When I was out with my oldest daughter, who’s [four years old], we were in a shopping mall, in a garage in Los Angeles . . . and there was a lady, who was with her husband. And I could tell they were just really nervous around me. And then we went to an ATM—I had to get some money—and there’s another couple and I heard the woman say, “Hurry up, let’s go, let’s go.” Like I was going to rob them, and my daughter was all like, “What happened, dad? What was that all about?” And I have to go into this conversation, “Well honey, sometimes people look at the color of my skin and they think I am a threat to them.”

Sometimes if I am walking down a street or something, I am whistling Frozen songs just to prove that . . . “Hey I have kids, I am not a threat to you. I just want to go home to my family.” So often people just view this as, “Oh gosh, you’re just whining” or “they are just making excuses or pulling out some mythical race card that doesn’t exist.” This is a real thing.

—Doyin Richards (a blogger who writes about fathers and fathering)

It’s like we are seen as animals. Treated like animals. It’s not easy.

—William Jones (high-end retail worker)
[I was] walking home in my beautiful upper-middle-class neighborhood in DC, when the cops start following me—kind of like this cat-and-mouse thing. They are in their car, and you know, every time I move, they move. And we get up to my house and I just stop on the street and say, “What are you doing?” And then they say, “What are you doing?” I say, “I live here.” They say, “Prove it.” They made me go to my porch, and then when I got there I said, “You know what, I don’t have to prove anything.” I knew this because I am a law professor. They said, “We are not leaving until you go in the house, because we think you’re a burglar.” I say, “You’re doing this because I am black.” They said, “No, we are not, we’re black too,” and that was true. These were African American officers. Even they were [racially] profiling me, another black man.

—Paul Butler (law professor)

Every day, I live and operate with that feeling of fragility, that feeling that I could be taken out at any time. I am a chokehold away from being Eric Garner.

—Ben Saunders (psychology professor)

These opening narratives describe a common experience for African American men—being seen by others as a threat or an outsider, guilty of something without reason. These perceptions are strikingly similar to the stereotypes about black men under slavery and Jim Crow. Why do they persist? What are the consequences?

Shopkeepers watch black boys and men with special attention; police routinely stop, question, and frisk them; and pedestrians may cross the street when they see a black man approaching. People think black men are bigger than white men of comparable size (Wilson, Hugenberg, & Rule, 2017). They view black boys over the age of 10 as older than they are—by about 4.5 years—and “less innocent” than other children (Goff et al., 2014). At school, black boys are punished more often and more harshly than white boys, even for the same behaviors. Administrators are more likely to suspend and expel black children, even preschoolers, compared to white children (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Even black boys with disabilities are disproportionately restrained at school compared with white boys with disabilities (Lewin, 2012; research about black girls and women reports similar findings).
African Americans are aware of these perceptions, which takes an emotional and physical toll (Butler, 2018; Davis, Vakalahi, & Scales, 2015). Sometimes the price is quite high. The news is filled with cases in which interactions, shaped by presumptions, have escalated quickly and turned violent. One noteworthy example happened in 2012 when George Zimmerman, an occasional participant in a neighborhood watch group, stopped 17-year-old Trayvon Martin as he walked home from the store because he “looked suspicious.” The situation escalated, and Zimmerman shot and killed Martin. He was acquitted of homicide in 2013.

The research demonstrates that on many levels, people (especially whites) continue to see African Americans as outsiders, apart from and alien to the [white] American mainstream. Certainly, America has made progress toward racial justice and inclusion. However, as this chapter will show, African Americans still suffer from race-based inequalities that are deeply rooted in the past. Thus, America’s struggle for racial equality is far from over.

More than 100 years ago, at the start of the 20th century, African Americans primarily lived in the rural South. Jim Crow stripped away the legal and civil rights that they briefly enjoyed during Reconstruction (1865–1880s). They had limited access to quality education and had few occupational choices. Whites exploited them through the sharecropping system and blocked them from the better-paying industrial jobs in urban areas. Additionally, African Americans had few political rights and few ways to express their concerns and grievances to the larger society or to the world.

Since then, the United States has seen greater equality between the dominant and minority groups, including African Americans. The election of Barack Obama as president of the United States in 2008 and 2012 is, perhaps, the single most significant sign of progress. If we take a “glass half-full” perspective, we see signs of improvement in most areas of social life. For example, African Americans are earning advanced degrees in greater numbers than ever before and are employed in diverse occupations. They’ve reached the highest levels of society, serving on the Supreme Court and in other important government positions, leading some of the most important corporations (e.g., American Express, Time Warner), and teaching at our most prestigious universities. Some of the best-known, most successful, most respected people in the world are African American: Martin Luther King Jr. (civil rights leader), Maya Angelou (writer), Thurgood Marshall (Supreme Court Justice), Beyoncé (entertainer), Muhammad Ali (athlete/activist), Serena and Venus Williams (athletes/entrepreneurs), Colin Powell (Secretary of State), Shirley Chisolm (congressperson/activist) August Wilson (playwright), Oprah Winfrey (media mogul), Ta-Nehisi Coates (scholar/writer), Michelle Obama (former First Lady/author) and Toni Morrison (Pulitzer prize–winning author), to name a few.

Additionally, African Americans continue to break barriers. For example, in 2012, Ava DuVernay became the first black woman to win the Best Director award at Sundance.
Films Festival (Hall & Renee, 2016). In 2015, Misty Copeland became the first African American woman to become the lead dancer for the world-renowned American Ballet Theatre ("Misty Copeland, Top 100," 2016). That same year, Vincent R. Stewart became the first African American director of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, Loretta Lynch became the first black woman to serve as the U.S. attorney general (Chung, 2015), and Michael Curry became the first black presiding bishop of the Episcopal church (Associated Press, 2015). In 2016, Maurice Ashley became the first African American grandmaster nominated to the U.S. Chess Hall of Fame. Simone Biles won four gold medals (and a bronze medal) in women’s gymnastics—the first American woman to do so at a single Olympic game (Hall & Renee, 2016). Finally, in 2018, Stacey Abrams became the first African American woman nominated for state governor by a major party.

Compared with 150 years ago, African Americans’ lives are much improved. However, social scientists caution against using a few examples, such as those listed above, as evidence of larger societal trends. As you’ll see, the journey to racial equality is far from accomplished. A large percentage of African Americans continue to experience exclusion, prejudice, discrimination, and persistent inequalities in education, health care, housing, employment, and other areas of social life. They have fewer resources to fall back on in hard times and weaker connections to the sources of power and privilege. The glittering success stories of the most famous African Americans obscure the significant problems faced by many others.

To understand contemporary black–white relations, you must understand the watershed events of the recent past: the end of de jure segregation, the triumphs (and limitations) of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the urban riots and Black Power movement of the 1960s, and the continuing racial divisions within the United States since the 1970s. Behind these events were powerful pressures of industrialization and modernization: the shift from rigid to fluid competitive group relations, deindustrialization, modern institutional discrimination, changing distributions of power and forms of intergroup competition, the shift from traditional prejudice to modern racism, and ideas about assimilation and pluralism. In general, you’ll see that black–white relations changed as a direct result of resistance, protest, and the concerted actions of thousands of people of all races and ethnicities.

THE END OF DE JURE SEGREGATION

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

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

The mechanization and modernization of agriculture in the South had a powerful effect on race relations. As machines replaced people, farm work became less labor-intensive
and landowners’ need for a large, powerless workforce declined (Geschwender, 1978, pp. 175–177). Thus, one of the primary motivations for Jim Crow segregation and the sharecropping system lost importance. Additionally, the modernization of southern agriculture helped spur African Americans’ migration northward and to southern urban areas. Outside the rural South, it was easier for African Americans to vote and to pursue different avenues for improving their lives. The power of the growing African American vote was first felt in the 1930s and was significant enough to make a difference in local, state, and even national elections by the 1940s. In 1948, for example, President Harry Truman recognized that he couldn’t be reelected without the support of African American voters. Therefore, the Democratic Party adopted a civil rights plank in the party platform—the first time since Reconstruction that a national political party had taken a stand on race relations (Wilson, 1973, p. 123).

The weight of these changes accumulated slowly. De jure segregation ended as it had begun: gradually and in a series of discrete events. By the mid-20th century, white resistance to racial change was weakening and the power resources of African Americans were increasing. This enhanced freedom and strength fueled many efforts that hastened the demise of Jim Crow segregation. Understanding why Jim Crow segregation ended is essential to understanding modern black–white group relations.

Wartime Developments

One of the first successful applications of the growing stock of black power resources occurred in 1941, as America was mobilizing for war against Germany and Japan. Despite the crisis atmosphere, racial discrimination was common, even in the defense industry. A group of African Americans, led by labor leader A. Philip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, threatened to march on Washington to protest discriminatory treatment (Brown, 2015).

To forestall the march, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an executive order banning discrimination in defense-related industries and created a watchdog federal agency, the Fair Employment Practices Commission, to oversee compliance with the new policy (Franklin & Moss, 1994, pp. 436–437; Geschwender, 1978, pp. 199–200). This was significant in two ways. First, a group of African Americans had their grievances heard at the highest level of society and they succeeded in getting what they wanted. Underlying their effectiveness was the rising political and economic power of the African American community outside the South and the need to mobilize everyone for a world war. Second, the federal government made an unprecedented commitment to fair employment rights for African Americans. This alliance between the federal government and African Americans was tentative, but it foreshadowed some of the dynamics of racial change that would occur in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Civil Rights Movement

The civil rights movement was a multifaceted campaign to end legalized segregation and ameliorate the massive inequalities experienced by African Americans. The campaign lasted for decades and included courtroom battles, protest marches, education,
voter registration drives, boycotts, and other forms of activism. We begin by looking at the movement’s successful challenge to legalized racial segregation.

**Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka**

In 1954, the Supreme Court’s ruling on *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* delivered the single most powerful blow to de jure segregation. It reversed the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896 (see Chapter 4) and ruled that racially separate facilities are inherently unequal and, therefore, unconstitutional. Segregated school systems—and all other forms of legalized racial segregation—would have to end.

The landmark *Brown* decision was the culmination of decades of planning and effort by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and individuals such as Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP’s chief counsel. (Marshall became a Supreme Court Justice in 1967.) The NAACP’s strategy was to dismantle Jim Crow laws by finding instances when an African American’s civil rights had been violated, then suing the relevant governmental agency.

The NAACP intended for the impact of these lawsuits to extend far beyond each specific case. The goal was to persuade the courts to declare segregation unconstitutional not only in the specific instance being tried but also in all similar cases. The *Brown* (1954) decision was the ultimate triumph of this strategy. The significance of the Supreme Court’s decision was not that Linda Brown—the child in whose name the case was argued—would attend a different school or even that the Topeka, Kansas, school system would be integrated. Instead, the significance was the court’s rejection of the principle of de jure segregation in the South and, by extension, throughout America.

Southern states responded to *Brown* (1954) by mounting massive resistance campaigns, which allowed Jim Crow laws to remain on the books for years. Most white southerners strongly supported the system of racial privilege and attempted to forestall change through a variety of means, including violence and intimidation. The Ku Klux Klan (KKK), largely dormant since the late 1920s, reappeared, along with other racist terrorist groups such as the White Citizens’ Councils. White politicians and other leaders competed with one another to express the most adamant statements of racist resistance (Wilson, 1973, p. 128). One locality, Prince Edward County in central Virginia, chose to close its public schools for five years rather than integrate them. During that time, white children attended private, segregated academies. The county provided no schooling for African American children (Franklin, 1967, p. 644). If they wanted to attend school, they had to travel outside the county, but most black families didn’t have the resources to send them.

**Nonviolent Direct Action Protest**

The principle established by *Brown* (1954) was assimilationist: It ordered the dominant group to open its educational institutions freely and equally to all. Southern states and communities overwhelmingly rejected this principle. Centuries of racist tradition and privilege were at stake and it would take considerable collective effort to overcome southern resistance.

The central force in this struggle was a protest movement that many people trace to Montgomery, Alabama. There, in 1955, Rosa Parks was riding the bus home from work.
The driver ordered her to surrender her seat to a white man. She refused, and the police arrested her for violating a local segregation ordinance. Although Parks didn’t plan her civil disobedience that day, it didn’t “just happen.” She had prepared for it—by engaging in activism for years and by training in nonviolent direct action, including a desegregation workshop at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee just months before her arrest (Theoharis, 2013).

Her case galvanized the African American community. They organized a city bus boycott led by Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., then a new minister in town. They created carpools, shared taxis, and walked or biked to and from work, school, worship services, and other places—sometimes for miles. The boycott drew attention, sympathy, and resources from people across the world. They stayed off the buses for more than a year until the courts ruled that Alabama’s segregated city buses were unconstitutional.

Many lesser-known actions paved the way for Parks and the Montgomery boycotts. For example, from 1905 to 1906, African Americans in Nashville, Tennessee, effectively boycotted the city’s streetcars (Cardona, 2015). And in 1953, blacks in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, successfully boycotted the city’s busses and created the model for the Montgomery boycott. Courageous individuals forged the path for Parks. For example, in 1946, Irene Morgan, age 27, was riding the bus back to Maryland after visiting her mother in Virginia. When the bus became crowded, the driver asked her to give up her seat; she refused saying that Virginia’s law didn’t apply to travel across states (Wormser, n.d.-a). A police officer got involved and grabbed Morgan, but she fought back. A court found her guilty. She paid the $100 fine for resisting arrest (equivalent to about $1,300 in 2019) but wouldn’t pay the $10 fine for violating segregation laws. The NAACP took her case before the Supreme Court (Morgan v. Virginia, 1946). Instead of arguing the case on the grounds of racial inequality, they contended that segregated seating on interstate travel violated the U.S. constitution. The Court agreed, saying such practices were “an undue burden on commerce” (Pilgrim, 2007).

Many southern private bus companies skirted this verdict by passing segregation rules. In 1947, the Congress of Racial Equality organized to fight them. Sixteen men (8 black and 8 white) traveled by bus on a “Journey of Reconciliation.” The white men sat in the colored section and black men sat in the white section. Some were arrested and jailed, including Bayard Rustin, who was sentenced to 30 days on a chain gang. Ever the activist, he published a report about his horrific experience, which led to prison reforms. He would go on to become one of the movement’s leaders, and the group’s action became a model for the Freedom Rides (Stanford University, n.d.).

In 1952, Sarah Louise Keys was traveling across state lines by bus, sitting toward the front. When a new driver boarded, he asked her to move. When she refused, the driver had the other passengers get on a different bus. Local law enforcement arrested, fined, and jailed Keys, and a North Carolina court upheld her conviction. The NAACP took her case before the Supreme Court (Sarah Keys v. Carolina Coach Company, 1955). Less than a week before Parks’s arrest, it ruled in Keys’s favor (Richardson & Luker, 2014, pp. 267–268). The case was heralded as a “symbol of a movement that cannot be held back” (McCabe & Roundtree, 2009, p. 154).

The movement’s central strategy was nonviolent direct action, which involved confronting de jure segregation head-on, not in the courtroom or the state legislature but where people experienced it (e.g., busses, stores, theaters). The movement
adopted principles of nonviolence based on Christian doctrine and the teachings of Mohandas K. Gandhi, Henry David Thoreau, and others. Dr. King (who earned his undergraduate degree in sociology) expressed this philosophy in numerous speeches and publications: People should confront the forces of evil rather than the people who were doing evil (see King., 1958, 1963, 1968). The movement didn’t want to defeat or humiliate its enemies; it wanted to gain their support. As King (1958) said, nonviolent action wasn’t a method for cowards; it required courage and discipline (pp. 83–84).

The movement used different tactics, including sit-ins at segregated restaurants, protest marches, prayer meetings, and voter registration drives. The police and terrorist groups such as the KKK often responded to these efforts with brutal repression and violence. Protesters were routinely imprisoned and physically attacked not only by white bystanders and by police who used fists and billy clubs but also by police dogs, high-pressure water cannons, and tear gas. The violent resistance sometimes included murder, such as the 1963 bombing of a black church in Birmingham, Alabama, which took the lives of four little girls, and the 1968 assassination of Dr. King. Resistance to racial equality was intense. It would take more than prayers and protests to end de jure segregation, and Congress finally provided the necessary tools to do so (see D’Angelo, 2001; Halberstam, 1998; Killian, 1975; King, 1958, 1963, 1968; Lewis & D’Orso, 1999; Morris, 1984).

Landmark Legislation

The successes of the civil rights movement, combined with changing public opinion and the legal principles established by the Supreme Court, coalesced in the mid-1960s to stimulate the passage of two laws that ended Jim Crow. First, in 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson urged Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act (CRA). The law banned discrimination based on race, color, gender, religion, or national origin by publicly owned facilities (e.g., city pools), facilities open to the public (e.g., stores, theaters), and programs receiving federal aid (e.g., colleges).

Second was the 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA), which required that federal, state, and local governments treat all citizens equally in election practices. For example, it banned literacy tests, whites-only primaries, poll taxes, property requirements, and other practices used to prevent African Americans from registering to vote. The VRA gave the franchise back to black southerners for the first time since Reconstruction and laid the groundwork for increasing black political power.

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

Unlike the CRA, the VRA was specifically designed to remedy discriminatory practices occurring in specific states in the mid-1960s. Congress has renewed the VRA periodically, most recently in 2006, when it was extended with bipartisan support through 2031 (Hagler, 2015). However, in 2010, many states began creating new voting regulations that some argue diluted the progress made by the VRA.

The most significant change to the VRA happened in 2013, when the Supreme Court ruled that parts of it were unconstitutional because they violated the “fundamental
principle of equal [state] sovereignty” (see *Shelby County v. Holder*, 2013). The majority opinion also said that such protections were unnecessary because “things have changed dramatically” (Roberts, 2013). Justice Ginsberg (2013), writing for the minority, argued with this interpretation, saying the court’s decision was “like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet.” (We’ll consider implications of this decision in the section on political power.)

The Successes and Limitations of the Civil Rights Movement

Why did the civil rights movement succeed? A comprehensive list of reasons would be lengthy; so, we’ll focus on important causes most consistent with the points we’ve made about dominant–minority relations throughout this book.

1. *Changing subsistence technology.* The continuing industrialization and urbanization of America—and the South in particular—weakened Jim Crow’s rigid competitive system of minority group control and segregation. (See our discussion of the impact of the changing subsistence technology and the end of paternalistic controls in Chapter 4, including Table 4.2.)

2. *An era of prosperity.* Following World War II, America enjoyed a period of prosperity into the 1960s. Consistent with the Noel hypothesis, this was important because it reduced the intensity of intergroup competition, at least outside the South. During prosperous times, resistance to change weakens. If the economic “pie” is expanding, the “slices” that minority groups claim can increase without threatening to reduce anyone else’s portions, and prejudice generated by intergroup competition is held in check (see the Robber’s Cave experiment in Chapter 1). Thus, these good times muted the dominant group’s sense of threat sparked by the civil rights movement.

3. *Increasing resources in the black community.* Some economic prosperity of this era found its way into African American communities and increased their economic and political resources. Networks of independent organizations, owned and operated by African Americans, were created or grew in size and power (e.g., colleges, businesses, churches). This increasingly elaborate infrastructure of the black community included protest organizations such as the NAACP and provided material resources, leadership, and “people power” to lead the fight against discrimination.

4. *Assimilationist goals.* The civil rights movement demanded civil, legal, and political rights for African Americans, but within a framework that emphasized liberty, equality, freedom, and fair treatment. Thus, many whites didn’t feel threatened by the movement’s philosophy and goals, which they saw as consistent with mainstream American values, especially in contrast to the intense, often violent resistance by southern whites.

5. *Coalitions.* Black southerners had few resources other than their numbers and courage. However, the perceived legitimacy of the movement’s goals created opportunities to form alliances with other groups such as white liberals, Jews,
and college students. By mobilizing these groups’ resources (e.g., legitimacy, money, political power, labor power), black southerners were in a much stronger position to challenge their opposition.

6. Mass media. Widespread sympathetic mass media coverage, particularly television, was crucial to the movement’s success. The frequent broadcasts of whites brutally attacking African Americans protesting for equal rights outraged many Americans and reinforced the moral consensus needed to eventually reject traditional racial prejudice and Jim Crow segregation.

The civil rights movement ended de jure segregation, but its confrontational tactics, effective against Jim Crow, were less useful in fighting race-based inequalities such as the unequal distribution of opportunities and resources between whites and blacks (such as jobs, wealth, political power, education, and other valued goods and services). These issues had long been the primary concern of African Americans outside the South and they’re what we’ll examine next.

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

1. How did broad social changes help end Jim Crow segregation? How did individuals and organizations aid in this process? Which seems most important, and why?
2. How did Supreme Court decisions or other legal changes affect segregation?
3. How do the concepts of competition and power differentials in the Noel hypothesis apply to the demise of the Jim Crow system of segregation?
4. Explain the important reasons for the success of the civil rights movement. Which seem most significant and why?

**DEVELOPMENTS OUTSIDE THE SOUTH**

**De Facto Segregation**

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

The pattern of racial separation and inequality outside the South during this time is **de facto** ("in fact" or by practice) segregation. As opposed to Jim Crow or South African apartheid, no public laws mandated racial separation, but it existed all the same. Consider it as de jure segregation in disguise.

Many people imagine that de facto segregation “just happens” as people choose where to live, work, shop, or worship—perhaps, for example, out of the desire to be with one’s
“own kind.” However, this is not the case. De facto segregation results from intentionally racist decisions and actions by governmental and quasi-governmental agencies, such as real estate boards, school boards, and zoning boards (see Massey & Denton, 1993, pp. 74–114; also see Loewen, 2005). When local and state authorities actively colluded with private citizens behind the scenes, ignored racist practices within their jurisdictions, and “simply refrained from enforcing black social, economic, and political rights so that private discriminatory practices could do their work,” that was de facto segregation (Massey, 2007, p. 57). For example, shortly after World War I, the real estate board in Chicago, Illinois, adopted a policy requiring its members, on penalty of “immediate expulsion,” to enforce racial residential segregation (Cohen & Taylor, 2000, p. 33; Rothstein, 2014). The city hadn’t passed any laws, but the result was the same: Black Americans were treated differently and unequally.

African Americans outside the South faced more poverty, higher unemployment, and lower-quality housing and schools than whites. Yet, there wasn’t an obvious equivalent to a Jim Crow system that was creating inequalities and, therefore, there was no obvious system to fight. The triumphs of the civil rights movement in the South had little impact on the lives of blacks living elsewhere. In the 1960s, the African American community outside the South expressed its frustration over the slow pace of change in two main ways: urban unrest and the creation of a new movement that rose to prominence as the civil rights movement began to fade.

**Urban Unrest**

Full racial equality continued to seem remote to many African Americans living outside the South. In the mid-1960s, the frustration and anger within urban black communities erupted into a series of violent uprisings. The riots began in the summer of 1965 in Watts, a black neighborhood in Los Angeles, California.

Racial violence wasn’t a new phenomenon in America. Race riots had existed as early as the Civil War and sometimes included considerable violence. Earlier race riots involved whites attacking African Americans, often invading and destroying black neighborhoods (e.g., see D’Orso, 1996; Ellsworth, 1982; Phillips, 2016). For example, the Memphis massacre of 1866, Thibodaux massacre in 1887, and the Springfield Race Riot of 1908. One of the most significant occurred over two days in 1921, when whites destroyed the Greenwood District of Tulsa, Oklahoma, also known as “Black Wall Street.” Hundreds of people died, and many more were injured. Most African Americans’ homes were destroyed, as were their churches, businesses, a hospital, and other community buildings—1,200 buildings total (Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, 2001, p. 12). However, the riots of the 1960s were different.

The urban unrest of the 1960s, in contrast, consisted largely of attacks by African Americans against white-owned businesses operating in black neighborhoods and against the police (almost all white), who they saw as an army of occupation and whose use of excessive force precipitated the riots (Conot, 1967; Mozingo & Jennings, 2015; National Advisory Commission, 1968). For example, the 1965 “Watts Rebellion” occurred after police stopped an African American man, Marquette Frye, on suspicion of drunk driving (Alonso, 1998). The situation quickly escalated. (The police claimed that Frye resisted arrest. Frye said that when his mother tried to stop the police from impounding their
vehicle, the police “roughed [her] up” and knocked him unconscious.) During the altercation, a large crowd gathered and quickly grew angry, viewing the situation as another example of excessive force by the police (United Press International, 1986). The riot lasted five days. More than $40,000,000 of property was destroyed, 34 people died, 1,032 people were injured, and almost 4,000 people were arrested (Alonso, 1998; Hinton, 2016, pp. 68–72).

Housing discrimination against blacks (and others) contributed to massive overcrowding in Watts and other minority neighborhoods. Remember from Chapter 4 that approximately 1.6 million African Americans left the South to live elsewhere in the country during the first wave of the Great Migration. Millions more left during the second wave that began in 1940. Between 1940 in 1965, the black population of Los Angeles increased almost 5.5 times (Simpson, 2012).

Like other parts of the country, Los Angeles was racially segregated due to redlining and other housing-related discrimination (e.g., higher rents for minorities). Additionally, real estate covenants barred people of color from renting or buying certain properties. Thus, in 1940, African Americans (and other racial/ethnic minorities) had to live in only 5% of residential Los Angeles, creating significant overcrowding in those parts of the city (Alonso, 1998).

As more African Americans (and Asians and Hispanics) moved into Los Angeles, pressures to find housing increased. Minorities tried moving into other neighborhoods but were subjected to violence or threats of violence (e.g., cross burnings) from whites who wanted to keep them out of “their” neighborhoods. During this time, the Los Angeles suburbs grew as record numbers of white families left the city because people of color were moving in. This phenomenon, called white flight, also occurred throughout the country (see Woldoff, 2011).

To address widespread patterns of discrimination, the Rumford Fair Housing Act of 1963 made it illegal for property owners to deny housing to anyone because of race, ethnicity, gender, physical ability, religion, and so on. However, in 1964, Californians approved Proposition 14, which gave property owners the right to “decline to sell, lease or rent such property to such person or persons as he, in his absolute discretion, chooses” (Brilliant, 2010, p. 193). Though the courts ruled Proposition 14 unconstitutional in 1966, “Prop 14” made it harder for people of color (and others) to find housing. Because it contributed to the extreme pressure facing the Watts community, it also contributed to the 1965 riots (Alonso, 1998; Theoharis, 2006, pp. 47–49).

**The Black Power Movement**

The urban riots of the 1960s were an unmistakable sign that the problems of race relations didn’t end with the death of Jim Crow segregation. Outside the South, the problems were different and necessitated different solutions. Even as the civil rights movement was celebrating its victory in the South, a new protest movement was rising in prominence.

The Black Power movement was a loose coalition of organizations and individuals that encompassed a variety of ideas and views, many that differed sharply from those of the civil rights movement. Most Black Power advocates rejected the civil rights movement’s assimilationist goals, arguing that integration would cause African Americans to become part of the very system that had oppressed, denigrated, and devalued them for
centuries. Instead, Black Power groups embraced black nationalism and celebrated black identity, including African heritage, and encouraged racial pride, the latter exemplified by a popular saying of the day, “Black is beautiful!”

Most Black Power supporters believed that white racism and institutional discrimination, buried deep in the core of American culture and society, were the primary causes of racial inequality. They believed that to become truly empowered, blacks would have to liberate themselves and become self-sufficient on their own terms. They created alternate ways to meet their needs, such as urban farms and food co-ops, restaurants and other businesses, medical facilities, media, and schools—all owned and run by African Americans.

The Black Panther Party (for Self-Defense) was one well-known expression of the Black Power movement. In the beginning (1966), it focused on creating armed, open carry street patrols to monitor police and guard against police brutality, which had been frequent. The Panthers argued that every American had the right to own and carry a gun. (Their legal battles began to shift public attitudes about the Second Amendment, which, until that time, was of extremely low importance to most Americans. See More Perfect, 2018.) As they gained national attention, the dominant image of militant blacks with guns became equated with the broader Black Power movement and it frightened many Americans, especially whites who remained largely unaware of the social programs (e.g., education, food security) created by the Panthers and other Black Power organizations to improve the lives of African Americans.

The Nation of Islam

The ideological roots of Black Power were centuries old. In the 1920s, Marcus Garvey popularized many of them. In the 1960s, the Nation of Islam (NOI), sometimes called black Muslims, embraced and further developed them. The NOI is one of the best-known and most militant organizations within the Black Power movement. They denounced the hypocrisy, greed, and racism they saw in the larger society and advocated staunch resistance to and racial separation from white America.

The NOI did more than talk. Pursuing the goals of autonomy and self-determination, members opened businesses in African American neighborhoods and tried to deal only with Muslim-owned black companies. Their goal was to create a separate, independent black-owned economy that would support and develop the African American community by supplying jobs and creating capital that would allow them to expand their efforts (Essien-Udom, 1962; Lincoln, 1961; Malcolm X, 1964; Marable, 2011; Wolfenstein, 1993).

The NOI and other Black Power groups distinguished between racial separation and racial segregation. They viewed the former as empowering because, as a group, they’d grow stronger by becoming more autonomous. They saw the latter as a system of inequality controlled by the dominant group, which kept the black community powerless. Thus, the Black Power groups worked to find ways in which African Americans could develop their own resources and deal with the dominant group from a more powerful position, a strategy similar to the ethnic enclaves created by other minority groups (see Chapter 2).

Malcolm X was the best-known representative for the NOI and was one of the most charismatic figures of the 1960s. He powerfully articulated the values and goals of the Black Power movement. Born Malcolm Little, he converted to Islam while in prison. He rejected his “slave name” and adopted X to reflect his unknown heritage.
Malcolm X became the group’s chief spokesperson and a well-known but threatening figure to many white Americans. After a dispute with Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the NOI, Malcolm X founded his own organization and continued to express and develop the ideas of black nationalism. In 1965, like so many protest leaders of the era, someone assassinated him (Marable, 2011).

Black Power leaders such as Malcolm X advocated autonomy, independence, and a pluralistic direction for the African American protest movement. They saw the black community as a colonized, exploited population that needed liberation from the unyielding racial oppression of white America, not integration into the system that oppressed them. In the 1970s, the group splintered into different factions. One sought greater assimilation into the dominant society. The other seems to have become more radicalized, leading to their classification by some as a hate group (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.).

**PROTEST, POWER, AND PLURALISM**

**The Black Power Movement in Perspective**

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

Some pluralistic themes of Black Power were a reaction to the failed assimilation and integration efforts of the 1950s and 1960s. Widely publicized court decisions had chipped away at racial inequalities (e.g., *Brown v. Board of Education*). The government had passed legislation to foster equality (e.g., CRA, VRA). Presidents, congresspeople, ministers and rabbis, and other leaders had pledged support for racial equality. Yet, for many African Americans, not much had changed. Their parents’ and grandparents’ problems continued to constrain their lives and many expected that these problems would affect their children’s lives, too. The Black Power ideology was a response to America’s failure to go beyond the repeal of Jim Crow and fully implement the promises of integration and equality.

Black nationalism, however, was more than simply a reaction to a failed dream. In the context of black–white relations in the 1960s, the Black Power movement served many purposes. First, along with the civil rights movement, it offered new ways of defining what it meant to be black in America and new ways of seeing African Americans. The dominant cultural stereotypes of black Americans emphasized their supposed laziness, irresponsibility, dangerousness, and inferiority. The Black Power movement rejected these ideas, emphasizing, instead, black power, seriousness of purpose, intelligence, beauty, assertiveness, independence, and courage.
Second, Black Power served as a new rallying cry for solidarity and unified action. Following the success of the civil rights movement, Black Power focused attention on America’s “unfinished business”—continuing inequalities between blacks and whites.

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

The nationalistic and pluralistic demands of the Black Power movement evoked a sense of threat and defensiveness in white society. By questioning the value of assimilation and celebrating a separate African heritage equal in legitimacy with white European heritage, the Black Power movement raised questions about the worth and validity of Anglo American values and norms. Many Black Power spokespersons condemned Anglo American values fiercely and openly and implicated them in creating and maintaining a centuries-long system of racial repression. Today, more than 50 years after the successes of the civil rights movement, many people still perceive the demands and critiques from the black community as threatening.

Gender and Black Protest

Paradoxically, the civil rights and Black Power movements accepted many of that era’s gender stereotypes (some of which remain); for example, that men are “naturally better” leaders or “more intelligent” than women. As in the larger society (e.g., workplaces, schools, places of worship), men dominated leadership positions and many members viewed women as men’s supporters, not equal partners, in the fight for racial equality. For example, when Rosa Parks joined the NAACP in 1943, the local leader, Edgar Nixon, reportedly said, “Women don’t need to be nowhere but the kitchen” (Theoharis, 2013, p. 28). However, he asked Parks to become the organization’s secretary a “woman’s job” that opened the door for her later activism. According to activist Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, even getting resources to do their work was challenging. Women “had to fight for resources” like “good typewriters and a good car . . . because the guys would get first dibs on everything” (Simmons, 2011). The women challenged that sexism. For example, the women in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) wrote position papers to protest their relegation to clerical positions and to being called “girls” (Andersen, 1993, p. 284).

Similarly, the NOI emphasized girls’ and women’s subservience, imposed a strict code of behavior (e.g., rules about clothing), and organized many activities by gender. Given the continuing failures of the civil rights movement, some black women viewed this “patriarchal bargain” with NOI as reasonable, even desirable, if it led to safety, independence, and greater financial stability for themselves and African Americans as a group (McDuffie, 2018; Taylor, 2017).
Thus, the battle against racism and the battle against sexism were separate struggles with separate, often contradictory agendas (Amott & Matthaei, 1991; Theoharis, 2013). Although often denied organizational leadership roles, black women were key participants—many people view them as the backbone of both movements. When the protest movements began, African American women were already heavily involved in communities and used their skills, intellect, creativity, and energy to further the cause of racial equality. Even if relegated to less glamorous but vital organizational work, black women shaped how the movements developed (Evans, 1979; Taylor, 2017).

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

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

(Amistad Research Center, n.d.)

She devoted herself entirely to the civil rights movement, helping to organize Mississippi’s Freedom Summer, for example. Later, she founded the Freedom Party, which successfully challenged the racially segregated Democratic Party and the all-white political structure of the state of Mississippi. Because of her activism, Hamer lost her job, was evicted from her house, and was jailed and beaten on several occasions (Evans, 1979; Hamer, 1967).

Much of the energy that motivated black protest was forged in the depths of segregation and exclusion, a system of oppression that affected all African Americans. However, social class and gender significantly shaped African American’s lives. Black women experienced distinct multiple jeopardy created by the interlocking systems of racism and sexism combined with class (particularly within a capitalist economy; Jones, 1949). As you’ll see in upcoming sections, those patterns still remain.

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

5. How did de facto segregation differ from de jure segregation? Were the differences cosmetic or substantial? Explain.

6. How and why did the Black Power movement differ from the civil rights movement?

7. To what degree did the Black Power movement succeed in achieving its goals? Explain.

8. What were some of the important gender dimensions of black protest movements?

9. Compare women’s experiences under Jim Crow segregation with that of the antebellum South. How did they reflect the larger society?
BLACK–WHITE RELATIONS SINCE THE 1960s: ISSUES AND TRENDS

Black–white relations have changed since the 1960s and the U. S. has taken steps toward reducing racial inequality and increasing integration. Barack Obama’s election to the presidency—unimaginable just decades ago—stands as one unmistakable symbol of racial progress. Indeed, it was a breakthrough so stunning that many Americans claimed it meant the U. S. had become post-racial and that race no longer influenced people’s lives. As you’ll see, that argument doesn’t hold up to evidence.

Without denying improvements, Americans must also recognize that progress in many areas has stagnated; basic patterns of black inequality and white dominance persist. Remaining problems are deeply rooted in and inextricably mixed with the structure and operation of society. As in earlier eras, we can’t address contemporary racism and racial inequality apart from larger societal changes, especially changes in subsistence technology. Next, we’ll examine the continuing racial separation that characterizes much of American society and we’ll apply many prior concepts to contemporary black–white relations.

COMPARATIVE FOCUS
RACE IN ANOTHER AMERICA

One of the key characteristics of traditional American antiblack prejudice is a simple two-race view: Everyone belongs to one and only one race; a person is either black or white. At its core, this perspective suggests ideas about black inferiority that were at the heart of the American system of slavery and Jim Crow segregation in the South. Southern states (and a few others) formalized this racial dichotomy in law and in custom in many ways, including the “one-drop rule.” If a person had any trace of black ancestry, even “one drop” of “African blood,” the law defined them as black and subjected them to all the related consequences of that label.

This dichotomous white/black construction of race contrasts sharply with many other nations. One useful comparison is between Brazil and the United States. Although the two countries’ racial histories run parallel in many ways, people in them perceive race very differently.

Most people in Brazil identify with one of about 10 racial categories, including branco [white], moreno [brown], morena claro [light brown], claro [light], pardo [mixed race], and negro and preto [black] (Telles, 2004, p. 82). However, when the government asked people to describe their race in something equivalent to our census, they got 134 categories, including “pinkish white,” “burnt yellow,” and “cinnamon,” among others (Garcia-Navarro, 2015).

Race is more fluid in Brazil. Qualities such as hair texture, eye color, ethnicity, and social class (e.g., education, occupation, income) affect one’s race in Brazil (Caldwell, 2008; Flavia et al., 2003). For example, people with higher-class status are considered “whiter”
than those of lower status, regardless of their actual skin color (Bucciferro, 2015; Wade, 1997). Additionally, people may be viewed as “whiter” simply by marrying a lighter-skinned person (Hernandez, 2007).

Past scholarship has likened Brazil to a racial utopia (Freyre, 1946) and Brazil has taken pride in being called a racial democracy. Yet, more expansive constructions of race don’t mean that Brazil is egalitarian. Their construction of race connects whiteness to wealth, education, and success while associating blackness with poverty, lack of refinement, and other negative qualities.

Prejudice, discrimination, and widespread racial inequalities remain a part of Brazilian society. Brazilian sociologist Antonio Risério says, “It’s clear that racism exists in the United States. It’s clear that racism exists in Brazil. But they are different kinds of racism” (Risério, 2007, p. 17; c.f. Reid, 2014, p. 181). In Brazil, black and multiracial Brazilians have higher illiteracy, unemployment, and poverty rates and are less likely to have access to a university education than white Brazilians (Bourcier, 2012; Gradín, 2007). Additionally, they are more likely than whites to experience police-based violence (Salhani, 2015). Whites dominate the more prestigious and lucrative occupations and the leadership positions in the economy and in politics, while black Brazilians are concentrated at the bottom of the class system, with multiracial people in between (Haan & Thorat, 2012; Marteleto, 2012). In short, Brazilian patterns mirror our own.

Consider these points:

• The foundation for contemporary race relations in Brazil was laid in the distant past—just like America’s. The Portuguese, the colonial conquerors of Brazil, were mostly single men. They married women from other racial/ethnic groups and produced multiracial children. European settlers in the American colonies often already had families. For those that didn’t, miscegenation laws prevented intermarriage.

• In Brazil, people didn’t equate slavery as thoroughly with race as in America, where slavery, blackness, and inferiority were tightly linked in the dominant ideology. However, Brazilians did link “blackness” with inferiority, which contributed to its somewhat fluid construction of race (including the tendency for people to “self-whiten”). Contemporary social inequalities reflect these racial ideologies.

After slavery ended, Brazil didn’t go through a period of legalized racial segregation, similar to the Jim Crow system in the American South or apartheid in South Africa. Since groups had always mingled, Brazil had a smoother societal transition after the end of slavery (“Affirming a Divide,” 2012).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

10. Compare the social construction of race in America and Brazil. Why do the differences exist? What’s their effect?

11. How does contact situation shape contemporary race relations in these two societies?
Continuing Separation

Just over 50 years ago, a presidential commission charged with investigating black urban unrest warned that America was “moving towards two societies, one black, one white, separate and unequal” (National Advisory Commission, 1968, p. 1). The phrase “moving towards” incorrectly suggests that America was racially unified at one time. Nevertheless, the warning seems prophetic.

African Americans’ lives have improved in many ways (e.g., increasing wealth, greater political power) and contemporary race relations have improved. However, inequality and power differentials between blacks and whites continue as the legacy of our past. In many ways, black and white Americans still live in separate worlds, especially when we consider social class and residence. The black urban poor lead lives that barely intersect with the lives of the affluent whites in suburbia.

While Barack Obama’s election inspired strong optimism about the future of race relations, the current mood is pessimistic, as national polls over the last two decades show. In 1996, more than half (54%) of the adults surveyed saw racism in America as a “big problem.” When Obama took office in 2009, that rate dropped dramatically to 26%. By 2015, people’s optimism had faded: 50% of the respondents saw racism as a major problem, a rate that increased to 57% in 2017 (Neal, 2017). While both whites and blacks expressed increasing concern about racism, the rate in 2017 was significantly higher for blacks (81%) than for whites (52%; Neal, 2017).

As full racial equality and integration continue to seem remote, frustration and anger run high among both blacks and whites, though sometimes for different reasons. (See our discussion about the differences in black and white beliefs about race relations in Chapter 1.) Next, we’ll explore some signs of the continuing separation between black and white Americans.

Continuing Separation: The Social Construction of Race, Difference, and Danger

Racial segregation still exists in some forms—in neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and churches, for example. For African Americans, segregation results in higher rates of unemployment, poverty, incarceration, and lower rates of degree completion, home ownership, and voting.

“Living While Black” (LWB) describes a phenomenon that’s recently gained national attention because it illustrates continuing race-based exclusion or segregation. LWB occurs when whites feel concern, suspicion, or discomfort about blacks and call the police as a result (Lockhart, 2018b). These reactions suggest that some whites feel, at least to some degree, that African Americans don’t belong in particular places, which seems reminiscent of Jim Crow segregation (Billings, 2017).

Whites’ apprehension about black people is recognizable; what’s new about LWB is that (1) these interactions are typically documented with cell phone cameras and (2) the calls are about black people doing everyday activities in “white spaces” where blacks “are typically absent, not expected, or marginalized when present” (Anderson, 2015, p. 10). In 2018, for example, white people called the police about African Americans eating at restaurants, moving into an apartment, working out, napping in a dorm’s common area, cashing a check at the bank, sitting in a coffee shop, barbequing,
being at the pool, mowing a lawn in their neighborhood, golfing, delivering newspapers, checking out of an Airbnb rental, and calling someone from their hotel lobby (Lockhart, 2018b; Nash, 2018; Patton & Farley, 2018).

These examples may seem trivial to some people, but Anderson (2015, p. 15) argues that they reflect an attempt by white people to protect what they see as “theirs.” That assessment, if true, suggests an underlying sense of tension and competition that’s at the root of prejudice and discrimination. Additionally, these examples indicate broader suspicions aimed at black people. For example, 40% of African Americans surveyed in 2017 as part of a national study reported people being afraid of them specifically because of their race. Ideas about men and masculinity magnified people’s fear of black men. More than half of black men (57%) reported people being fearful of them (NPR, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, & Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, 2017a, p. 10). Just 7% of white people and 11% of white men reported people being afraid of them due to their race (NPR et al., 2017c, p. 12). Similarly, a national survey in 2016 by the Pew Research Center found that almost half (47%) of the black respondents thought someone had viewed them with suspicion because of their race at some point over the last year. These and other experiences are marginalizing and result in blacks feeling the need to justify their existence (Lockhart, 2018a) and to carefully navigate predominantly white settings in particular (Anderson, 2018).

Some people might suggest that calling the police simply reflects a desire to stay safe. Others might propose that callers are trying to do good, not harm. We don’t have the intimate details of every case; besides, the callers, like most people, probably aren’t aware of their biases. We’d offer that these aren’t either/or situations (e.g., “they’re trying to help” or “they’re racist”) as much as those involving both/and. That is, people want to be safe and they’ve internalized stereotypes of black people that were created hundreds of years ago and that have largely gone unchallenged. It might be helpful to ask, why don’t whites call the police about Asian men or white women doing everyday activities? And why are there so many “white settings” to begin with?

Although whites’ attitudes about blacks have improved, the LWB phenomenon suggests two kinds of continuing separation between blacks and whites. The first is at the level of abstract thinking and feeling, the other is in the physical world where people go about their daily lives. To create racial equality, we’ll have to address both.

Continuing Separation: Protests, Riots, and Activism

One major source of discontent and frustration for African Americans (and others) involves police actions toward them. Several major police-related incidents have sparked violence and riots. One of the most widely publicized examples was incited by the 1991 beating of Rodney King by police officers in Los Angeles. National and international news outlets covered the incident widely, showing video of the police using a Taser and kicking and hitting King with a nightstick, even as he lay on the ground. The video stunned the nation; in only 81 seconds, officers kicked or hit him 56 times (Matiash & Rothman, 2016; Sastry & Bates, 2017).

Four officers were charged with assault with a deadly weapon and use of excessive force. Contrary to most people’s expectations, an all-white jury acquitted them of almost all charges. On hearing word of the acquittals, communities in several cities erupted into violence. The worst disturbance occurred in the Watts section of Los Angeles—the same
location as the 1965 Watts Rebellion. More than 60 people died and 2,300 were injured. More than 1,100 buildings, valued between $785 million and $1 billion, were destroyed. Police arrested about 12,000 people (Kim & Kim, 1999; Lee, 2015; Los Angeles Times Graphics Staff, 2012; Wilkens, 1992).

The 1992 riots illustrate two ingredients that have triggered black collective protest and violence since the 1960s: police behavior and the pervasiveness of recording devices. Today, cell phones and police cameras can supply important visual evidence about these interactions. Yet, focusing closely on the interaction can make it easy to forget the larger social context. For example, in 2009 in Oakland, California, Oscar Grant, a 23-year-old black man, was returning from New Year’s Eve celebrations when police got reports of a fight on a subway train. Police detained several people. Something happened, police pushed Grant to the ground, and Officer Johannes Mehserle shot him in the back. Mehserle claimed that Grant was reaching for his waistband—possibly for a gun—when he fired the fatal shot. In fact, Grant was unarmed. Individuals recorded the incident on their phones and official police cameras recorded it, too. The videos quickly went viral (McKinley, 2009). Many people saw Grant’s death as intentional and unprovoked, since he appeared to be cooperating. Yet, the court found Mehserle guilty of a lesser charge: involuntary manslaughter (McKinley, 2010). He was sentenced to two years in prison, which many people saw as a mild reprimand. The community—primarily African American but also including whites, Asians, and Hispanics—responded with both peaceful protests and violent rioting (Bulwa, 2010; Egelko, 2009).

The 2014 police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, sparked some of America’s most significant recent protests. The incident garnered international attention and led to investigations by Amnesty International, governmental agencies, and a host of independent researchers. Findings pointed to racial tensions within the predominately black community that stemmed from persistent discrimination by members of a nearly all-white police (Lowery, Leonnig, & Berman, 2014). The U.S. Department of Justice (2015) noted “a pattern or practice of unlawful conduct.”

Community members held a candlelight vigil on the evening of the shooting and several hundred went to the police headquarters, held their hands in the air, and chanted, “Hands up, don’t shoot” (Lurie, 2014). On the streets, the interaction between police and citizens escalated quickly. As the crowd grew, the police became concerned about unruly individuals; they responded by bringing in 150 police officers with riot gear. Anger mounted and protestors vandalized vehicles, broke windows, looted stores, and confronted the police (Tribune Wire Reports, 2014). The police used riot gear and other crowd control tactics, to little avail. Missouri Governor Jay Nixon turned the situation over to the Missouri State Highway Patrol, who took a different approach. They arrived without riot gear, vowed not to block the streets, and promised to listen to people’s concerns (Hartmann, 2014).

Racial tensions in Ferguson persisted and smaller protests continued for several months. A grand jury heard evidence regarding the criminal liability of the police officer (Darren Wilson) who fired the fatal shot. The governor declared a state of emergency in anticipation of the verdict. When the grand jury didn’t indict officer Wilson, peaceful protests (and some angry clashes) resumed, lasting eight days and involving tens of thousands of people in 170 American cities, Canada, England, and elsewhere (Almasy & Yan, 2014a, 2014b). Activists had come to Ferguson from across the country, many on long bus trips that echoed the Freedom Rides of the 1960s. Protestors chanted “Black Lives
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Matter,” a phrase first used in 2013 after the death of Trayvon Martin to focus attention on antiblack racism, especially “state-sanctioned violence” against blacks (Black Lives Matter Global Network, n.d.).

As in earlier decades, discontent generated a new movement for racial equality: the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Global Network. The movement has adopted some philosophies and tactics from the civil rights and Black Power movements but it’s modified and expanded them with a modern, intersectional approach. It seeks racial equality, but unlike earlier movements, it is explicitly against sexism, homophobia, and other forms of prejudice and discrimination. As with prior movements, public opinion about BLM is mixed: 55% of Americans support the movement while 34% oppose it (Neal, 2017).

In some ways, recent unrest mirrors the protests and riots that emerged from the civil rights movement. The protests and mass violence were spontaneous and expressed diffuse but bitter discontent with the racial status quo. They signaled the continuing racial inequality, urban poverty and despair, and the reality of separate communities, unequal and hostile.

Continuing Separation: Envisioning the Past and Future

The shooting of Michael Brown became a conduit for societal discussions about race-related issues. One topic that continues to produce fierce debate concerns Civil War monuments and other Confederate-related objects in public places such as parks, school grounds, and town squares.

Americans who disapprove of their presence say they represent a limited view of southern history that’s focused on only one perspective of the Civil War. Without sociohistorical context, like one might find in a museum, these objects symbolically honor the system of slavery and the people who supported it. For many, especially African Americans, the continued presence of these objects, especially in public spaces, suggests formal, continuing approval of antiblack racism and disregard for black Americans (Agiesta, 2015). The mayor of New Orleans articulated these concerns in a speech about the city’s removal of its remaining Civil War monuments:

It immediately begs the questions, why there are no slave ship monuments, no prominent markers on public land to remember the lynchings or the slave blocks; nothing to remember this long chapter of our lives; the pain, the sacrifice, the shame. . . . So for those self-appointed defenders of history and the monuments, they are eerily silent on what amounts to this historical malfeasance, a lie by omission. There is a difference between remembrance of history and reverence of it. (Landrieu, 2017)

Yet, meaning is subjective. Many Americans, especially southern whites, equate Confederate-era objects with “Southern pride.” They say this includes love of family, brotherhood, sacrifice in war, individualism, taking a stand, and the importance of honoring one’s ancestors. For them, keeping these objects in the public view is an important reminder of those ideals.

Generally, opinions about confederate symbols fall along racial lines. For example, in a 2015 survey, 75% of southern whites called the Confederate flag “a symbol of pride.” The same amount of southern African Americans (75%) saw it as “a symbol of racism.”
These differing views are part of what fueled protests in 2015 after South Carolina decided to remove the Confederate flag from its State House grounds (Rosenblatt & Siemasko, 2017), a decision hastened by Dylann Roof’s killing of nine African Americans at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston.

The flag’s placement at the capitol goes back to 1961, near the zenith of the civil rights movement. Until the 1940s, people rarely used the flag except in Civil War reenactments, to honor the dead, or in Confederate veterans’ parades (Bruzgulis, 2015; Strother, Ogorzalek, & Piston, 2017a, 2017b). However, its meaning changed, and it surged in popularity after the “Dixiecrat revolt” of 1948 when white southerners walked out of the Democratic National Convention to protest the party’s civil rights goals and actions.

Whatever its historic meaning, the Confederate battle flag became a symbol of segregation. A “flag fad” broke out across the country (and in military bases abroad), peaking between 1950–1952 when millions of flags in various forms (e.g., pins, cloth) were sold (Coski, 2009, p. 111). Some southern states began incorporating aspects of it into their state flags as visible reminders of their resistance to civil rights (Coski, 2009). These efforts increased with the decision in Brown v. the Board of Education. For example, two years after Brown, Georgia changed its state flag to highlight the Confederate emblem. A proposal for its change suggested a desire to honor southern tradition, yet it didn’t mention the Civil War or Confederate soldiers as part of its motivation. Rather, it said that school integration was “an affront and challenge to [those] traditions” and it vowed “to protect and maintain the segregation of the races in our schools” (Strother et al., 2017b).

Instead of redesigning its state flag, South Carolina started flying the Confederate flag atop its statehouse in 1961, ostensibly to celebrate the Confederate War Centennial but also establishing its segregationist stance. Some 50 odd years later, new civil rights activists would bring the flag down, in the spirit of joy and hope, amidst clamor and resentment, and as part of a continuing struggle between groups.

Nowhere has this contemporary struggle been more shocking than in Charlottesville, Virginia, at a white nationalist (WN) rally in 2017. The gathering was one of the largest of its kind in America in decades. Groups such as the KKK, neo-Nazis, neo-Confederates, the Proud Boys, and various militia came from around the country (Morlin, 2017).

Over the past few years, people have started calling these groups, collectively, the Alt-Right—as if they are merely an “alternative” choice. This label is part of a larger effort to become more mainstream. As such, at least one major group has replaced the swastikas on its uniforms and banners with the Odal Rune (ᛒ), a lesser known Nazi symbol (Kovaleski, Turkewitz, Goldstein, & Barry, 2016). Most rally participants proudly displayed symbols of their group membership such as shields emblazoned with Iron or St. Andrew’s crosses, white robes and pointed hats, and, for many, confederate flags—in this context, an unmistakable symbol of white supremacy.

They planned to protest the scheduled removal of a Robert E. Lee statue from a local park, but the event was part of a larger mission to “Unite the Right”—specifically, to build a coalition of white Americans who, a century ago, would have felt divided due to ethnic heritage (e.g., Irish, French) or region (e.g., northerners, southerners). One speaker noted this upending of the historical pattern when he rhetorically pitted whites against nonwhites, saying, “We are all White, and that means we are all in the same boat now” (Law, 2017). Participants carried torches and shouted phrases such as “You will not replace us” (sometimes “Jews will not replace us”). On one level, this phrase signifies their
resistance to the statue’s planned removal. On another, it suggests the participants’ sense of being replaced within the nation’s changing demographics, what some of them call “white genocide” (Kessler, 2017; Law, 2017). They were met with resistance by locals and activists (including “anti-fascists”) from around the country. Most of the protests were peaceful, but violent clashes resulted in three deaths and dozens of injuries, leading the governor to declare a state of emergency (Stolberg & Rosenthal, 2017).

In the context of the Dixiecrat Revolt (1948) and Brown (1954), we can view the addition of the Confederate symbols to state flags, city buildings, and public spaces as symbolic resistance to racial equality generally and to federal civil rights laws of the era specifically (Bruzgulis, 2015; Coski, 2009; Strother et al., 2017a, 2017b). Similarly, we can interpret 21st-century battles about race-related objects, such as Confederate monuments, as representative of group struggles to define meaning, history, and identity. Both provide evidence of the continuing separation between black and white Americans.

The Criminal Justice System and African Americans

No area of race relations seems more volatile and controversial than the relationship between the black community and the criminal justice system. There’s a long history of considerable mistrust and resentment between the police and minorities, and it’s common for African Americans to see the system as stacked against them.

A Biased Criminal Justice System?

The perception of bias isn’t without justification. As we’ve shown, the criminal justice system has a long history of mistreating or abusing African Americans (e.g., the Black Codes, during desegregation). Within this context, it’s understandable that African Americans are more likely than whites to view the police and the criminal justice system with suspicion. For example, a 2016 nationally representative poll found that 76% of black respondents felt the American criminal justice system is biased against blacks compared with 45% of whites. Alternatively, Gallup Poll data for 2011–2016 (combined) showed that twice as many whites (58%) have “a great deal or quite a lot” of confidence in the police compared with 29% of blacks (Newport, 2016).

In 2017, results from a comprehensive national study, Discrimination in America (DIA), showed comparable patterns. This study is interesting because researchers conducted five comparable surveys across five major racial/ethnic groups. In addition to asking about general perceptions about group experiences, questions also asked about personal experiences of discrimination that respondents felt happened because of their race. In this way, the surveys also assess perceptions of prejudice. Of course, it’s difficult to say whether someone’s personal experiences of discrimination shape general attitudes about discrimination or the reverse. Nevertheless, the findings are striking. Half (50%) of the African American participants reported personal experiences of discrimination by police because of their race—five times more than whites (10%; NPR et al., 2018, p. 8). More than half (54%) said that African Americans, as a group, “often” experience police discrimination and 29% said it “sometimes” happens (NPR et al., 2017a, p. 34, Q16).

The vast majority of social science research has documented pervasive bias in the criminal justice system, at all levels, against African Americans (and other minorities). In a comprehensive analysis of this research, Rosich (2007) concluded that
while blatant and overt discrimination has diminished over the past few decades, the biases that remain have powerful consequences, even though they often are subtler and harder to tease out. Even slight acts of racial discrimination throughout the stages of processing in the criminal justice system can have a cumulative effect, resulting in significant differences in racial outcomes. For example, recent research suggests that, in general, African Americans have higher rates of being stopped, handcuffed, and searched by police. They’re arrested and convicted at higher rates for offenses ranging from misdemeanors to murder. And they’re sentenced to more time than whites, even when criminal history, education, age, and other factors are similar (U.S. Sentencing Commission, 2017; see, for example, Alexander, 2012; Hetey, Monin, Maitreyi, & Eberhardt, 2016; Stevenson & Mayson, 2018).

The War on Drugs policies of the 1980s (see below) led to a massive increase in the American prison population. Black men, especially those with less formal education, were primarily affected (Neal & Rick, 2014). Since 2009, the prison population has declined due to policy reversals and decreased crime. The incarceration rate for African American men dropped faster than it did for whites, helping to shrink that racial incarceration gap by about 17%. Women’s racial incarceration gap declined more dramatically, in part because the incarceration rate for white women increased (The Sentencing Project, 2015, p. 2). Even with this progress, African Americans are five times more likely to be incarcerated than whites (Gramlich, 2018; Nellis, 2016). Since incarceration profoundly affects other life experiences, including family life, housing, employment, and the right to vote, it follows that black Americans would feel those effects more often (Alexander, 2012).

Education is a key factor affecting imprisonment. Pettit and Western (2004) studied men born between 1965 and 1969 and found that 20% of African Americans, compared with 3% of whites, were imprisoned by the time they were 30 years old. Nearly 60% of the African American men in this cohort who didn’t complete high school went to prison. Similarly, a 2010 study found that nearly a third of black men, then aged 26–29, had dropped out of high school or been otherwise institutionalized as youth (Neal & Rick, 2014, p. 3). By late 2015, 9.1% of black men aged 20–34 were incarcerated compared to 1.6% of white men of the same age, a slight decrease from 1985 rates. Men with lower levels of education suffered disproportionate rates of incarceration, and the racial incarceration gap between blacks and whites was significantly bigger for those who didn’t graduate high school (Pettit & Sykes, 2017, p. 25).

Youth incarceration rates reflect these general patterns: decreasing but with continuing racial disparities. In 2014, just over a million children were arrested; 34% were black—2.5 times the rate for whites (relative to population size). Additionally, black youth were more likely to go to prison rather than community-based residential programs and they received adult sentences nine times more frequently than whites (Children’s Defense Fund, 2017, pp. 32–33). Once they left the juvenile system, about two thirds dropped out of school, which led to a greater chance of incarceration (Aizer & Doyle, 2015; Children’s Defense Fund, 2017, p. 29).

The War on Drugs

Perhaps the most important reason for racial differences in adult incarceration rates is that, since the early 1980s, black men have been much more likely than white men to
be penalized by America’s “get tough” policy on drugs, especially crack cocaine. Crack is a cheap, smokable form of powdered cocaine used disproportionately by people of color from impoverished neighborhoods. As concern about a crack epidemic spread, police actively targeted inner-city areas using SWAT teams and “stop and frisk” methods that one federal judge recently called a “policy of indirect racial profiling” that violated constitutional rights (Goldstein, 2013). Street-level dealers (mostly young black men) felt the brunt of the anti-drug campaign, though it produced little decline in the number of people either dealing or using (Cooper, 2015).

Originally, people thought that crack was much more addictive than powdered cocaine and sentencing guidelines reflected this idea. For example, until 2010, federal law required a mandatory five-year prison term for possession of five grams of crack. A person would need to have one hundred times more powdered cocaine (500 grams) for a comparable sentence (Rosich, 2007). Thus, although it may have seemed race-neutral, the “war on drugs” produced significant racial disparities to such an extent that they constituted a form of institutional discrimination. The result was that many more poor minorities were (and still are) serving lengthy prison sentences compared to whites, who tend to use the powdered form of cocaine.

In 2010, the sentencing disparity was reduced by congressional action, and the mandatory five-year prison term for simple possession of crack cocaine was eliminated (Eckholm, 2010), yet Figure 5.1 illustrates the much higher drug arrest rate for blacks since the early 1980s. Notice that the arrest rate for African Americans spiked in the late 1980s, when the war on drugs began.

![FIGURE 5.1 Drug Abuse Arrests for Juveniles Age 10–17 by Race, 1980–2016](chart)

One national study, in 2010, focused on marijuana arrests and found huge racial disparities in every state except Hawaii. Overall, African Americans were roughly 3.7 times more likely to be arrested. Is this because black Americans use the drug more than white Americans? Decidedly not. It showed virtually no difference in drug use rates between racial/ethnic groups (American Civil Liberties Union, 2013, p. 9). In fact, a national survey conducted by the National Institutes of Health found that among youth, African Americans how lower usage rates of “nearly all drugs” compared with whites or Hispanics (Johnston, O’Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2012, p. 104).

So, what explains the huge racial disparity in arrests? African Americans are more likely to be policed, watched, stopped and frisked, and profiled than whites. Their greater vulnerability to arrest for marijuana, a relatively minor offense, is echoed in patterns throughout the criminal justice system. They go to prison on drug possession charges about five times more than whites; they’re also exonerated from wrongful convictions 12 times as often (Gross, Possley, & Stephens, 2017).

In her important thought-provoking book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Alexander (2012) argues that the massive racial disparities in the war on drugs amount to a new racial control system that’s halted civil rights–era advances. Millions of black men convicted under the racially biased drug laws aren’t only sent to prison; they also carry the stigma of a felony conviction their entire lives. Their prospects for legitimate employment are low, most lose the right to vote, and they’re ineligible for many government programs, including college loans. Their families and communities are also affected. We’ll talk about several of these issues later in the chapter.

**Racial Profiling**

*Racial profiling* happens when the police use a person’s race to help decide if they’re suspicious or dangerous (R. Kennedy, 2001, p. 3). This practice is significant because it lays the foundation for other racial inequalities in the criminal justice system, including incarceration. It’s like the first domino that gets knocked over, causing the others to fall.

Earlier, we reported some findings from the 2017 DIA surveys that compared people’s experiences across five racial/ethnic groups. Sixty percent (60%) of black participants reported that they or a family member had been “unfairly stopped” or “unfairly treated” by the police because of race; that’s 10 times higher than whites (6%; NPR et al., 2018, p. 9). Almost two thirds of blacks (67%) living in the suburbs reported being “unfairly stopped” or “unfairly treated” by police compared with about half (49%) in urban areas (NPR et al., 2017a, p. 8), perhaps seeming “more suspicious” in the suburban context. Another national survey found that 17% of young black men felt “treated unfairly” by police within the previous 30 days (Newport, 2013). Some argue that humiliating encounters with police (e.g., being questioned for “driving while black”) are so common, they’re almost an unwelcome rite of passage for black men (Butler, 2018; Coates, 2015; R. Kennedy, 2001, p. 7).

Whether by policy or informal mechanisms, the tendency to focus on African Americans and to follow, stop, and question them disproportionately is a form of discrimination that generates resentment and increases the distrust and fear many African Americans feel toward their local police forces (Hall, Hall, & Perry, 2016). For example,
61% of black respondents in the DIA survey felt that local police were “more likely to use unnecessary force on a Black person than on a white person in the same situation.” Because of concerns, 27% of African Americans limited their activities (e.g., driving) to avoid contact with police and 31% didn’t call the police, even when needed; the rate for whites (2%) was 15 times lower (NPR et al., 2017a, p. 17).

Data support some of these concerns: Black boys and men (15–34 years old) are killed in officer-related shootings at significantly higher rates than others (9–16 times more, depending on the data used; Fryer, 2018; see also Arthur, Dolven, Hamilton, McCann, & Sherman, 2017; Kindy, Fisher, Tate, & Jenkins, 2015; Swain, Laughland, Larrey, & McCarthy, 2015). In a 2016 survey of more than 8,000 police officers in America, almost half (42%) said they “nearly always or often have serious concerns about their safety” and this may lead to hypervigilance, which may play a role in these shootings. However, black officers were about twice as likely as white officers (57% vs. 27%) to say that recent deaths of blacks during encounters with police are signs of broader problems, not isolated incidents (Morin, Parker, Stepler, & Mercer, 2017).

### Increasing Class Inequality

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

#### The Black Middle Class

A small black middle class, based largely on occupations and businesses serving only the African American community, had existed since before the Civil War (Frazier, 1957). Has this more affluent segment benefited from increasing societal acceptance, civil rights legislation, and affirmative action programs? Has the black middle class continued to increase in size and affluence?

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

The size and prosperity of the black middle class was always less than people assume. Between 1996 and 2002, the percentage of middle- and upper-class African Americans never exceeded 25% of the black population. For whites, it was 60%—more than twice the size of blacks (Kochhar, 2004). Oliver and Shapiro (2006) studied racial differences in wealth, which includes income and all other financial assets (e.g., home value, cars, savings, other property). Prior to the 2007 economic crisis, the African American middle class was smaller than the white middle class and much less affluent.

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

Wealth is defined first by net worth which includes all assets (e.g., houses, cars) minus debt. The second measure, net financial assets, is the same as net worth but excludes the value of a person’s home and cars. Net financial assets are a better gauge of the resources
available to invest in children’s education or financing a new business (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006, pp. 60–62).

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

The bad economic times that began in 2007 affected virtually all Americans, but they’ve been disproportionally hard on African Americans. In 2016, the median wealth of white households was $171,000, well below the levels for 2007 but 10 times greater than black households ($17,000) (Kochhar & Cilluffo, 2017. See also Kochhar, Fry, & Taylor, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2016, p. 25; Shapiro, Meschede, & Osoro, 2013, p. 2).

These economic differences are due partly to discrimination in the present and partly to the racial gaps in income, wealth, and economic opportunity inherited from past generations. Racial differences in homeownership are a key component of the racial wealth gap (Shapiro et al., 2013, p. 4). The greater economic marginality of the black middle class today is a form of past-in-present institutional discrimination. White parents (and grandparents) enjoyed much higher rates of homeownership, which allowed them to finance their children’s college education and subsidize business ventures and other home mortgages (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006). Institutional discrimination such as
redlining (see Chapter 4) meant that black parents (and grandparents) didn’t have this same resource and advantage.

Not only is their economic position more marginal, but middle-class blacks commonly report that they’re unable to escape the narrow straitjacket of race. No matter what their level of success, occupation, or professional accomplishments, many people still see race—blackness—as their primary defining characteristic (Benjamin, 2005; Cose, 1993; Hughes & Thomas, 1998). Without denying the advances of some, many analysts argue that the stigma of race still sharply limits African Americans’ life chances. (We’ll discuss this in upcoming sections.)

Some people express concern that greater class differentiation within the African American community may decrease its solidarity and cohesion. More income inequality among blacks exists than ever before; the urban poor are at one extreme and some of the wealthiest people in the world are at the other. If the black middle class increases, will class divisions grow as they have for whites? If so, will this further marginalize impoverished blacks, especially those in poor urban areas?

**Urban Poverty**

African Americans have become an urban minority group, and their fate is inextricably bound to that of America’s cities (Figure 4.2). In other words, we can’t successfully address black–white relations without dealing with urban issues, and vice versa.

As you saw in Chapter 4, automation and mechanization in the workplace eliminated many manual labor jobs that sustained city dwellers in earlier decades (Kasarda, 1989). The manufacturing (secondary) segment of the labor force has shrunk, and the service sector has continued to expand. The more-desirable jobs in the service sector have increasingly demanding educational prerequisites. The service sector jobs available to people with lower educational credentials pay low wages—often less than what’s needed for essentials; they offer low security and few (if any) benefits or opportunities for advancement. This form of past-in-present institutional discrimination is a powerful disadvantage for colonized groups such as African Americans, who were excluded from educational opportunities for centuries.

Furthermore, many blue-collar jobs that escaped automation have migrated from cities. Industrialists have moved their businesses to areas where labor is cheaper, unions have less power, and taxes are lower. This movement to the suburbs and to the Sunbelt has been devastating for people living in city centers (Wilson, 1996). Historically, poor transportation systems, the absence of affordable housing (and housing discrimination and segregation, specifically) combined to keep poor blacks (and other people of color) confined to center-city neighborhoods, distant from opportunities for jobs and economic improvement (Feagin, 2001, pp. 159–160; Kasarda, 1989; Massey & Denton, 1993).

Sociologist Rogelio Saenz (2005) studied the 15 largest metropolitan areas in America and found that blacks were much more likely than whites to live in highly impoverished neighborhoods, cut off from the “economic opportunities, services, and institutions that families need to succeed” (para. 2). Their greater vulnerability and social and geographical isolation was pervasive. In addition to higher rates of poverty and unemployment, Saenz found substantial differences in their access to resources that most people of higher economic means take for granted (e.g., cars, phones). For example, blacks were three times less likely to have a car and thus had no independent means to get to jobs outside
city centers and they were up to eight times less likely to have a telephone. By 2013, that latter reality had improved: 92% of African Americans owned cell phones and 56% had smartphones (Smith, 2014).

After some improvements in the late 20th century, the racial concentration of poverty increased. Since 2000, the percentage of African Americans living in “high poverty neighborhoods” (with more than 40% of the population living below the poverty level) increased from 19% to 25%. Comparatively, only about 8% of whites did (Jargowsky, 2015, p. 6).

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

For more than 60 years, impoverished African Americans were increasingly concentrated in narrowly delimited urban areas (“the ghetto”) where poverty was compounded and reinforced by other problems, including joblessness, high school dropout rates, crime, drug use, and teenage pregnancy, and inadequate support to move up the economic ladder. These increasingly isolated neighborhoods were fertile grounds for the development of oppositional cultures, which reject or invert the values of the larger society. The black urban counterculture may be most visible in music, fashion, and other forms of popular culture, but it’s also manifested in a widespread lack of trust in the larger society, especially whites. An urban underclass, barred from the mainstream economy and the primary labor force and consisting largely of poor African Americans and other minority groups of color, has become a prominent and perhaps permanent feature of the American landscape (Kasarda, 1989; Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1987, 1996, 2009).

Consider this comparison between today’s African American underclass and black southerners under de jure segregation:

- In both eras, a large segment of the African American population was cut off from opportunities for success and growth.
- In the earlier era, African Americans were isolated in rural areas; now, they’re more likely to be in urban areas, especially city centers.
- Historically, escape from segregation was limited primarily by political and legal restrictions and blatant racial prejudice; escape from poverty in the present is limited by economic and educational deficits and a subtler and amorphous prejudice.

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

**Modern Institutional Discrimination**

The processes that maintain contemporary racial inequality are indirect and sometimes difficult to measure and document. They often flow from blatant racial discrimination of
the past but aren’t overtly racial today. They operate through a series of cumulative effects that tend to filter black Americans into less-desirable positions in education, housing, the criminal justice system, and the job market. To better understand this, we’ll consider two areas in which racial class inequalities are perpetuated: employment networks that were closed in the past and remain shut today and the greater vulnerability of the black community to economic hardships in the larger society.

Closed Networks and Racial Exclusion

Royster (2003) dramatically illustrated the continuing importance of race as a primary factor in the perpetuation of class inequality through her extensive interviews with black and white graduates of a Baltimore trade school. Her respondents had all completed the same curricula and earned similar grades, so they were nearly identical in terms of work credentials. Yet, the black graduates were employed less often in the trades for which they had been educated, had lower wages and fewer promotions, and experienced longer periods of unemployment. Virtually every white graduate found secure and reasonably lucrative employment. The black graduates, in stark contrast, were usually unable to stay in the trades and became low-skilled, low-paid service sector workers instead.

The differences couldn’t be explained by training or personality characteristics. What really mattered was not what you know but who you know. White graduates had access to networks of referrals and recruitment that linked them to the job market in ways that weren’t available to black graduates. In job searches, whites were assisted more fully by their instructors and were able to use intraracial networks of family and friends, connections so powerful that they “assured even the worst [white] troublemaker a solid place in the blue-collar fold” (Royster, 2003, p. 78). Though not specifically about race, Rivera’s (2015) analysis of elite students uncovered a similar process. Parents and students used their social networks to share important information about opportunities (e.g., internships) and to broaden connections, both of which provided an advantage to get into elite colleges or work in the most desirable jobs (p. 7).

Similarly, DiTomaso (2013) interviewed 246 working- and middle-class whites and found that more than two thirds (70%) of their jobs came from personal networks (e.g., friends, neighbors, family). Given that white social networks are overwhelmingly white, it stands to reason that blacks are excluded from these employment networks. Others got jobs as the result of favors. DiTomaso argues that such favors, within informal networks, have the same effect as overt discrimination.

Employment is particularly important for recent college graduates, not only for income but also because it provides crucial development opportunities for skills and professional networks (the latter can also help develop informal networks). Economists say professional networks affect earnings over one’s lifetime (Ross, 2014). This is significant because even when black students graduate from college, their unemployment rates are higher than those of whites (Jones & Schmitt, 2014; Ross, 2014). Thus, their potential for future income is decreased more intensely.

These results run contrary to some deeply held American values, most notably the widespread, strong belief that success in life comes from individual effort and self-discipline. A recent survey documents the strength of this faith. Researchers asked a representative sample of adult Americans whether they thought people got ahead by hard work, luck, or a
combination of the two. More than two thirds (69%), said “hard work,” and another 20% chose “hard work and luck equally” (National Opinion Research Council, 1972–2016). This overwhelming belief in the importance of individual effort echoes human capital theory and other traditional sociological perspectives on assimilation discussed in Chapter 2.

Royster’s (2003), DiTomaso’s (2013), and Rivera’s (2015) research demonstrates that the American faith in the power of hard work alone is simply wrong. To the contrary, access to jobs is influenced by networks of personal relationships that are decidedly not open to everyone. These subtle patterns of exclusion and closed intraracial networks are more difficult to document than the blatant discrimination that was at the core of Jim Crow segregation, but they can be just as devastating in their effects and just as powerful as mechanisms for perpetuating racial gaps in income and employment.

The Differential Impact of Hard Times

Because of their greater vulnerability, African Americans (and other racial minorities) are more likely to suffer from the widespread economic problems that affect society. They’ll feel the impact earlier and more deeply, and they’ll be the last to recover. As you’ve seen, the 2007 recession affected almost everyone in some way (e.g., job loss, loss of health care coverage, increasing poverty, home foreclosures). How did it affect African Americans?

Consider the unemployment rate, which generally runs twice as high for blacks as for whites. During the 2007 recession, unemployment increased for all groups. However, as Figure 5.3 shows, the unemployment rate for blacks rose at a steeper angle and went to a

FIGURE 5.3 Unemployment Rate by Race in United States, 1972–2018

much higher peak. The highest rate for whites was 8.7%, about 55% of the peak rate of 15.8% for blacks. Also, the white unemployment rate leveled off and began decreasing somewhat earlier than the rate for African Americans.

Additionally, the recession disproportionately affected African American homeownership and unemployment rates. For most Americans, homeownership both reflects and provides a crucial source of wealth. For example, people can take out business and school loans using their houses as collateral. Therefore, homeownership can help families achieve upward social mobility (Oliver & Shapiro, 2008, p. A9).

In addition to the influence of redlining on residential segregation, Oliver and Shapiro (2008) found that black Americans and other minority groups of color were more than three times as likely as whites to be victimized by toxic subprime home loans and more than twice as likely to suffer foreclosure as a result. Subprime home loans were new financial instruments that enabled many previously ineligible people to qualify for home mortgages. Predatory lenders marketed the loans especially to more vulnerable populations, and the deals had hidden costs, higher interest rates, and other features that made keeping up with payments difficult. One result of the housing market's collapse was “the greatest loss of financial wealth” in the African American community (Coates, 2014; Oliver & Shapiro, 2008, p. A11). By 2017, only 43% of African Americans were home owners versus 72% of whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017a, p. 9).

Thus, a group that was already more vulnerable and economically marginalized suffered the greatest proportional loss—an economic collapse that will take years to recover from. Societal disasters such as the recent recession aren’t shared equally by everyone; they’re especially severe for the most vulnerable groups with the most tenuous connections to prosperity and affluence. Though it may not be obvious, this persistent racial inequality reflects decades of blatant, direct, state-supported segregation in America’s past.

The Family Institution and the Culture of Poverty

African American family life has been a continuing source of public concern and controversy. Some analysts see African American families as structurally weak compared to white families. They assert that particular family forms are the cause of African Americans’ problems, such as persistent poverty. The most famous study in this tradition was the 1965 Moynihan Report, which focused on African Americans’ higher rates of divorce, separation, desertion, and children born to unmarried women (compared to whites). Moynihan asserted that these factors indicated a crumbling black family structure that would perpetuate a cycle of poverty for generations (p. iii). Of course, family structure is not monolithic, there is no “one” family for any race or ethnic group, though we see patterns ebb and flow over time and place. Today, for example, the aspects of family life that concerned Moynihan are even more pronounced in both black and white heterosexual couples. To illustrate, Figure 5.4 compares the percentage of households headed by women (black and white) with the percentage of heterosexual households headed by married couples. (Note that the trends seem to have stabilized since the mid-1990s.)

The Moynihan Report implicitly located the problems associated with urban poverty within the African American community, particularly African American families.
He saw the black family as “broken” and in need of being fixed. Moynihan’s argument is consistent with the idea of a culture of poverty or the belief that poor people have maladaptive beliefs, values, norms, and other qualities that make and keep them poor. We’ll discuss this idea more in Chapter 7, but to summarize, poverty encourages fatalism or the sense that your destiny is beyond your control. As a result, you focus on the present, not the future. If you can’t guarantee what happens in the future, why not enjoy life now? The supposed desire for instant gratification among the poor features prominently in this theory and is juxtaposed with the ability to defer gratification (thought to be essential for middle-class success). According to this theory, other problematic characteristics of the poor include tendencies toward violence, school failure, authoritarianism, alcoholism, and family desertion by men (Lewis, 1959, 1965, 1966; for a recent reprise of the debate over the culture of poverty concept, see Small, Harding, & Lamont, 2010; Steinberg, 2011).

Belief in a culture of poverty leads to the conclusion that if the poor could adopt “good” (i.e., white, middle-class) values and norms, they wouldn’t suffer from the problems of urban poverty. Note that this approach is consistent with the traditional assimilationist perspective and human capital theory.

Another perspective, more consistent with the theories in this book, sees African American family structure as the result of urban poverty rather than a cause of it. For example, in impoverished neighborhoods, the number of men able to economically support their families has been reduced by high rates of unemployment, incarceration, and mortality (e.g., through violence). These conditions are, in turn, created by the concentration of urban poverty and the growth of the “underclass” (Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1996, 2009).
Even when men are available, they may not bring enough human or social capital to the table for marriage to “make sense.” For example, both Boo (2001b) and Edin and Kefalas (2005) suggest that young, poor black (and Latina) girls and women want to marry, but many do a cost–benefit analysis before settling down. If a man was (or may be) unemployed or incarcerated, they may drain family resources rather than contribute to them. Similarly, Boo (2001a) shows how “welfare reform” disincentivized marriage (and even cohabitation) by cutting off forms of government aid once single women became partnered. Thus, with a smaller pool of eligible partners, impoverished women became heads of households, responsible for all aspects of family life.

Stack’s (1974) ethnography of a poor, black, urban community challenged Moynihan’s general assumptions. Because she became a participant in the community, she was able to view it in the long term and from an insider perspective. She argued that participants used adaptive strategies to cope with issues of poverty. Community members defined family broadly to include fictive kin (those you “adopt” as family), people moved around as necessity dictated, and members engaged in a lot of “swapping” as needed, sharing resources (food, money) and even long-term child care in creative, collaborative ways. From an outsider’s perspective, such as Moynihan’s, these families may have seemed disorganized and lacking in self-sufficiency. Stack shows they definitely didn’t suffer from fatalism.

Census data shows the effect of intersecting gender, race, and marital statuses on family income. In 2016, 9.3% of men lived in poverty; the rate for women was 12.8%. That may not seem much, but women’s rate is 38% higher than men’s (a gender effect). About 1 in 10 (9.7%) of white women are poor. The rate is more than double for black women; more than 1 in 5 (21.4%) are poor (a race effect). More than a third (35.3%) of all single-women–headed households are poor—including 11% of them who work full-time (an effect of having only one income). Given the intersection of these three variables, it may not surprise you that families headed by single black mothers have higher rates of poverty (38.8%) compared to households headed by single white mothers (30.2%; National Women’s Law Center, 2017, pp. 1–3).

Woman-headed families tend to be poor not because they’re weak but because of the lower wages accorded to women generally and to African American women in particular (see Figure 5.5). Note that Figure 5.5 includes only full-time, year-round workers and that wages are in 2017 dollars (to control for the effects of inflation). Black woman workers have the lowest wages throughout this period. Also note that the gap between black women and white men has narrowed over the years. In 1955, black women earned about a third of what white men earned. In 2017, the gap stood at about 66% (after shrinking to just under 70% in 2005), largely because men’s wages (for African Americans and whites) have been relatively flat since the 1970s, while women’s wages (for whites and African Americans) have risen. This pattern reflects the impact of deindustrialization: the shift from manufacturing, which has eliminated many blue-collar jobs, and the rise of employment sectors in which women tend to be more concentrated.

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

**Mixed Race and New Racial Identities**

As you’ve learned, Americans traditionally see race as a simple dichotomy: People are either black or white. Historically, the social convention of the “one-drop rule” meant that people of mixed racial descent were classified as black. To illustrate, consider the life of Gregory “Billy” Williams, a boy growing up in the segregated South in the late 1940s and early 1950s. When Billy was 10, his father revealed that he was “half-colored.” Under the one-drop rule, that made Billy black. He at first refused to believe his father: “I’m not colored, I’m white! I look white! I’ve always been white! I go to the ‘whites only’ school, ‘whites only’ movie theaters, and ‘whites only’ swimming pool” (Williams, 1995, p. 34). Gradually, he came to realize that his life—not only his opportunities and his relations with others but his very identity—had been transformed by his father’s revelation.

Historically, people like Williams had few choices: Others classified him as black, and the rigid social conventions of the day forced him to accept that identity, with all its implications. Today, five decades after the formal end of Jim Crow, Americans are confronting the limitations of this dichotomous racial convention. Multiracial people are increasing...
in number and some are the most well-known people in America, or even in the world. President Obama is one example; others include singers Alicia Keys and Mariah Carey, Yankees baseball star Derek Jeter, actor Halle Berry, and professional golfer Tiger Woods (who calls himself *Cablanasian*: Caucasian, black, Native American, and Asian).

How do people of multiracial descent define themselves today? How do others define them? Have the old understandings of race become irrelevant? Ideas are changing rapidly, especially among young people.

One important study illustrates some possible identities for mixed-race individuals. Rockquemore and Brunsma (2008) interviewed several hundred multiracial college students and narrowed their sample to people with one white and one black parent. Their sample isn’t representative; their findings might not apply to all biracial Americans. Nevertheless, their study provides insights into the conceptually complex and highly variable nature of multiracial identity (p. 50).

1. The most common racial identity was the border identity. These respondents (58% of the sample) didn’t consider themselves black or white. They saw themselves as members of a third, separate category linked to both groups. One respondent declared, “I’m not black, I’m biracial” (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008, p. 43). The authors make a further distinction:
   
   a. Some people’s border identities are “validated” or accepted by others, such as family and friends and the community.
   
   b. Some border identities are “unvalidated” by others. These individuals see themselves as biracial but others classify them as black. For example, one respondent said, “I consider myself biracial but I experience the world as a black person” (p. 45). This disconnect may result from persistent traditional dichotomous ways of thinking about race, which makes it hard for some people to recognize or understand the category of biracial. People in this category are of special interest because of the tensions created by the conflict between their self-image and the way others define them.

2. The second most common identity was the singular identity. These individuals saw themselves as exclusively black (13%) or exclusively white (3%). Singular identity is most consistent with Americans’ traditional constructions of race. The authors argue that the fact that this identity is not the most common illustrates the complexity of racial identity for biracial people.

3. A third identity was the transcendent identity (15%). These respondents rejected the whole notion of race, including traditional categories of black and white. They wanted people to see them as unique individuals and didn’t want to be placed in a category, especially because of assumptions related to those categories (e.g., character, intelligence). These respondents constantly battled to avoid classification. One respondent’s remarks are illustrative:

   I’m just John, you know? . . . I’m a good guy, just like me for that. . . . When I came here (to college), it was like I was almost forced to look at other people as being white, black, Asian, or Hispanic. And so now, I’m still trying to go, “I’m just John,” but uh, you gotta be something. (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008, p. 49)
4. The final racial identity is the least common (4%) but perhaps the most interesting: protean. These individuals’ racial identity changes as they move between groups and across different social contexts. They slip effortlessly from one to the other and are accepted by both groups as members. It’s common for people to adjust their behavior in different situations (e.g., a fraternity party vs. a family Thanksgiving dinner), but these individuals also change their identity and adjust who they are to different circumstances. Respondents with the protean identity felt empowered by their ability to fit in with diverse groups and felt they possessed a high degree of “cultural savvy” (p. 47) which, in an increasingly diverse, multicultural, and multiracial society, is a strength.

What can we conclude? Ideas about race as a dichotomy (e.g., the one-drop rule) live on but in weakened forms. Racial identity is evolving and becoming more complex. Similar to other aspects of self-identity, racial identity isn’t permanent or fixed; it’s contingent on social context. Biracial people have choices about identity and they’re contingent on different factors (such as personal appearance) but they’re always made in the context of a highly race-conscious society with long and strong traditions of racism and prejudice (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

12. This section examined several issues and trends in contemporary black–white relations. In your opinion, which of these is most important? Why?

13. To what extent do black and white Americans live in different worlds? Is it fair to characterize contemporary black–white relations as “continuing separation”? Why or why not?

14. How has the social construction of race in America evolved since slavery? How is that related to wider social changes? How has that affected racial identity?

PREJUDICE AND MODERN RACISM

Some of the strongest evidence that traditional, overt antiblack prejudice is declining comes from public opinion research. Figure 5.6 uses survey data from representative samples of Americans to show the dramatic decline since the mid-20th century. In 1942, the vast majority—more than 70%—of white Americans thought that black and white children should attend different schools. Forty years later, in 1982, support for separate schools had dropped to less than 10%. Similarly, support for the right of white people to maintain separate neighborhoods declined from 65% in 1942 to 18% in the early 1990s.

The overall trend is unmistakable: There’s been a dramatic decline in support for prejudiced statements since World War II. In the early 1940s, most white Americans supported prejudiced views. In recent years, only a small portion did.
However, you shouldn’t accept this information at face value. First, the survey items also show that prejudice has not vanished. A percentage of the white population continues to endorse highly prejudicial sentiments. Second, the polls show what people say they think, which can be different from what they truly believe. Figure 5.6 may document a decline in people’s willingness to admit their prejudice as much as it does an actual change in attitudes. Another possibility is that the figure is misleading—that prejudice remains substantial but takes new forms that we refer to as symbolic, color-blind, or modern racism (see Chapter 1). Rather than the overt hostilities of the past, modern racism is a more subtle, complex, and indirect way of thinking or expressing negative feelings about minority groups or about one’s opposition to changes in dominant–minority relations (see Bobo, 1988, 2001; Bobo, Charles, Krysan, & Simmons, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2006; Kinder & Sears, 1981; Kluegel & Smith, 1982; McConahy, 1986; Sears, 1988; for a review, see Quillian, 2006).

Modern racists have negative feelings (the affective aspect of prejudice) toward minority groups; however, they reject the idea of biological inferiority and don’t think in terms of traditional stereotypes. Instead, modern racists express their prejudice indirectly and subtly. The attitudes that define modern racism are generally consistent with some tenets of the traditional assimilation perspective, especially human capital theory and the Protestant ethic—the traditional American value system that stresses individual responsibility and the importance of hard work. Modern racists believe the following:
• They aren’t prejudiced.

• Serious racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination in American society no longer exists.

• Because discrimination no longer exists, efforts to reduce inequality—such as affirmative action—are unjustified and unfair. Minority groups—especially African Americans—have already gotten more than they deserve (Sears & Henry, 2003).

• Any remaining racial or ethnic inequality is the fault of minority group members who suffer from largely self-imposed cultural disadvantages (for example, people who don’t “make it” simply don’t work hard enough).

The last tenet is particularly important: Traditional racists explained racial inequality as the result of “racial inferiority” or biological deficiencies. Modern racists explain it as the result of cultural deficiencies. For example, many people took President Obama’s election in 2008 (and in 2012) as a sign that America is post-racial and that race no longer matters, despite “substantial evidence to the contrary” (Dawson & Bobo, 2009, p. 247). If America is post-racial, then racial inequality must be the result of minority groups’ values and behaviors, not the powerful historical processes and policy choices of the dominant group. In other words, the problems of inequality lie with the people experiencing the inequality—not society (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Dawson & Bobo, 2009; Schorr, 2008; see Chavez-Dueñas, Adames, & Organista, 2013).

To illustrate the difference between traditional prejudice and modern racism, consider the results of a recent survey administered to a representative sample of Americans (National Opinion Research Council, 1972–2016). Researchers asked people to choose up to four reasons why black people, on average, have “worse jobs, income, and housing than white people.” Respondents could choose as many explanations as they wanted.

One explanation, consistent with traditional or overt antiblack prejudice, attributed racial inequality to the genetic or biological inferiority of African Americans (“The differences are mainly because blacks have less inborn ability to learn”). Less than 7% of the white respondents chose this explanation. A second explanation attributed continuing racial inequality to discrimination, and a third to the lack of opportunity for an education. Of white respondents, 38% chose the former and 50% chose the latter.

A fourth explanation, consistent with modern racism, attributes racial inequality to a lack of effort by African Americans (“The differences are because most blacks just don’t have the motivation or willpower to pull themselves up out of poverty”). Of the white respondents, 42% chose this explanation, the second most popular of the four.

Thus, the survey found support for the idea that racial inequality resulted from discrimination and lack of educational opportunities, views that are consistent with the analysis in this book. It found relatively little support for traditional antiblack prejudice based on biological stereotypes.

However, the second most endorsed explanation was that continuing racial inequality lies within the African American community, not society. This suggests that African Americans could solve their own problems but aren’t willing to do so.
Modern racism ignores centuries of historic oppression and continuing institutional discrimination. This thinking contributes to stereotypes about minority group members (e.g., “they’re lazy”), which encourages the expression of negative attitudes and actions against them.

Modern racism is consistently correlated with opposition to policies and programs intended to reduce racial inequality (Bobo, 2001, p. 292; Quillian, 2006). In the 2016 survey summarized earlier, for example, respondents who blamed continuing racial inequality on the lack of motivation or willpower of blacks—the “modern racists”—were the least likely to support affirmative action programs and government help for blacks (see Figure 5.7). In fact, they’re less supportive than traditional racists who chose the “inborn ability” explanation.

Many researchers argue that modern racism has taken the place of traditional, overt prejudice. If this is correct, then America’s “report card” on declining racial hostility is mixed. We shouldn’t understate the importance of the fading of overt prejudice. Yet, we can’t ignore evidence that antiblack prejudice has changed forms rather than declined in degree. Subtle and diffuse prejudice may be preferable to the blunt and vicious kind, but it shouldn’t be mistaken for the demise of prejudice.

How can we address the pervasive problems of racial inequality in the present atmosphere of modern racism? Many people advocate a “color-blind” approach: individuals, organizations, and institutions should ignore race and treat everyone the same. This approach seems sensible to many people because, at first glance, there aren’t obvious limits on African Americans’ life chances like there were under slavery or Jim Crow.
Others see a color-blind approach as doomed to fail. They argue that to end racial inequality and deal with the legacy of racism, society must use race-conscious programs that explicitly address the problems of race and racism. They assert that color-blind strategies amount to inaction, which will perpetuate (or widen) the present racial equality gap.

ASSIMILATION AND PLURALISM

In this section, we’ll use the major concepts from Gordon’s model of assimilation to assess the current status of African Americans. We can’t address everything in this book, so consider these section overviews worthy of further exploration.

Acculturation

The Blauner hypothesis states that the culture of groups created by colonization will be attacked, denigrated, and, if possible, eliminated. Evidence seems to validate this assertion. As discussed in the Assimilation section of Chapter 3, slavery took African culture(s) from enslaved people and their descendants. As a relatively powerless, colonized minority group, slaves had few opportunities to preserve their heritage, though researchers have found traces of it in kinship systems, music, folklore, language, foodways, philosophies, and other dimensions of culture (see Levine, 1977; Stuckey, 1987).

Cultural domination continued under Jim Crow, albeit through a different structural arrangement. Under slavery, slaves and their owners worked near one another and interracial contact was common. Under de jure segregation, intergroup contact between blacks and whites diminished. After slavery ended, African Americans had more autonomy to create their own communities with distinct cultures. Since then, African Americans have continued to share and create a common culture with the dominant society while creating room to explore their unique cultural traditions.

The Black Power movement of the 1960s may have slowed (or even reversed) the acculturation process. Since then, African Americans have become increasingly interested in African culture and in celebrating the innumerable contributions of African Americans to America. For example, millions of people celebrate Kwanzaa, a holiday designed in the late 1960s to connect African Americans to African heritage. Likewise, after the 1976 mini-series, Roots, some couples incorporated “jumping the broom,” into their weddings. This tradition recently reappeared on the popular television shows Grey’s Anatomy and This Is Us.

The resurgence of Afrofuturism is another exciting expression of this trend. Think of Afrofuturism as a sci-fi approach to exploring alternate realities for black people (and others) around the world where past, present, and future blur and where white domination doesn’t exist. The comic book/film, Black Panther, Kendrick Lamar’s “All the Stars” video (featuring SZA), and the amazing story of Janelle Monáe’s alter-ego, Cindi Mayweather (who lives 600 years in the future) are just some examples. Afrofuturism is about creation. Then again, similar traditions and contributions have existed all along, in different forms (e.g., Parliament/Funkadelic, Sun Ra); so, they may not be signs of stalled acculturation. Indeed, their recognition by the dominant culture may signal some degree of its willingness to move toward increased racial equality.
Secondary Structural Assimilation

Structural assimilation (integration) involves two phases. Secondary structural assimilation refers to integration in more public areas (e.g., the job market, schools, and political institutions). In the next sections, we’ll assess structural assimilation by comparing different groups’ residential patterns, income distributions, job profiles, political power, and education. Later, we’ll discuss primary structural assimilation in intimate associations, such as friendship and intermarriage.

Residential Patterns

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

Residential segregation between African Americans and whites peaked toward the end of the Jim Crow era, in the 1960s and 1970s. In recent decades, it’s decreased (Logan & Stults, 2011). Figure 5.9 uses census data from 1980–2010 to show residential segregation between white and black Americans. We also include residential segregation scores between white and Hispanic Americans and white and Asian Americans. We’ll focus on black Americans here and discuss the other groups in Chapters 7 and 8, respectively.

Figure 5.9 uses a statistic called the dissimilarity index, which shows the degree to which groups are not evenly spread across neighborhoods or census tracts. Specifically, the index is the percentage of each group that would have to move to a different tract to achieve integration. A score above 60 indicates extreme segregation.

People seeking evidence of improved relations between blacks and whites (“the glass is half-full”) should note the falling scores for racial residential segregation between 1980 and 2010 and, especially, that the dissimilarity index dipped to slightly below 60 in the most recent year. However, people with a “glass is half-empty” mind frame might notice that racial residential segregation continues and that African Americans are much more segregated from whites than the other two groups.

The Great Migration did little to end residential segregation, which tends to be highest in the older industrial cities of the Northeast and upper Midwest. In fact, the five most residentially segregated large metropolitan areas in 2010 weren’t in southern or border states but were (in rank order) in Detroit, Milwaukee, New York, Newark, and Chicago (Logan & Stults, 2011, p. 6).

Military service didn’t help much, either. Post-WWII, many white families took advantage of the G.I. Bill’s extremely low interest rates, which made first-time home purchases possible for substantial numbers of Americans. Though not explicitly racist, this federal program was enacted on the local level, and most banks (or their individual representatives) would not do business with African Americans, essentially stripping them of this benefit (Coates, 2014). As America’s first suburbs rose, black veterans and their families were shut out.
FIGURE 5.8  Geographical Distribution of the African American Population, 2010

Source: Rastogi, Johnson, Hoefler, and Drewery, 2011, p. 11.
As you've learned, continuing patterns of residential segregation are reinforced by many practices, including racial steering by real estate agents (guiding clients to same-race housing areas) and barely disguised discrimination. Discriminatory banking practices continue as well. For example, in 2016, the Department of Justice and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau charged a Mississippi-based bank with denying personal and business loans for African Americans twice as often as comparable whites. Additionally, the bank “structured its business to avoid and discourage consumers in minority neighborhoods from accessing mortgages” (Lane, 2016). There’s no sign saying, “Keep out!” as in the past; however, the effects are similar.

Contrary to popular beliefs among whites, personal preference for living in same-race neighborhoods plays a small role in these patterns. Studies generally find that African Americans prefer to live in areas split 50/50 between African Americans and whites; however, whites much prefer neighborhoods with low percentages of African Americans or Latinos (e.g., see Havekes, Bader, & Krysan, 2016; Krysan & Farley, 2002, p. 949; Lewis, Emerson, & Klineberg, 2011). The social class and income differences between African Americans and whites are also relatively minor factors in perpetuating residential segregation, as the members of the black middle class are as likely to be segregated as the poor (Stoll, 2004, p. 26; see also Dwyer, 2010).

According to the National Fair Housing Alliance (2018), 50% of African Americans live in neighborhoods without white residents. The “average white person” lives in neighborhoods that are filled, overwhelmingly, with white residents (p. 6). As we've said previously, one’s home is an indicator of economic health, but it also can create economic wealth. One’s neighborhood affects quality of life in many ways through access (or lack thereof) to community resources such as parks, public transportation, grocery stores, job opportunities, medical facilities, and access to neighborhood networks. Combined, they
have a profound impact on present-day quality of life. Additionally, as groundbreaking economic research is beginning to show, the “hyper-local setting” within a half-mile of a child’s home exerts a powerful influence on future educational and economic success as an adult (Badger & Bui, 2018; Chetty, Friedman, Hendren, Jones, & Porter, 2018). If our neighborhoods remain segregated, what's the net effect for African Americans?

School Integration

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

In recent decades, however, pressure from the federal government has eased, and school integration is slowing and, in many areas, has even reversed. The high point in the desegregation of public schools was in 1988, three decades ago. In that year, less than 6% of public schools were “intensely segregated” with 90% to 100% nonwhite students. In the decades following, this percentage has tripled to over 18% (Orfield, Ee, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2016, p. 3).

We haven't achieved the goal of school desegregation; indeed, black children (and those of other minority groups of color) are increasingly concentrated in schools segregated by social class and by race. Figure 5.10 shows that since the 2000–2001 school year, the percentage of black students that attended “high poverty” schools increased from 32% to 48%. Thus, poor African American students appear doubly isolated: by social class and by race. This increasing economic and racial separation is a deep betrayal of the philosophy and goals of the civil rights movement and of democracy generally.

What accounts for the failure to integrate public schools? One significant cause is the declining white population in general (see Figure 1.1) and in public schools in particular. In the 2013–2014 school year, whites were 50% of all students, down from almost 80% in the early 1970s (Orfield et al., 2016, p. 2).

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

Without a renewed commitment to integration, American schools will continue to resegregate. This is a particularly ominous trend because it directly affects the quality of education. Years of research demonstrate that integrated schools—by social class and race—are related to better educational experiences, improved test scores, and other outcomes (e.g., see Orfield et al., 2016).

The black–white gap in educational attainment has generally decreased over the past several decades. Figure 5.11 displays the change from 1940 to 2017 in the percentage of the population older than 25 years with high school diplomas by race and gender; there is a dramatic decline in racial differences. Given the increasing demands for higher educational credentials in the job market, it’s ironic that the nation has nearly achieved racial
equality in high school education at a time when this credential matters less. On the positive side, 61% of African Americans in one national survey reported being “encouraged to apply to college while growing up.” Unfortunately, of those who “applied to or attended college,” more than one third (36%) reported discrimination based on their race (NPR et al., 2017a, p. 6).

Similarly, Figure 5.12 shows a narrowing gap for college graduation rates. In 1940, white men held a distinct advantage over all other race/gender groups: They were about three times more likely than African American men and women to have a college degree. By 2017, the advantage of white men had shrunk, but they were still about 1.5 times more likely than black men and women to have a college degree. These racial differences grow larger with more advanced degrees, however, and these differences will be increasingly serious in an economy in which more desirable jobs more frequently require advanced education.

**Political Power**

Two trends have increased the political power of African Americans since World War II. One is the movement out of the rural South, a process that concentrated African Americans into areas in which it was easier to register and vote. As the black population outside the South grew, so did their national representation. The first African American representative to Congress (other than those elected during Reconstruction) was elected in 1928. Yet, by 1954, only three African Americans had been elected to serve in the House of Representatives (Franklin, 1967, p. 614).
FIGURE 5.11  ■ High School Graduation Rates for People 25 Years and Older in the United States, 1940–2017


FIGURE 5.12  ■ College Graduation Rates of People 25 Years and Older in the United States, 1940–2017

In 1993, Carol Moseley Braun made history as she became the first black woman senator in America. When Barack Obama was elected to the Senate in 2004, he was only the fifth African American senator since Reconstruction to serve in that role. Since then, five more African Americans have been elected to the Senate: Roland Burris (Illinois, 2009), Tim Scott (South Carolina, 2013), Mo Cowan (Massachusetts, 2013), Cory Booker (New Jersey, 2013), and Kamala Harris (California, 2017). A record 51 African Americans are serving in the 115th Congress during the current session (2017–2019): three in the Senate and 48 in the House of Representatives (History, Art, & Archives, 2008), including seven new black House members.

The number of African American elected officials at all levels of government has increased over time. Both Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice have served as Secretary of State, the highest governmental office ever held by an African American (along with Supreme Court Justice and excluding the presidency). Since Bill Clinton took office, African Americans have filled about 12% of appointed Cabinet positions.

At the state level are several new black Attorneys General, Lieutenant Governors, and county judges (Dovere, 2018). In 1989, Douglas Wilder (Virginia) became the first African American to be elected to a state governorship—only one of four ever elected in American history as of this writing (Brown & Atske, 2019). African American communities are virtually guaranteed some political representation because of their high degree of geographical concentration at the local level. Today, most large American cities, including Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, New York, and Washington, DC, have elected African American mayors.

Another trend that has increased black political power is the dismantling of the institutions and practices of disenfranchisement that operated during Jim Crow segregation (Chapter 4). Since the 1960s, the number of African Americans in the nation’s voting-age population has increased from slightly less than 10% to about 13%. But this increasing potential for political power has not always been fully mobilized in the past, and actual turnout has generally been lower for blacks than for whites. In the hotly contested presidential races between 2000–2016, however, many organizations (e.g., the NAACP) made a concerted and largely successful effort to increase turnout among African Americans. In the 2000–2008 elections, black turnout was comparable to whites, and in the 2012 presidential election, the black turnout (66.2%) was slightly larger than the white turnout (64.1%; File, 2013). However, after steadily increasing from 1996 through 2012, the African American turnout dropped sharply to 59.6% in the Trump–Clinton election of 2016, six percentage points below white voters (Krogstad & Lopez, 2017).

Overall, black American political power has increased over the past several decades at all levels. One potentially ominous threat to this trend is the growth of voting restrictions since the 2013 Supreme Court ruling on the VRA. Shortly after the decision, Texas announced that a voter identification law, previously blocked, would go into effect immediately (Liptak, 2013), and North Carolina passed one of the most restrictive laws since the Jim Crow era (Brennan Center for Justice, 2013). The courts declared the latter unconstitutional on the grounds that it “target[ed] African Americans with almost surgical precision” (Vicens, 2016; also see Liptak & Wines, 2017).

Well over half the states have considered or have passed various measures that could decrease the size of the electorate generally and disproportionately lower the impact of the African American vote. For example, many states may require voters to
show a government-issued photo ID—such as a driver’s license or passport—before allowing them to cast a ballot. For many reasons (e.g., their relative poverty) African Americans—and other minority groups of color—are less likely to possess official forms of identification. Other states have ended same-day voter registration and shortened early voting periods (Brennan Center for Justice, 2018). As a result, some people will face additional challenges getting to and from polling places and getting time off from work to vote.

Proponents of restrictive voting measures argue that they prevent voter fraud. As is typical of modern institutional discrimination, the new laws don’t specifically mention minority groups. Fresh’s (2018) analysis suggests that the Supreme Court’s 2013 decision will decrease black voter registration the most while also decreasing white voter registration and general voter turnout. Groups with lower rates of voting (e.g., racial minorities, senior citizens, younger voters, lower-income people) will likely feel greater marginalization from the political system than others (e.g., white, affluent college graduates). This spate of new restrictive legislation affects them disproportionately, making them less likely to participate in the democratic process (Pew Research Center, 2014a; see Brennan Center for Justice, 2018).

Finally, we’d note that many formerly incarcerated people lose their right to vote. Thus, the high and disproportionate incarceration of black people not only affects their democratic rights but the group’s overall political power.

Jobs and Income

African American integration in the job market and subsequent income follows the patterns that we’ve documented in other areas of social life: The situation has improved since Jim Crow, but it’s stopped well short of equality. White men are much more likely to be employed in the highest-rated and most lucrative occupations, while African American men are overrepresented in the service sector and in unskilled labor (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015a). One comprehensive analysis of race/gender employment trends found that, after some gains following the landmark legislation of the mid-1960s, gains for black men and women (and white women) were slight, and whites, especially men, continue to disproportionately fill better jobs and earn higher wages (Stainback & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012, pp. 155–177).

Although huge racial gaps continue, the current occupational distribution for African Americans has significantly improved. Some might say this progress has been rapid, given that as recently as the 1930s, most African American men worked as unskilled agricultural laborers (Steinberg, 1981, pp. 206–207). Likewise, African American women’s employment has improved. In the 1930s, about 90% of employed African American women worked in agriculture or in domestic service (pp. 206–207). Those rates dropped dramatically. Today, most African American women are employed in the two highest occupational categories, although typically at the lower levels. For example, in the “managerial and professional” category, women are typically concentrated in lower-income occupations, such as nursing or teaching (see Figure 4.4), while men are more likely to be physicians and lawyers.

Figure 5.13 depicts the racial income gap in terms of the median—the average difference between “typical” white and black families. The racial income gap reflects
racial differences in education, which influences occupational options and, therefore, wages. The graph presents two kinds of information. First, follow the solid lines from the left vertical axis toward the right, which shows changes in the median household incomes for the groups from 1967 to 2017. You’ll notice that median household income for both groups generally moved together, trending upward until the turn of this century. Incomes flattened and then fell, reflecting hard economic times after 2000 and especially after the 2007 global economic crisis. Beginning around 2014, household incomes began to rise again, with white income rising more rapidly. Also note that black household income stayed well below white household income throughout this period. In the late 1960s, for example, black household income was about 58% of white household income.

The dotted line shows the percentage of black to white household income over time. (Note that incomes are presented in 2017 dollars, which adjusts for inflation.) The gap remained relatively steady through the 1980s but closed during the boom years of the 1990s. Since the turn of the century, it’s widened again, especially in recent years. The gap was smallest in 2000 (68%) and, in the most recent year for which data was available (2017), it was 62%, reflecting the differential effects of the recession on minority groups of color, as we discussed previously.

Figure 5.14 supplements this information by comparing the distribution of income within each racial group for 2017. It also highlights the different percentages for each

**FIGURE 5.13  Median Household Income by Race, 1967–2017**

group in low-, middle-, and upper-income categories. To read this graph, notice a few things: (1) income categories are arranged from the top (highest income category) to the bottom (lowest income category); (2) the horizontal axis (on the bottom) has a zero point in the middle of the graph; (3) the horizontal bars represent the percentage of households in each income category. Data for non-Hispanic whites are to the left of the zero point. Information for blacks is on the right side of the zero point.

Starting at the bottom, notice that the bars representing black households (on the right side) are considerably wider than those for white households (on the left side). This reflects African Americans’ greater concentration in lower-income brackets. For example, 12.4% of black households were in the lowest two income categories (less than $10,000), which is 2.5 times higher than the rate for white households (4.9%) in this income category.

As you read upward, notice the clustering of black and white households in the $50,000 to $124,000 category–income ranges associated with middle and upper-middle-class lifestyles. White households are overrepresented in these income categories compared to blacks (39.4% and 31.7%, respectively). Racial differences are even more dramatic in the two highest income ranges: About 15.6% of white households had incomes greater than $150,000 versus only 6.1% of black households. In sum, while African Americans are at all income levels, this data convincingly refutes the notion, common among modern racists and others, that no important racial inequalities exist in America today.

Finally, poverty affects African Americans at much higher rates than it does white Americans. Figure 5.15 shows the percentage of white and black American families living below the federally established, “official” poverty level from 1967–2017. Historically, the poverty rate for African American families ran about two to three times higher than the
Part 3 Understanding Dominant–Minority Relations in the United States Today

rate for whites. However, the gap has narrowed in the last several years. In 2017, the poverty rate for black families was 1.5 times higher than the rate for white families.

Note that a dramatic decrease in black poverty happened during the boom years of the 1990s, only to be followed by rising rates after 2000. The poverty rates for both groups trended upward between 2000 and 2012 before decreasing in recent years. Tragically, children’s poverty rates—especially African American children—continue to be extremely high. Like Figures 5.13 and 5.14, this graph refutes the notion that serious racial inequality is a thing of the past.

Primary Structural Assimilation

Interracial contact in the more public areas of society (e.g., schools, workplaces), is more common today. As Gordon’s model of assimilation predicts, this public contact has led to increases in more intimate contacts across racial lines. To illustrate, McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears (2006) looked at changing intimate relationships among Americans by asking a nationally representative sample about the people with whom they discuss important matters. Although the study didn’t focus on black–white relations per se, the researchers found that between 1984 and 2004, the percentage of whites who included African Americans as intimate contacts increased.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census [2018a].

Note: Family poverty rates and child poverty rates are computed using different units of analysis. Family rates represent the percentage of all families below the poverty line. The rates for children are the percentage of all people younger than 18 in poverty.
Chapter 5  ■  African Americans

from 9% to more than 15%. From one perspective, this increase is encouraging because it suggests progress toward a more integrated, racially unified society. Alternatively, the relatively low percentages may feel discouraging because they suggest that about 85% of white Americans maintain interpersonal networks of friends and acquaintances of the same race only.

In 2016, Cox, Navarro-Rivera, and Jones found similar patterns in people’s social networks. They asked participants to name the people with whom they discussed important matters and then to identify each person by race. The vast majority of white respondents maintained racially homogenous networks: 91% of their close contacts were white. Black respondents reported less (but relatively high) racial exclusiveness: 83% of their close contacts were black. This difference in the racial composition of social networks results, partly, from population sizes: Because white Americans outnumber black Americans by far, they have more choices for friends and acquaintances and, as the dominant group, they can more easily maintain racial exclusiveness. (Note that one doesn’t need to “intend” to have race-exclusive networks. Partly they result from segregation in neighborhoods, schools, etc.)

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

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

Consistent with the decline in traditional, overt prejudice, Americans are much less opposed to interracial dating and marriage today. As noted in Chapter 1, a recent national poll (Livingston & Brown, 2017) found that 9% of Americans felt that interracial marriage is “a bad thing” for society. Almost 40% felt interracial marriages were “a good thing” (up from 24% in 2010) and the majority (52%) felt that it didn’t “make much difference” (p. 24). Support for interracial marriage was especially high among young people (54% of 18- to 29-year-olds said it was “a good thing” vs. only 26% of respondents over 65), the college educated (54% of the college educated said it was “a good thing” vs. only 26% of respondents with a high school degree), and urbanites (45% of city dwellers said it was “a good thing” vs. only 24% of rural respondents; p. 25).

Behavior follows attitudes, so you’re probably not surprised that rates of interracial dating and marriage are increasing. Several studies find that interracial dating is increasingly common (see Keels & Harris, 2014; Wellner, 2007), and the number of marriages between African Americans and whites is increasing, although still a tiny percentage of all marriages. In 1970, the U.S. census recorded 65,000 black–white married couples
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(including persons of Hispanic origin). That’s about 0.10% of all married couples. By 2010, that increased 8.5 times (to 558,000), which is still less than 1% (0.9%) of all married couples (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a, p. 54; see also Livingston & Brown, 2017).

Finally, a study comparing intermarriage based on the 1980 and 2008 censuses found a trend toward decreasing in-marriage, particularly for black men, as shown in Table 5.1. Also, most black men in interracial marriages married white people (14.4%) and Hispanics (4.8%). Black women in interracial marriages showed a similar pattern: 6.5% were married to whites and 2.3% to Hispanics.

| TABLE 5.1  ■ Percentage Married to a Person of the Same Race, 1980 and 2008 |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
|                | Whites          |                | African Americans |              |
|                | Men             | Women          | Men              | Women         |
| Year           |                 |                 |                 |                |
| 1980           | 96%             | 95%            | 93%             | 97%           |
| 2008           | 93%             | 92%            | 77%             | 88%           |


QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

15. Which dimensions of acculturation and integration for African Americans are most important? Why?

16. What evidence can you cite for the claim that “black–white relations are the best they’ve ever been”? What evidence can you cite against this claim?

FOCUS ON CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

DOES THE ELECTION OF PRESIDENT OBAMA MEAN THAT AMERICA IS POST-RACIAL?

The election of President Barack in 2008 led many people to conclude that America had rejected racism and finally become a “post-racial” society in which race was irrelevant. Others warned that reports about the death of racism were vastly exaggerated and that the triumph of one person—even one as significant as the president—doesn’t represent the situation of black Americans generally or that of other minority groups.
Which view seems more accurate? We can’t fully address this topic in merely a few paragraphs, but we can offer some important points that suggest that America is far from being post-racial.

First, race figured prominently in the presidential campaign, although its effects tended to be below the surface. The Obama campaign knew that they had to avoid the controversial topic of American racism if their candidate was to be successful. They de-emphasized his racial identity, presenting him as a candidate who happened to be black, not “the black candidate.” Additionally, Obama avoided discussion on racially charged issues (e.g., civil rights, affirmative action, the war on drugs) and focused on issues of broad concern instead (e.g., the economy, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, health care). His strategy was to discuss race “only in the context of other issues” (Ifill, 2009, p. 53).

This strategy couldn’t defuse all of people’s concerns, fears, and anxieties triggered by Obama’s race. Given traditional stereotypes about whites and blacks, the campaign wanted people to see Obama as a multiracial person and as “more white,” which has positive associations. They wanted to contain negative associations related to his blackness.

The most potentially disastrous racial episode during the campaign linked Obama with Pastor Jeremiah Wright, a flamboyant minister of a Chicago church that Obama had attended. A YouTube video in which Wright strongly condemned America for its treatment of blacks and other people of color surfaced and threatened to sink Obama’s candidacy by associating him with what most whites would see as angry, militant racialized rhetoric.

Forced to confront American racism openly, Obama crafted a speech acknowledging racism past and present, but he rejected Reverend Wright’s views as distorted, saying that Wright elevated “what is wrong with America above all that we know is right with America” (Obama, 2008). The speech successfully defused the immediate issue, but issues of race continued to lurk in the background of the campaign. There was a persistent tendency to label Obama as something other than a “true American”—as a Muslim, a Kenyan, an outsider, a terrorist, a revolutionary, or an angry black man. His campaign provided evidence to refute those claims. The campaign was, in part, successful because it was able to portray him as “white-assimilated, acceptable, multiracial, and thus less black (or not really black)” (Wingfield & Feagin, 2010, p. 219). Thus, the first black president in American history owed his success to many people’s perception of him as not “really” black.

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

Furthermore, perceptions of Obama’s effectiveness remained highly racialized. Weekly surveys showed that the percentage of whites who approved of the job he was doing varied between 30% and 40%, while approval ratings among blacks typically ran between 80% and 90 (Gallup, 2012). In January 2017, as he was preparing to leave office, those numbers had increased: 49% of whites and 91% of blacks approved of the job he did (Gallup, 2017b). Thus, his support in the black community was roughly two to three times his support in the white community.

Finally, and most detrimental to the argument that America is post-racial, the racial gaps that existed when Obama took office have persisted, as figures in this chapter show. Racial issues regularly animate public discourse, and prejudice, racism, and discrimination have increased and become more overt since the election of Donald Trump.
IS THE GLASS HALF-EMPTY OR HALF-FULL?

The contemporary situation of African Americans is what we might expect for a group so recently released from exclusion and subordination. Figure 5.16 shows the length of the periods of subjugation and the brevity of time since the fall of Jim Crow—information that’s easy to forget. Overall, life for African Americans improved vastly during the last half of the 20th century in virtually every area. Yet, as the data in this chapter show, racial progress has stopped well short of equality, sometimes even reversing course.

In assessing the present situation, one might stress the improved situation of the group (the glass is half-full) or the challenges that remain before full racial equality and justice are achieved (the glass is half-empty). While African Americans have occupied the highest levels of American society (e.g., Oval Office, Supreme Court), a large percentage have merely shifted from rural peasantry to urban poverty, still facing many formidable and deep-rooted problems.

The situation of African Americans is intimately connected to the changing economy and the plight of city centers. It is the consequence of approximately 400 years of prejudice, racism, and discrimination and it also reflects broader social forces, such as urbanization and industrialization.

Consistent with their origin as a colonized minority group, African Americans’ relative poverty and powerlessness has persisted long after some minority groups have achieved equality and acceptance (e.g., the descendants of the white European immigrants who arrived from the 1820s through 1920s).

Whites enslaved African Americans to meet the labor demands of an agrarian economy. Blacks became rural peasants under Jim Crow segregation, were excluded from the opportunities created by early industrialization, and remain largely excluded from the better jobs in the emerging post-industrial economy.

Progress toward racial equality has slowed since the heady days of the 1960s, and in many areas, earlier advances seem hopelessly stagnated. Public opinion polls indicate
little support or sympathy for African Americans and the issues they face. Traditional prejudice has declined, only to be replaced by modern racism. Biological racism has been replaced with indifference to racial issues or with victim blaming. And the court of public opinion often holds African Americans responsible for what centuries of structural oppression has wrought.

Nevertheless, contemporary African Americans, as a group, have experienced real improvements in their lives. Compared with their counterparts during Jim Crow, they are, on average, more prosperous and more politically powerful. They have increased opportunities to develop their interests and skills through formal education. They can work in diverse professions and be recognized for their contributions. Media portrayals of African Americans are increasingly diverse, realistic, and complex, not merely stereotypical. Indeed, it’s worth noting that *Get Out* (2017) and *Black Panther* (2018) earned critical acclaim and broke box office records and were created by people of color, featuring people of color, telling stories that offered powerful critiques of white supremacy and colonialism. Related to this, beauty ideals have expanded to include diverse skin tones, body shapes, hair textures, and facial features. (That’s if you see the glass as half-full.)

However, the increases in average income and education and the glittering success of the few obscure the complex, interrelated problems experienced by many—unemployment, a failing educational system, residential segregation, poverty, racism, and continuing discrimination persist as seemingly inescapable realities for millions of African Americans. Crime, drugs, violence, poor health care, malnutrition, incarceration, and other factors compound these problems, which may grow worse without the commitment of will and the resources to solve them. (That’s if you see the glass as half-empty.)

Given what can feel like a depressing situation, it’s not surprising that African Americans (and their allies) feel anger and resentment and are embracing pluralistic, nationalistic thinking as a result. Black nationalism and Black Power offer powerful ideas and hope for the widespread development and autonomy of African Americans as a community. Yet, without the support to bring them to fruition, these ideas remain largely symbolic.

We could characterize the situation of the African American community in the early 21st century as a combination of partial assimilation, structural pluralism, and inequality that reflects the continuing effects of being a colonized group. Contemporary problems are less visible than in earlier eras (or perhaps they’re better hidden from the average white middle-class American). Responsibility is more diffused, and the moral certainties in opposition to slavery or to Jim Crow laws are long gone. Modern racism and institutional discrimination are less dramatic and more difficult to measure than an overseer’s whip, a lynch mob, or a sign that reads “Whites Only.” However, as you’ve learned, they’re as real and as deadly in their consequences.

As we end this chapter, we want to encourage you to see the glass as half-full and to feel hopeful about the present and the future. College students and other young people were at the heart of the civil rights movement (and other justice movements, too). They dismantled Jim Crow in creative, powerful, nonviolent ways, and they did it with courage and dignity. Let them inspire you to forge ahead in community with one another, doing the work that needs to be done to bring America closer, each day, to equality and justice for all.
Main Points

At the beginning of the 20th century, the racial oppression of African Americans took the form of a rigid competitive system of group relations and de jure segregation. This system ended because of changing economic and political conditions, changing legal precedents, and a mass protest movement started by African Americans.

The Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) was the single most powerful decision against legalized segregation. The civil rights movement pursued a nonviolent direct action campaign in the South that challenged and defeated Jim Crow. Congress delivered the final blows to de jure segregation in the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Outside the South, African American concerns centered on access to education, jobs, housing, health care, and other opportunities. African Americans expressed their frustration in the urban riots of the 1960s. The Black Power movement addressed the massive problems of racial inequality that remained after the civil rights movement defeated Jim Crow.

Black–white relations since the 1960s have been characterized by continuing inequality, separation, and hostility, along with substantial improvements in status for some African Americans. Class differentiation within the African American community is greater than ever before.

Many people perceive some African American family forms as weak, unstable, and a cause of continuing poverty. Some claim that African Americans (and others) possess a culture of poverty that discourages upward mobility. Structural (and other) theories see African American family forms (e.g., women-headed households) as resulting from poverty, not causing it.

Subtler forms of antiblack prejudice and discrimination (modern racism and institutional discrimination) have replaced traditional forms of overt antiblack prejudice and discrimination.

African Americans are largely acculturated, but centuries of separate development have created a unique black experience in American society.

Though many African Americans have experienced real improvements in life, secondary structural assimilation, overall, remains low. Evidence of racial inequalities in residence, schooling, politics, jobs, income, unemployment, and poverty is massive and underlines the realities of the urban underclass.

In the area of primary structural assimilation, interracial interaction and friendships are rising. Interracial marriages are increasing, although they remain a tiny percentage of all marriages.

Compared with the start of the 20th century, African Americans have experienced improved quality of life, overall, but the distance to true racial equality remains significant.
Applying Concepts

The table below lists 10 metropolitan areas from across the nation in alphabetical order. Which ones do you think have the most racial residential segregation? Cities in the South? Cities in the Northeast or the West? Cities with a higher or lower black population? What’s your best guess and why? Rank order them, accordingly, from 1 (most segregated) to 10 (least segregated).

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

*Percentage in entire metropolitan area, including suburbs.

Source: Data from U.S. Census Bureau (2012c, p. 31).

Turn the page to see the actual ranks and scores.

Review Questions

1. What led to the end of de jure segregation? When answering, address broad social changes (e.g., industrialization) as well as changes created by collective action.

2. Compare the civil rights movement to the Black Power movement. How were they similar? How were they different? How does Black Lives Matter compare to the earlier movements? When answering, consider philosophies, tactics, leaders, and the greater social context.

3. Explain the most critical issues related to black–white relations since the 1960s, including (a) the relationship between the criminal justice system and the black community, (b) class and gender inequality.
within the black community, (c) family forms, (d) new racial identities, (e) prejudice, and (f) individual and institutional forms of discrimination.

4. Analyze the contemporary situation of African Americans using the concepts of assimilation and pluralism, especially in terms of acculturation, secondary structural assimilation, and primary structural assimilation.

5. Are African American women a minority group within a minority group? Explain.

6. An old saying is, “When America catches a cold, African Americans get pneumonia.” Based on this chapter, would you say that’s mostly true or untrue? Why? Use evidence from this chapter (and others) in your answer.

7. What are the implications of increasing class differences among African Americans?

8. Regarding contemporary black-white relations, is the glass half-empty or half-full? Discuss at least three areas of social life (e.g., education) when answering.

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**Answers to Applying Concepts**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City Score (Dissimilarity Index)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore, Maryland 62.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City, Kansas 57.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston, Massachusetts 57.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, DC 56.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta, Georgia 54.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco, California 50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond, Virginia 49.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas–Fort Worth, Texas 47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego, California 38.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Data from Glaeser and Vigdor (2012).*
Internet Learning Resources

SAGE edge™ offers teachers and students easy-to-use resources for review, study, and further exploration. See http://edge.sagepub.com/diversity6e

Note

1. This incident is the basis for the 2013 feature-length film Fruitvale Station.