search of recognition and mobilizational power (see, for example, Cohen 1994).
 7. Although this idea of presumed kinship and/or provenance as defining features of ethnicity departs from recent conventions in sociology and related disciplines that rely instead on supposed “cultural differences,” it cleaves to a long-standing tradition. See, for example, Weber (1968), Schermerhorn (1978), Horowitz (1985), and the discussion in Cornell and Hartmann (1998). This tradition has nearly disappeared from sociological work on ethnicity in the United States, but it remains vibrant within anthropology and in studies of ethnicity elsewhere.
 8. This is readily apparent in the United States, where a central mechanism in the maintenance of white privilege is the construction of racial categories to which “others” can be assigned. This is one of the central insights of critical studies of whiteness.
 9. Following John Ogbu (1990), we might say that the difference between race and ethnicity is rather like the difference between involuntary and voluntary migration.
 10. See Ignatiev (1995), but also the critical discussions in Arnesen (2001) and Kolchin (2002).
 11. On constructed primordiality, see Appadurai (1990) and Griswold (1994); cf. Gil-White (1999).
 12. The examples are legion. See, among numerous others, Hanson (1989, 1991), Malkki (1995), and Conzen and others (1992); see again the discussion of authenticity in Cornell and Hartmann (1998, 91–94).
 13. See also Yen Le Espiritu’s (1992) treatment of a comparable process among Asian Americans.
 14. This is an excellent example of what Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou (1993) call segmented assimilation.
 15. Some of the other ways in which groups experience and respond to these dynamics are explored in detail in later sections of this book.
 16. For some useful discussions, see Winant (1997) and Hartigan (1999).
 17. A similar argument is made by Amy Kaplan (1993), while historical treatments of these issues are given by, among others, John Higham (1955) and, more recently, Gary Gerstle (2001). For materials employing some similar ideas in the case of Great Britain, see Cohen (1994).

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