RACISM

in the

United States
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This book is dedicated to our families, friends, colleagues, students, and all who came before us and will follow us in the struggle against racism. With gratitude to Davina, Lucy, Corina, and Sophie for their love and support.

—Joshua L. Miller

For Katherine, Jocelyn, Madison, and Brayden—with love and hope for their future.

—Ann Marie Garran
## CONTENTS

Preface ix  
Acknowledgments xiii  
Introduction: Racism in the United States: Implications for the Helping Professions xv  
Share RACISM in the United States: Implications for the Helping Professions, Second Edition  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Background: Social Identity and Situating Ourselves</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What Is Racism?</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A Brief History of Racism in the United States and Implications for the Helping Professions</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Web of Institutional Racism</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Why Is It So Difficult for People With Privilege to See Racism?</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Social Identity Formation and Group Membership</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Intersectionality: Racism and Other Forms of Social Oppression</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Racial Dialogue: Talking About Race and Racism</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Responses to Racism in the Community</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Confronting Racism in Agencies and Organizations</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Cross-Racial Clinical Work</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Teaching About Race and Racism</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Dismantling Racism: Creating the Web of Resistance</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix A**  
Study Circles Dialogues 355  

**Appendix B**  
Steps to Successful Intergroup Conversation: A Critical-Dialogic Model 357  

**Appendix C**  
Activities Toward Becoming an Antiracist Organization 359  

**Appendix D**  
Issues to Consider When Confronting Institutional Racism 361
PREFACE

Racism has evolved as a persistent part of the human condition. Its obstinacy and intractability are frustrating and at times baffling. We live in a world in which most nations have signed the United Nations’ declarations of human rights and claim to be democracies, yet racial and ethnic conflict abound. The United States cherishes its Constitution and Declaration of Independence. Abraham Lincoln is viewed as a great president and the Civil War as an important milestone in the march toward freedom and social justice for all. Surveys find that today the vast majority of Americans believe in civil rights for all citizens and that racial prejudice and discrimination are wrong. As this book amply illustrates, though, racism is profoundly entrenched in the U.S. society, in many ways and forms.

Perhaps the complexity of racism is part of the problem. Racism is manifested and embedded politically, socially, and culturally in institutions, the economy, social welfare policies, everyday practices, internalized stereotypes, interpersonal and intergroup relations, and public discourse. Despite efforts to eradicate it, racism has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to mutate and evolve, much as bacteria respond to antibiotics. Racism wreaks havoc in many lives—physically, economically, socially, and psychologically—while remaining virtually invisible to those with the privileges of Whiteness. And it damages and dishonors those who benefit from racism, though many people are unaware of this. Racism divides and alienates people from one another, leaving emotional, psychological, and spiritual wounds. The magnitude and doggedness of racism can be demoralizing both to those enduring it and those committed to ending it.

Many people do want to dismantle racism but do not know how. The helping professions—which include social work, psychology, psychiatry, counseling, nursing, medicine, education, and law—usually have codes of ethics that commit practitioners to cultural competence, nondiscrimination, and, in some instances, social justice. Helping professionals interact with millions of people, work in thousands of agencies and offices, and contribute to policy formation and enactment at many levels of society. They can make a real difference in the struggle against racism. They receive training about how to do their jobs, and anti-oppression and antiracism material should be part of the curriculum.

We have been antiracism activists and educators for many years, working with individuals, families, organizations, and communities to dismantle racism. We have pursued our antiracism work as a team, working alone, and in collaboration with many others throughout the United States. In co-teaching an antiracism course for professional social workers for more than a decade, we were unable to find a text directed toward helping professionals that covered the entire spectrum of racism affecting helping professionals and their clients—which motivated us to produce this book. We have now written a second edition, as the face of racism and strategies to confront it are constantly changing. The new edition maintains the essential structure of the first
edition while updating concepts and facts, including new case vignettes, and adding more exercises for students at the end of chapters.

Writing this book has posed a number of challenges. One is that racism is ongoing; while we were writing the book, many examples of extreme racism were occurring on a nearly daily basis—killings of unarmed Black men by the police, the murder of police officers after a peaceful demonstration protesting such police killings, and a presidential campaign with one candidate promoting racist policies and racial stereotypes. Another is that racism is so deep and pernicious that we would have to cover many forms of racism. We could not concentrate only on racist stereotypes, or institutional racism, or interpersonal and intergroup racism. Knowledge of all forms of racism is relevant to helping professionals. Therefore, we had to place racism in a historical context and link it to other related forms of oppression, such as classism, sexism, and heterosexism. Thus, this book approaches racism comprehensively, with an emphasis on how helping professionals can respond.

Another challenge is that racism affects people in many different ways, ranging from those who endure it daily to those who do not experience it and often have little awareness of its pervasive and destructive reach. Workers and students in the helping professions have had very different experiences with racism and represent a range of racial and social identities, with very different levels of understanding and awareness about racism. We have attempted to write a book from which all helping professionals can benefit. We hope this book will engage those who are new to an exploration of racism while appealing to those who are engaged in antiracism work already.

Race and racism are complex and disputed notions, with varying meanings that are historically situated. In Chapter 2, we explore different ways of understanding and conceptualizing these concepts and conclude that race is a social construction. All social constructions involve the use of language in ways that reflect social positioning, power, conflict, and contested meanings. These terms shift over time and are interrogated, challenged, and reworked. Thus, in this book we use many words to describe race and ethnicity—White, African American, Black, people of color, Anglo, Latino, Hispanic, American Indian, Native American—which in many cases are not literally correct or even logically consistent, but they do reflect idioms and labels commonly used in public conversations about race and racism. We have, however, stayed away from two terms, Caucasian and minority. For us, Caucasian is a remnant of essentialist views of race, in which the world was misleadingly divided into biological races. We critique this position in Chapter 2. Although the term minority is used quite frequently in public discourses, for many people of color the term has embedded, or pejorative, meanings that imply “less than.” Even when people of color are in the majority, as in a public school, they often are referred to by White teachers and administrators as “minorities.” Thus, we try to use this term as little as possible.

Another challenge has been to strike the proper balance between understanding racism and sustaining hope. We cannot confront racism effectively without thoroughly appreciating its complexity. Yet we could easily be demoralized if we were to read only about the consequences of racism without addressing how to tackle it. The early chapters explore and map out the contours of racism, and the later chapters place greater emphasis on how to dismantle it.

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At the end of each chapter are exercises to help readers explore racism and how it is manifested in their social world, as well as how they have internalized it. Learning about racism and how to challenge it must be experiential and affective, in addition to being cognitive. The exercises are geared toward action, as working against racism is in itself empowering.

We believe in many ways of knowing and understanding, and we value multiple and different perspectives. Still, we have a clear and constant bias: We are against racism in all of its manifestations and conceive of this book as an act of resistance to racism. Although we have tried to understand empathically how people are inducted into a social and psychological racial calculus, we stand firmly against racism, and the ultimate purpose of this text is to help readers further their own antiracism work. We have also included an Instructor’s Manual and PowerPoint presentations for each class as a baseline, but welcome the many creative ways that instructors and students will use this material; qualified instructors can request these supplementary materials by email (textbook@springerpub.com).

During our years of antiracism activism, we have had many mentors, teachers, colleagues, compadres, and students. We have attempted to give credit to anyone who contributed specific ideas used in this book, but much of our own thinking has been forged in collaboration with those with whom we teach, as well as our students; they have evolved collectively. So, although we are listed as the authors of this book, there are many, many people who have participated in constructing its concepts and devising the exercises, and whose voices are woven into the book’s narrative fabric. In this spirit, we encourage readers to take the ideas that are presented and to revise, rework, and integrate them into their own antiracism work.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to express our gratitude to a number of people. The course we have taught is located at a school for social work that has made an explicit antiracism commitment as part of its mission statement. Thus, we thank the entire faculty at the Smith College School for Social Work, as well as the deans present during this commitment: Ann Hartman, Susan Donner, Anita Lightburn, Carolyn Jacobs, and Marianne Yoshioka. We also acknowledge the work of the numerous chairs and professors working in the Human Behavior in the Social Environment sequence where the antiracism course is lodged. We also appreciate the financial support of the Smith College School for Social Work.

Since we first taught this course, we have worked alongside many other antiracism teachers at the Smith College School for Social Work, the University of Connecticut, and elsewhere whose ideas and commitments have been inspirational: Beverly Tatum, Andrea Ayvazian, Elba Carballo, Orlando Isaza, Norma Akamatsu, Arlene Avakian, Frank Robinson, Helen Page, Darius Burton, Deborah Carlin, Alex Deschamps, Cynthia Gallagher, Andrea Canaan, Cheryl Stampley, Camille Hall, Lisa Werkmeister Rozas, Matt Ouellett, Edith Fraser, Johnnie Hamilton-Mason, Mary Gannon, Rani Varghese, Sheri Schmidt, John Orwat, Victor Mealy, Lois Bass, Ximena Zuñiga, Mary Hall, Eve Bogdanove, Valerie Richards, Tim Wise, Sarah Stearns, Nnamdi Pole, Peggy O’Neill, Keshia Williams, Michael Funk, and Mareike Muszinsky, who also wrote the Instructor’s Manual and developed the PowerPoint presentations to go with this book.

While working on both editions we asked for ideas and at times submitted drafts of chapters to colleagues who provided us with constructive criticism and helpful advice: Matt Ouellett, Fred Newdom, Rani Varghese, Lisa Werkmeister Rozas, Edith Fraser, Peter Rose, Liz Keenan, Cheryl Stampley, Betty Ruth, Irene Rodriguez Martin, Michael Funk, Nnamdi Pole, Yoonsun Park, and Kimberlyn Leary. We also thank the hundreds of colleagues we have collaborated with in antiracism work on campuses and in agencies and communities throughout the United States.

Any reasonable manuscript requires a good editor, and we were blessed to work with Eileen Dunn, communications editor at Smith College, for the first edition. Additional editorial suggestions for the first edition were made by our student, Sandra Hall. We also received much technical and administrative support from Lisa DeCarolís, Irene Rodriguez Martin, and Nicole Kutcher. For the second edition, we are grateful for our student research assistants: Emma Un, Rachel Lichtman, Bridget Mientka, Seiya Fukuda, Drew Cavanaugh, and Amanda Cramer. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Irene Huestis for her help with computer graphics. We would also like to thank our first editor at Brooks/Cole, the late Lisa Gebo, for working with us to realize the first edition of this book. Finally, we thank our family and friends for their support and forbearance while we worked on this project.
INTRODUCTION

Racism in the United States: Implications for the Helping Professions

In a social service agency that offers clinical services to children and adults, a “multicultural task force” has been formed to ensure that the agency's clients, more than half of whom are people of color, receive “culturally sensitive” services. The task force consists of clinicians, administrators, and top-level managers. Although some people of color work as clinicians and in administrative positions, most of the staff members are White, as are all members of the senior management team.

Many of the people of color on the task force are frustrated because they believe the agency is riddled with racism, which negatively affects the working environment and the quality of services offered to clients. They are concerned that racism often is unconscious within the White staff and that many of those staff members' assumptions and biases result in the agency being a predominantly White, Eurocentric workplace. Some people of color wonder whether the agency is truly interested in meaningful change.

Many of the White task force participants are frustrated, too. A few share the concerns of their colleagues of color, and others worry that too much emphasis has been placed on race and racism, which divides and categorizes people. Most of the staff members at the agency have liberal political views and are against discrimination of any kind, so even though they understand the importance of cultural sensitivity toward ethnic and racial “minorities,” they are apprehensive about the task force's focus on racism. Some White members also question why more emphasis is not placed on other forms of discrimination and oppression, such as sexism, heterosexism, and ableism.

The conversations in the task force are quite strained at times, with heated confrontations, even expressions of rage and anger. Participants have accused each other of being racist. Feelings have been bruised, and a number of people have become mistrustful and wary of those in the group. They are wondering how much more to invest and risk in this project. Some are concerned that their views may not be considered “politically correct,” and they fear being misjudged and attacked. Others are wary of participants making racist and stereotypical statements in meetings without acknowledgment or self-reflection. One participant says, “I'm a White male, so no matter what
I say, I can’t win.” Another member thinks, “Will he ever get in touch with how much privilege he has every day, which I can never take for granted?”

For many helping professionals, this is an all-too-familiar experience, albeit well-intentioned. In our example here, an agency has at least tried to consider and discuss issues of culture and difference, in an attempt to better serve its clients. Yet the domain of what should be under consideration is contested, the assumptions about what is real and important are under dispute, and the very words used to discuss the topic (such as racism) carry different meanings for the diverse participants, who have had different experiences of racial oppression, power, and privilege. Although they may share certain professional values and ethics, they do not necessarily agree in their worldviews. And no one stands above the fray. All participants are situated by virtue of their race, ethnicity, social identities, group memberships, and personal experiences.

This example offers a taste of the complexity of racism in human service organizations today, to illustrate how challenging, if not daunting, is the task of understanding, discussing, and working to overcome it. This is not unique to human service organizations. It is true of racism in the United States in general. Tilly (1998) has described that racism is an example of a “durable inequality”—emulated and adapted by social institutions and organizations, each a synecdoche for society at large.

Tackling racism is compounded by a lack of agreement about what exactly racism is. Racism has been equated with prejudice and bias. By this definition, anyone can be racist or nonracist. Other definitions limit racism to egregious acts of discrimination and oppression, such as the separate facilities and water fountains of the pre-civil rights era in the southern United States, or acts perpetrated by overt racists, such as the racially motivated savage murder of James Byrd in Texas in 1998. Others view racism as a comprehensive system of privilege and oppression, with rights and privileges for members of some groups but not others.

Even when there is not de jure racism, differential access to resources and privileges by virtue of one’s skin color, identity, or group membership reflects a racialized calculus. Social psychologists (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002) have described “aversive racism” or the enacting of “racial micro-aggressions” (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1978; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), both of which are beyond the consciousness of perpetrators, while wounding the targets of such interactions. We cover these varied definitions of racism in Chapter 2, and we offer our own working definition, but we first wanted to illustrate how confounding it can be to even begin to think about racism.

WHY BOTHER?

Given the complexity and tenacity of racism, and the tremendous resistance (whether this is societal, institutional, group, or individual) to undoing it, why should we even attempt to dismantle it? We can offer many answers—first and foremost, that it is morally wrong and injures everyone, depriving all—perpetrators and beneficiaries alike—of their full humanity. Racism wounds and dehumanizes those who are targeted by it and morally compromises those who benefit from it. It also is illegal in the United
States, although this certainly does not prevent it from occurring. Racism divides and alienates people, extracting an emotional cost and a social and economic one as well.

In our increasingly multiracial and multiethnic society, corporations lose hours of productivity and cooperative endeavor because of racism and racial tensions. Many lives are truncated and constrained and prematurely ended by racism, reducing the contributions that individuals can make to society while incurring the costs of services or imprisonment. Cities become more dangerous and communities less cohesive as racism exacts its social toll. People voluntarily or involuntarily live in highly segregated neighborhoods, which increases social isolation, reduces social trust, perpetuates social inequality, and decreases the capacity of citizens to collaborate and share across racial and ethnic lines. Still, most Americans would agree that racism is morally wrong and violates modern-day visions of fairness and justice.

We have written this book for another reason as well: Racism violates professional codes of ethics and compromises the capacity of human service professionals to help their clients and to uphold their professional ideals, including social justice. The American Psychological Association’s (2002) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct states in Principle D, Justice, that “fairness and justice entitle all persons to access to and benefit from the contributions of psychology and to equal quality in the processes, procedures, and services being conducted by psychologists.” Psychologists also are urged to ensure that their biases do not contribute to “unjust practices.” The ethical standards further mandate, in paragraph 3.01, that psychologists not engage in discrimination, including by virtue of race.

The American School Counselor Association’s (2004) Ethical Standards for School Counselors states that each student must have access to a school counseling program that affirms all students, whatever their race or ethnicity. The section on diversity (E.2) includes clauses about how racism affects counselors personally and professionally, including developing an awareness of cultural values and biases. Counselors are expected to achieve “cultural competence.”

The most comprehensive professional statement about ethical obligations and social injustices, such as racism, comes from the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2008). In its Preamble, the code of ethics reminds social workers that the…

… primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.

This code also emphasizes the profession’s commitment to social change and social justice. Social workers are expected to achieve “cultural competence” (1.05) and are expected to understand the nature of “social diversity and oppression” (1.05), with prominent mention of race and ethnicity.

Paradoxically, while belonging to professions dedicated to upholding ethics and values that are inconsistent with racism, human service professionals are part of a society structured by racism, serving clients who are either beneficiaries or targets of racism, working in agencies that reflect society’s institutional racism and that employ
practitioners who experience conscious, unconscious, and internalized racism when providing services. Practitioners are taught their professional skills in schools that are embedded in a racist society and reflect institutional racism by professors who are racially positioned in that society and who may or may not have explored the meaning of racism in their work.

Professions such as social work, too, are agents of social control and, as a result, unintentionally perpetuate racism despite codes of ethics to the contrary. For example, in working to prevent child abuse and neglect, social workers are participating in child welfare and juvenile justice systems that place children of color disproportionately in substitute care and in juvenile detention centers. When working in health and mental health arenas, social workers are part of a system that allows greater access to White consumers while disproportionately stigmatizing, misdiagnosing, and underserving clients of color.

**OUR OBJECTIVE**

Our purpose in writing this book is not to indict helping professionals, accuse individuals, or universally condemn society and its institutions. Nor do we want to instill a sense of hopelessness or a feeling that racism is so overwhelming, ubiquitous, and entrenched that nothing can be done about it. We believe that racism can be undermined, dismantled, and eventually overcome. We have witnessed societal gains (such as passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964), worked with organizations that have made significant progress toward becoming antiracism institutions, taught students who became more aware of their internalized stereotypes and internalized racism, and worked actively to become allies in the struggle against racism. Counselors and clinicians have learned the skills needed to work effectively cross-culturally, and human service workers and social service agencies have contributed to coalitions working to address racism in the community.

Yes, we have ample ground for hope. But we also have learned that it is important not to minimize the complexity, obstinacy, persistence, and power of racism in society; its power to shape lives, create wounds, construct areas of unawareness and accompanying rationalizations, and divide and alienate people from themselves and from one another. We cannot challenge racism effectively while wearing rose-colored glasses, but neither can we succeed in confronting it without hope. As Primo Levi (1982) described in his novel, *If Not Now, When?*, even when facing the most overwhelming and dismaying odds, to struggle on behalf of oneself and others is in itself the key to hope and survival; the actual act of resistance is an act of liberation.

Therefore, we intend to examine how racism exists outside of us, as well as inside of us, for we believe that health and human service workers must confront racism in both of these sites. We are ethically obligated to work for a society of fairness and social justice and to provide culturally responsive services to all of our clients, ensuring equal access and quality for all. We also recognize, however, the insufficiency of focusing solely on social structures, services, institutional practices, or on changing other people. We must look within and explore our own wounds, biases, and stereotypes, as
these surely will affect how we view ourselves and those whom we are committed to helping. Thus, in this book, we will pursue both themes, analyzing the social and psychological dynamics of racism.

**ORGANIZATION**

Chapter 1 introduces the notion of social identity and explains how understanding ourselves—whatever our social identity—is essential in examining racism. In Chapter 2, we consider how racism is conceptualized and defined, as this influences perceptions of racism and how it is discussed, and has implications for professional practice, social action, and social welfare policies. This chapter clarifies the terminology, which include consideration of what “race” and “racism” are. We will draw on a body of scholarship known as critical race theory, which emphasizes the historical, social, and political constructions of race and racism and how the “racial project” (Omi & Winant, 1994) is constantly shifting and evolving.

Chapter 3 places racism in the United States in a historical context. It considers the foundations of racism in this country from its inception and tracks the legal construction of race (Lopez, 1994, 1996) and how this has shaped the nation economically, politically, and socially. We link the treatment of ethnic and racial “minorities”—such as Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Chinese Americans, and Japanese Americans—with domestic policies, as well as with the United States’ international role, including its forays into colonialism and imperialism. By comparing the experiences of ethnic and racial groups “of color” with those of European-descended immigrants, such as the Irish, Italians, Ashkenazi Jews, and Armenians, we can examine how certain groups “became White” (Guglielmo & Salerno, 2003; Ignatiev, 1995; Sacks, 1996). Finally, this chapter considers the historical formation of the helping professions and their relationship to the construction of race and racism in the United States.

Chapter 4 examines the web of institutional racism in the United States today—its various forms and how they interact and potentiate one another to form a matrix that allows some people to have access to opportunities and resources while blocking others from these life prospects. The chapter presents data illustrating the scope and incidence of institutional racism in this country and how some social policies sustain and reinforce racism while others challenge it.

Chapter 5 explores why many White people have difficulty recognizing, acknowledging, and responding to racism, despite its historical and contemporary ubiquity. We employ concepts such as “the racial contract” (Mills, 1997), “invisible White privilege” (McIntosh, 1989, 1992), and “the discourse of denigration and the creation of other” (Miller & Schamess, 2000) to examine how racism is masked, obfuscated, and excused, which can present cognitive challenges for those with race privilege.

Chapter 6 continues in this vein, expanding on the discussion begun in Chapter 1 and presenting and critiquing theories of racial, ethnic, and social identity. We link these concepts with theories about group membership and intergroup relationships and conflict. The chapter explores the impact of racial identity and group membership
on clients and practitioners and offers an intersectional model of racial identity formation for human service professionals.

Racism does not exist in a social vacuum. Racial identity is linked to other aspects of social identity, including gender, class, sexual orientation, citizenship status, and immigration experiences. The topics of Chapter 7 are the interaction and relationship between race and racism and other facets of social identity and forms of social oppression.

This leads to a consideration in Chapter 8 of why talking about race and racism is so difficult. We consider the importance of discussions about race and racism, the negative consequences of avoiding these conversations, what impedes them, and how to structure and facilitate racial dialogues. The chapter offers a model for talking about racial reconciliation and reparations (Yamamoto, 1999).

Chapter 9 shifts the focus to the dynamics of racism in communities and how human service professionals can intervene effectively. Chapter 10 continues this theme by examining organizational and agency racial dynamics and how human service workers can strive to create antiracism organizations.

Chapter 11 looks at how race and racism influence clinical work. The chapter begins by considering differential access to clinical services, unequal treatment of consumers, the use and misuse of power, and the mismatch between those who receive services and those who provide them. It covers issues such as client rage and “noncompliance,” as well as clinician reactivity and defensiveness. We examine racial assumptions and biases in theories, as well as what is needed to become a culturally responsive clinician. Then we present a model of empowerment-based, culturally responsive clinical practice and offer implications for training and continuing education.

When it comes to understanding race and racism in society and within ourselves, we are all perpetual students and potential teachers. Thus, Chapter 12 offers suggestions for how to teach effectively about race and racism, whether this occurs in classrooms, agencies, or the community. It considers typical teaching problems and challenges and presents helpful pedagogical approaches and teaching techniques.

The final chapter, Chapter 13, is a call to action. We firmly believe that none of us can be neutral in a racialized society and that it is important that citizens—particularly those with race privilege—do not sit on the sidelines (Staub, 2001). Thus, we articulate a professional imperative for challenging racism and review the various ways by which people can work individually and collectively to dismantle racism, ranging from broad strategies to concrete and specific actions. Racism will not end without recognizing it and taking concerted actions to dismantle it. Helping professionals are ethically obligated to work toward this goal—and we all have a great deal to contribute.

**REFERENCES**


Share
RACISM in the United States: Implications for the Helping Professions
CHAPTER 1

Background: Social Identity and Situating Ourselves

CONTENTS

SOCIAL IDENTITY
SITUATING OURSELVES
POWER, PRIVILEGE, AND SOCIAL IDENTITY
COMFORT ZONES, LEARNING EDGES, TRIGGERS, AND CREATING A CONTEXT FOR LEARNING
  Setting Group Norms and Guidelines
  Journal Writing
  Creating a “Safe” Environment?
CONCLUSION

Reading a book like this takes effort. It asks us to examine our society and also to examine ourselves in society. Even though racism in the United States affects us all, we have a variety of individual reactions to this material. Some people of color or people who identify as being multiracial reading this book may think they already know the content or may feel ambivalent about the pain that the content evokes. Some White people will experience resistance, denial, or powerful feelings of guilt and shame. Even the terms White or people of color (discussed in Chapter 2) are contested and can evoke varied, and at times powerful, reactions. Racism is not a neutral topic. It stirs up strong reactions and feelings in all of us. Yet, if we are to become competent helping professionals, we must take steps to confront racism as it is manifested in society, in our professions, and within ourselves.

None of us is a bystander in a society structured by racism. We may be targeted by racism, benefit from white skin privilege, and, in some instances, experience both, but we are never neutral because racism is not neutral. Ultimately, racism hurts and degrades us all, even those with race privilege. It undermines democracy and scapegoats and dehumanizes people, poisons the wellsprings of interpersonal contact, fosters friction between groups, and causes people to doubt or feel badly about themselves.
or to unfairly condemn and degrade others. For those in the helping professions, racism undercuts their work with consumers and creates schisms among colleagues.

Pain, confusion, and strong emotions will accompany any serious examination of racism—particularly in a context that engages us personally and professionally and is not merely an analytic or academic endeavor. Fear of emotional pain can lead people to approach the subject of racism with wariness or detachment. In engaging in this work, we accept the risk of becoming vulnerable to being wounded along the way.

Because the spectrum of racism is vast, deep, and far-reaching, some readers may feel overwhelmed or resigned to it. These reactions are understandable, but we should keep in mind that racism has been challenged successfully, in the United States and elsewhere, and maintain the belief that all aspects of racism can be overcome someday. We cannot allow the complexity of racism to overpower us.

Racism has been part of the DNA of the United States since its inception and is still a major factor today, and all helping professionals have an obligation to work to dismantle racism and overcome its insidious effects. Ultimately, all human beings are entitled to equal rights, and we must visualize a nation in which all are validated and respected. To that aim, we hope that readers will strive to accept the strong reactions and feelings that this exploration is likely to engender. Profound feelings can be a source of motivation and inspiration for changing ourselves and our social world. As we confront racism and struggle to undermine it, we empower ourselves.

Ultimately, dismantling racism will benefit us all individually and will support a better society and nation collectively. In reading this book and working against racism, it is important to acknowledge that each of us has had different experiences of racism and privilege. For some, this is a new area for consideration; for others, it has been a daily struggle throughout life. This book is for all helping professionals, regardless of race. Some of the content may appear to be geared more toward one group than another. This is part of the challenge of writing and talking about race and racism. We come to the topic with a range of experiences. Some of us have been targets of racism and others have race privilege. Whether we identify as a person of color, White, or multiracial, or have a strong or weak ethnic identity, as individuals, we resist being categorized or being subjected to assumptions that do not respect us as unique and intricate beings. At times, though, generalizations are needed when discussing race and racism. We also offer examples to illustrate specific points and concepts, and these should not be construed as conveying the dynamic, multidimensional complexity of people’s lives and experiences.

When studying or discussing racism—including while reading this book—you may feel frustrated that your personal experience is overlooked. We hope that you will channel this frustration into continued learning and communicating and use the frustration as motivation to fuel antiracism activism, including offering feedback and contributing to teaching and leadership roles.

Ultimately, no one reading this book is single-handedly responsible for the systemic racism that has hobbled our nation from its inception. As professionals and citizens, however, we are responsible for how we respond to racism today—in our own lives and in the lives of our clients. Thus, when learning about the nature of racism and countering the impact that racism has had on us, we should strike a balance between pushing ourselves to do more while also being gentle with ourselves and others. In any case,
in order for things to change, we must press ourselves past our comfort zone to our learning edge and be open to absorbing new content, skills, and insights about ourselves and society.

Racism has a long history and deep tentacles, and overcoming it will take time and persistence. We may learn and explore things about ourselves that we do not like, some of which will be unpleasant or even abhorrent. And we will encounter bias and prejudice in others. Although critical self-awareness and self-monitoring are important components of this process, excessive self-criticism can be detrimental. It can lead us to shut down or, if we are unduly impatient with others, cause them to shut down. This does not further the cause of antiracism.

Beyond confronting ourselves and others and taking responsibility for what we say and do, we should work to develop patience and compassion for the struggle that antiracism work involves. We are imperfect beings trying to be decent people doing good work. We will make mistakes. We may hurt people inadvertently or be hurt ourselves. At times, we may think we have regressed or feel more angry or confused than enlightened. All of these reactions are normal and predictable when undertaking a project as complex, challenging, and important as this one. Thus, a balance between pushing ourselves to do more and accepting our limitations is helpful in this work.

SOCIAL IDENTITY

Most of us prefer to be viewed as individuals and not placed in social categories or be typecast by others. We do not appreciate people making assumptions about who we are, particularly based on our appearance. This is part of what is so pernicious about racism: It stems from a social construction of race, a system of categorizing and generalizing about people based on physical characteristics and the alleged deeper meanings. We consider this concept in greater detail in Chapter 2, but for now, it is important to note the tension between the understandable wish to author our own identities and the social reality of how our identities can be assumed or even imposed by others.

When talking about race and racism, we do not want to be viewed solely as racial beings. We are far more complex than that. Our social identity has many facets—gender, social class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and ability/disability—which together constitute who we are as social beings. Social identity is a useful construct as we approach the topic of race and racism. It helps us situate ourselves and be mindful of who we are in relation to students, colleagues, consumers, and others.

What is meant by social identity? This is a central topic in Chapters 6 and 7, but it is helpful to introduce the concept now so we can “situate” ourselves. Tajfel (1981) described social identity as that part of our self-concept that comes from our membership in social groups, the value we place on this membership, and what it means to us emotionally. For example, one of the authors identifies as White and Jewish and the other as Puerto Rican, Black, and a person of color. These are statements about our race and ethnicity. The first author is racially constructed as White, while he identifies himself ethnically as Jewish. The coauthor identifies herself racially as a person of color and ethnically as Puerto Rican and African American.
Each of us has a range of feelings associated with these social categories. The statements about who we are also contain an assumption about another social category—gender—as one author is male and the other female. Although observers might be able to tell that one of us is White and male and the other is a person of color and female, they might not be able to discern that one of us is Jewish or one of us is part Puerto Rican. They also would not know how we feel about our gender, ethnicity, and race, unless we tell them. But, like it or not, people will be making assumptions about us when they see us, as this is a normal human response.

Tajfel’s definition of social identity has been criticized for being too individualistic (Eriksen, 2001; Kelman, 2001). People do not always choose their social identities. Social identities emerge at certain times under specific conditions; they are shaped by social and cultural contexts, public discourses, national myths, and intergroup relations. For example, the meaning of being Jewish in Europe shifted before, during, and after World War II. A Jewish person who was no longer observant and whose ethnic or religious affiliation as a Jew had little or no personal meaning would have been defined as Jewish during the Nazi era, like it or not. In Rwanda, which experienced genocidal conflict, the meaning of being a Tutsi or a Hutu was woven inextricably into the relationships, perceptions, and history between the two ethnic groups. As we consider in Chapter 3, throughout U.S. history, people have been granted privileges or have encountered barriers or overt oppression based on social constructions of their race. Social identity is how we see ourselves in relation to others. It reflects two powerful social motives: our desire to be included and be part of a group, and at the same time our need for individuation and separateness (Brewer, 2001). This is how we internalize being part of our social world. It influences how we position, align, and categorize ourselves and how we join with and individuate ourselves from others. It is the sense of self that we bring with us to work, to school, in public, at home—every environment and system that we are part of—although what we bring and share about ourselves varies considerably among cultures and depends upon social contexts. Some aspects of our social identity are self-selected, customized, and individualized. Others are collectively constructed, shared with others, and at times imposed.

It is also important to note that social identity is a fluid and changing concept. How we see ourselves or how others view us may be different today than 2 years ago. And social context is another determinant of which parts of our social identities are salient at a given moment: for example, what neighborhood we are walking through, who else is in a classroom with us, and how much we feel others are similar or dissimilar to us. Finally, social identity is complex, and it is often difficult to feel comfortable fitting into binary categories assigned by society and others. We consider these issues in greater detail in Chapter 6.

SITUATING OURSELVES

Rather than talk abstractly about social identity, let us explore our social identities together. Figure 1.1 presents a diagram encompassing some aspects of social identity: age, sexual identity, chosen interests, nationality, social class, economic status, gender, health status, religion, ethnicity, race, and political affiliation. Also, pieces of our identity
reflect our personal history (such as growing up on a farm in South Carolina) and personal interests (such as amateur jazz musician). Already we can see how some of our social identity is chosen, some is inherited, other parts are imposed, and all aspects have meanings that are socially constructed. On the outer edge of the circle, we have listed some environmental factors that shape social identity: family, culture, institutions, political climate, economy, history, community, religion, and geography. These external contexts are also fluid and are experienced subjectively: Culture may be conscious and huge for one person and either invisible or less relevant for another. And what is on the outside of the circle (e.g., religion or geography) can also be internalized as part of a person’s social identity; for example, a person may identify as a Southern Baptist.

This might be a good time to draw your own social identity pie (see Exercise 1.1). If you do this exercise in class or in a group, it can be productive to discuss the questions listed in Exercise 1.1 in pairs. After thinking or talking about the questions, some of the following points might emerge:

- **Identity changes over time.** If we had drawn our pies 5 or 10 years ago, would they have looked the same as they do today? Probably not. Some aspects are enduring, and others have changed or shifted in importance. As we encounter new experiences and the world around us changes, our social identity evolves. It is
dynamic, not a static part of ourselves. (We consider phases of social identity development in Chapter 6.)

- **Some of our identity is chosen, some is imposed, and at times identity is a combination of the two.** We have choices over some parts of our social identity, but we receive other pieces from others and society. Also, there is a dynamic interaction between the parts that are imposed and the parts that are chosen. Although our race may be socially constructed by society, the meaning we make of it is our choice.

- **Some of our identity is conscious, and other parts are unconscious.** We are always aware of some parts of our identity, and others we take for granted or think about only when we are doing an exercise such as this. It is useful to reflect on why we are so aware of some parts of our identity and unaware of others. In our experience, people tend to be more aware of those aspects of their identity that are socially targeted or marginalized and less aware of privileged parts of their identity.

- **What is salient in our social identities differs from one person to the next.** For example, although my friend and I both may be female, African American, and Puerto Rican, the meaning that these facets of our identity have for each of us may differ considerably. One of us may identify strongly with both of her ethnic heritages, and the other of us may identify only with one heritage and identify most strongly with being a lesbian.

- **What is salient in our social identities is influenced by social context.** If a White man is in a classroom with a lot of other White men, he may not be conscious of his race or gender. If he is the only man in a class full of women, he is likely to be highly aware that he is male, or in a class where he is the only White person, very aware of his race. Eriksen (2001) offered the construct that social identity is relational, situational, and flexible.

- **Conflict and oppression can heighten our awareness of our social identity.** Social identities forged in conflict or in opposition to culture and society usually are salient, whereas those that are part of the mainstream or carry a lot of privilege are often less visible. (We consider this dynamic in greater detail in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.)

- **Social identity is cocreated in microrelations.** Moffat and Miehls (1999) made the point that how we construct our social identity varies from relationship to relationship and from one interaction to another. The parts of self that emerge with an old friend may be very different from the parts that are prominent when meeting with a supervisor.

These points about social identity can be helpful to keep in mind when taking a course on racism, talking about racism in groups, or even reading a book like this. It is helpful to position ourselves, to think about our social identity, and to consider the social identities of people whom we are interacting with or reading about. We all have social identities, which vary considerably from person to person and have different significance and meaning for each individual. We must respect our diversity and appreciate our different experiences.
POWER, PRIVILEGE, AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

If diversity of social identity were only about difference, we would understand and appreciate one another more readily. But some aspects of our social identity carry social privileges and power while others are targeted or disparaged. One way to conceptualize this difference is the notion of agent and target (Hardiman & Jackson, 2007). Agent status denotes power, privilege, and the capacity to define and determine what is “normal.” Target status means that social identity places a person with a group that is discriminated against, marginalized, and oppressed. Figure 1.2 illustrates some aspects of identity that are privileged or oppressed, using an agent/target line. Agents (privileged) are shown above the line, and the targets are shown below the line.

Although the diagram presents agent and target status as dichotomous and absolute, they rarely are that clear-cut. Some people of color have a great deal of target status because of their race (or skin color, hair texture, accent, or language), while others rarely experience racism. A multiracial person may experience both target and agent status at different times. A bisexual or transgendered person may not feel that he or she fits into what appear to be essentialist categories. Further, most people have social identities that are mixed, in which some aspects are targeted and others are privileged (Hardiman & Jackson, 2007). Some people with a similar mixture of agent–target status in their social identities feel privileged, and others in similar circumstances consider themselves to be targeted. We cannot assume that we understand the meaning of another person’s social identity.

It is also important to note agent–target tells us nothing about a person’s internal sense of self and efficacy, nor the subjective feelings such as pride or shame, that accompany one’s social identity. It also approaches identity as something that is carried by an

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FIGURE 1.2 Agent–Target Identities

Source: Inspired by Hardiman and Jackson (2007).
individual; in many societies and cultures, identity is more collective or familial than in Western cultures. And the word target can imply a victim status, rather than recognizing the strength and resilience that can come with resistance.

Despite these caveats, it makes a huge difference to life chances and experiences whether a person's social identity is mostly privileged or is targeted. This explains why racism is much more profound than individual biases and prejudices (discussed in Chapter 2). Differences in social identity reflect differential social privilege, power, and access to resources. When talking about social identity and difference, these disparities always should be taken into account. It is not a level playing field of difference but, rather, a tilted landscape of inequality. Those with the most privilege usually are the least aware of it, as culture and society mirror the centrality of these forms of status. People who have parts of their identity targeted find quite the opposite. This is one of the greatest challenges in talking about race and racism. For further work on social identity, see Exercise 1.2.

**COMFORT ZONES, LEARNING EDGES, TRIGGERS, AND CREATING A CONTEXT FOR LEARNING**

Certain concepts can assist us when we are trying to learn about racism and other forms of oppression, including the notions of comfort zones, learning edges, and triggers (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2007). *Comfort zones* are the safe places from which we generally operate, where things are familiar and predictable, and where we feel most in control. If we stay inside our comfort zones, we have little impetus for change, we surround ourselves with the well-known, and we do not challenge ourselves with new information or experiences. Moving too far away from our comfort zone can feel threatening and evoke a great deal of anxiety. This can lead people to withdraw or shut down.

Hardiman, Jackson, and Griffin (2007) suggest that the balance we should strive to achieve is our *learning edge*—that place where we are on the edge of our comfort zone—not so far out that we panic, but looking out at the world and taking small steps away from our safe place. At the learning edge, we try to remain open to new perspectives, enhancing our awareness of self and others and ultimately learning new information that we can integrate into new understandings. We have achieved a balance between comfort and discomfort, stability and instability, awareness of self and openness to others, having an anchor while allowing ourselves to sail into new waters.

As we move to our learning edge, we usually encounter some internal mine fields that can be activated by *triggers*: words, ideas, or statements that set off a strong emotional reaction (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2007). Triggers often strike an emotional vein, either unconscious or conscious, that holds reservoirs of pain, frustration, confusion, guilt, or shame. We all have triggers and should not be alarmed by them. The key thing is to learn about what they are, recognize them when they arise, and learn to handle them rather than have them manage you. When we are emotionally activated in a negative way, we are less likely to be open to new learning and other people and perspectives and more likely to feel guarded or defensive. Conversely, when experiencing a sense of well-being, we approach people and topics with greater openness and flexibility and are less judgmental of ourselves and others (Isen, 2009). (Exercise 1.3 offers some suggestions.)

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Identifying comfort zones and learning edges, as well as identifying and managing triggers, requires self-reflection and awareness of others. It can be useful to identify what fears and hopes people have in group situations, such as when taking a course on racism or working in an agency exploring racism or a related topic. Identifying hopes and aspirations enables individuals to define and express their goals for the course, workshop, or discussion; indicates areas of convergence and divergence; and allows teachers and facilitators to clarify realistic goals for the group.

Expressing fears and concerns also is helpful, as this allows for venting anxiety, as well as providing an opportunity for members to collectively generate ideas for managing the group process effectively. It also can lead to suggestions and ideas about how to proceed if the group becomes stuck or if excessive conflict breaks out.

**Setting Group Norms and Guidelines**

The group discussion can lead to a consensus about guidelines or norms for the group—which is why it makes sense to engage in the process early on. All groups develop norms; when discussing racism, it is more inclusive and effective to have explicit rather than implicit norms. It is also important for norm setting to be a collaborative process, whereby everyone in the group contributes to identifying class or group guidelines and the entire group takes responsibility for articulating and abiding by group norms. The norms serve as a group contract that clarifies expectations and supports the development of a collaborative learning culture, serving as a platform from which to explore racism. Helpful guidelines include:

- Maintaining confidentiality (only themes, not names, will be taken outside of the group)
- Listening carefully
- Treating one another with respect
- Confronting without trying to shame, calling in rather than calling out
- Taking responsibility when making statements
- Not having to represent one’s racial/ethnic group

Emerging norms will be unique to each group, and these are valuable to identify and practice. It is also helpful to have the norms to refer back to in times of disagreement.

**Journal Writing**

Another way to further a group or classroom climate of authentic introspection is the use of journals. Dealing with racism evokes strong feelings, and classroom discussion can be supplemented by keeping journals. Sometimes, feelings arise when reading a book or article, or a person may have a delayed reaction to something that came up in a workshop or class. The act of writing allows us to become more aware of our thoughts and feelings and to be able to reflect on what we find.

A journal also can represent a safer space to process difficult, confusing, embarrassing, and conflictual material. Trusted people, including instructors and others, might be invited to read the journals and offer comments and encouragement. Although readers can offer helpful comments, journal writers should not be judged on what they write.
Creating a “Safe” Environment?

Often, people embarking on an exploration of race and racism will say they need to feel safe when processing difficult material (Garran & Rasmussen, 2014). The suggestions presented here lend themselves to creating “safer” learning contexts that are conducive to learning and growth. As should be clear by now, learning about racism is not merely an academic enterprise. It combines substantive knowledge with self-awareness. This involves taking risks, moving out of our comfort zones, and being open to new experiences and to feedback. Psychological and emotional safety are not things that can be fully guaranteed, though the expressed desire for safety should be explored with students—with the understanding that definitions may vary widely, often depending on one’s social location.

Although the risk of hurt feelings or bruised self-esteem is always there, these reactions can spur growth and self-awareness. Ultimately, we cannot learn about racism without taking some emotional risks, keeping in mind that the risks of exploring racism in a book or class are minor in comparison to the risks that racism poses to people of color day in and day out. Ultimately, exploring racism in a class can be beneficial to everyone, especially when this leads to action to dismantle racism.

CONCLUSION

This book and courses and workshops on racism and other issues of diversity have the potential to lead to new insights and commitments but may also engender strong emotional reactions, influenced and moderated by a sense of one’s social identity. A constructive learning environment should encourage openness to new information and experiences, appreciation of differences, recognition of differential social power and privilege, and self-awareness and examination.

The following exercises can help in identifying and investigating aspects of social identity and the concepts of comfort zone, learning edge, and triggers.

The next three chapters explore how racism is conceptualized, review the history of racism in the United States, and explore the manifestations of institutional racism today. Using the concepts and techniques presented in this chapter should provide a structure and foundation for engaging with this challenging material.

EXERCISE 1.1 Social Identity

On a blank piece of paper, draw your own social identity pie. Look at the pie presented in this chapter and think about which parts are relevant to you. You might draw certain pieces of your pie as being very big and others very small. Some pieces of the pie in this chapter may not be relevant for you, or some aspects of your social identity may be missing. You may want to draw your pie to reflect these differences. Draw your pie in whatever shape, with whatever contents and in whatever proportions, best describes you.
Either on your own or in pairs, consider the following questions:

1. Which parts of your social identity are most important and meaningful for you and why?
2. Which parts are apparent to others and which are more hidden?
3. Which parts did you consciously choose and which parts do you feel were imposed upon you?
4. Which parts of your identity give you the greatest source of pride and satisfaction?
5. Which parts of your identity are ambiguous, in flux, or generate ambivalence?
6. When you are in classes, in your internship, or at work, which parts of your identity come to life and which parts are in the background?
7. Do you ever have to monitor whether you present or hide certain parts of your identity?

**EXERCISE 1.2 Racial Identity Formation**

This exercise should be done in pairs, with each member of the pair interviewing the other.

1. When did you first become aware of your race and ethnicity?
2. Were there any “critical incidents” that shaped your awareness of your identity?
3. How has your racial or ethnic identity affected your life?
4. How does your racial or ethnic identity intersect with other aspects of your identity?
5. In what ways are you targeted, oppressed, or marginalized? In what ways are you privileged? How do these different aspects of your identity interact?

After conducting the interview, write it up or discuss it in class. Consider how your partner’s experience with racial identity formation is similar to or different from yours. What did you learn about your partner and yourself? In what ways are you similar and different?

**EXERCISE 1.3 Exploring Triggers**

This exercise can be done in pairs, in small groups, or individually.

1. When discussing race and racism, what are you most apprehensive about?
2. What types of statements or situations do you find triggering?
3. What responses are most typical for you when you are triggered?
4. What gets stirred up for you when you are triggered when discussing racism?
5. What strategies work for you when you are triggered?
6. What do you need from those around you in these moments?
7. What guidelines for classroom discussion would you find helpful?
REFERENCES


CHAPTER 4

The Web of Institutional Racism

CONTENTS

THE NATURE OF THE WEB OF RACISM
RESIDENTIAL RACISM: NEIGHBORHOODS AND HOUSING
EDUCATIONAL RACISM: PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND HIGHER EDUCATION
EMPLOYMENT RACISM
RACISM AND WEALTH ACCUMULATION AND UPWARD MOBILITY
ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH RACISM
MENTAL HEALTH RACISM
   Access
   Services Offered
   Who Provides Treatment
   The Structure of Services
   Theoretical Biases
   Racism in Clinical Encounters
   Culturally Insensitive Facilities
   Lack of Representation on Policy-Making Boards
   Lack of Access to Private Practitioners
   The Misuse of Diagnosis
RACISM IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM
POLITICAL RACISM
MEDIA RACISM
IMMIGRATION RACISM
   Islamophobia
IMPLICATIONS OF THE WEB OF RACISM FOR THE HELPING PROFESSIONS
CONCLUSION

In the video “True Colors,” Diane Sawyer leads a team of journalists/researchers for the ABC television show Primetime Live to “test” whether racism is still alive in a “typical” U.S. city (Łukasiewicz & Harvey, 1991). Two testers, one Black and the other White, are filmed secretly while trying to find jobs or apartments, purchasing used cars, and hailing taxis. It becomes clear that the two are consistently treated differently. An advertised job is open to the White man, with great encouragement from the employer, and the same
employer denies that the job is available when the Black man with the same credentials applies for the job. The same happens with an apartment that is allegedly for rent.

In a music store, the White man browses without notice while the Black man is followed by an employee wherever he goes. A used car dealer jacks up the price of the same car for the Black man. As the two men leave the television studio after debriefing, a taxi ignores the Black man and screeches to a halt to take the White man.

Many White people who watch this video have expressed shock, while many people of color nod their head because these experiences are all too familiar. Sadly, subsequent research involving “testers” of different racial identities has confirmed the same pattern (Pager & Western, 2012).

For a significant number of White people, racism is a relic of the past and not a salient social issue today. Many Whites believe that the United States has moved to a color-blind society. True racism, in this view, is associated with the overt, Southern variety of hostility, aggression, and discrimination that was challenged by the civil rights movement after World War II. Certainly, there has been a great deal of movement toward diminishing overt forms of racism, although Whites view this progress much more optimistically than people of color.

As visible signs of progress, more people of color have gained access to universities, many police departments now are desegregated, and significantly more people of color are serving in public life as business leaders, actors, athletes, Supreme Court justices, and cabinet officers.

At the same time, some Whites have resented civil rights accomplishments. School busing, often in Northern cities, in the wake of the Brown v. Board of Education decision in the 1950s, spurred White anger and flight from cities to suburbs, as well as from public schools to private and parochial schools—in many instances reinstituting de facto segregation. And some Whites now feel victimized, believing that their chances of being admitted to elite colleges or of securing jobs are diminished by too much emphasis on race, which they think favors people of color. In fact, today more Whites believe that they are the victims of “reverse racism” than believe in the persistence of racism against people of color (Norton & Sommers, 2011).

To be sure, many White people are well aware of the persistence of racism in the United States. Still, Whites and people of color show marked differences in their beliefs about the extent of racism today, and these disparities indicate a significant perceptual racial divide in this country (Shipler, 1997). African Americans and Hispanics overwhelmingly believe that there is occupational discrimination in favor of Whites, while less than a fourth of Whites agree; and people of color view racism as a deeply entrenched, institutional phenomenon, while many Whites see it as a question of attitudes and behaviors (Bobo, 2001). Whites are victimized by crime far less than African Americans and Latinos but voice far greater support for a criminal justice system and punitive sentencing policies that disproportionately victimize African Americans and Latinos (Ghandnoosh, 2014).

These different observations perhaps belie fundamentally dissimilar experiences with racism, but the perceptual chasm itself becomes a factor in sustaining racism. A danger in having such divergent views about the nature of social phenomena in a highly segregated society is that many people exist in homogenous environments in which it is easy to mistake mirrors for windows.
Revisionist historians and critical social scientists, such as Takaki (1993), Ignatiev (1995), Allen (1994), and Steinberg (2001), have illustrated how members of certain ethnic groups (e.g., Irish, Jews, and Italians) initially encountered discrimination but eventually gained access to resources, were granted full citizenship, and assumed the privileges of Whiteness, yet members of other ethnic groups who were socially and legally constructed as “of color” and “other” experienced barriers, exclusion, and at times extreme and brutal repression that has endured. As is still the case today, those who encountered social oppression were, in turn, held responsible for their own misfortunes.

A political backlash erupted in response to the “Great Society,” when there were active government efforts to mitigate racism. One form of this backlash has been the growth of predominantly White exurbs and gated communities, as well as concerted assaults on affirmative action, questioning its use to ensure diverse student representation on college campuses and in social work programs. This backlash also has resulted in a stalling or even backsliding of the gains and momentum created by the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s. For example, we will consider the Supreme Court decision in 2013 that undermined the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The backlash has carried over to views on immigration, with the majority of Whites now feeling negative or ambivalent about immigration, particularly when media focuses on Latinos or undocumented immigrants (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015).

In this chapter, we map out the contours of the web of institutional racism in the United States today in the wake of this backlash, illuminating its stubborn and tenacious tendrils. We focus on 10 types of institutional racism: residential, educational, employment, accumulation of wealth and upward mobility, environmental and health, mental health, criminal justice, political, media, and immigration. The emphasis here is on how racism remains institutionally embedded in U.S. society and what remains to be done, as opposed to what has been accomplished. We are well aware of other severe forms of social oppression in the United States—for example, income and social class inequities, sexism, heterosexism—and that these (and other types of social oppression) are intricately entwined with racism. To completely separate out, for example, the effects of class inequities or those due to racism is difficult. We consider these intersections of oppression in Chapter 7. We also note that in using the category “people of color,” we are referring to a very ethnically diverse group and that some aspects of the web have a negative impact on some ethnic groups more than others. For example, criminal justice racism particularly affects African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans. However, in our view, White people do not encounter the web of racism, even if they are oppressed by economic or gender oppression, and, conversely, all ethnic groups of color have and do experience at least some of the negative consequences of the web of racism.

THE NATURE OF THE WEB OF RACISM

We have diagrammed the web of institutional racism in Figure 4.1. This figure does not cover every type of institutional racism; instead, each circle encapsulates a critical area in which institutional racism is manifested through laws, policies, and formal and informal practices. Each nodule is connected to all others, although some are attached by large, thick cables and others by thin but strong threads. Some strands of the web
restrain certain ethnic or racial groups of color more than others, and some individuals and subgroups succeed and prosper despite the web. The web is metaphorical but, as we will illustrate, also very real.

Durable inequalities, such as racism, are replicated in all institutions and practices of a society, although their form adapts and changes (Omi & Winant, 1994; Tilly, 1998). The United States was founded on a “racial contract,” which was the shadow side of the social contract (Mills, 1997), topics that were explored in Chapter 3. The social contract stressed the Enlightenment values of equality, citizenship, and human rights, and the racial contract defined who was human and who was not, who was free and who was enslaved, who could be dispossessed of their lands and often slaughtered, and who would take their place. Thus, we should not be surprised that in a nation founded on a racial contract, racism is reflected in institutions and policies. It is as if the “public DNA” contains this mutation, which is regenerated and reproduced. Because the racial contract is ubiquitous, it becomes central (i.e., the norm, a given), which makes it all the more difficult to see by those unimpeded by it (Mills, 1997).

In the film *The Matrix*, the hero (who is White) lives in an illusory world that appears pleasing and benign until he has a transformative experience (guided by an African American man) that enables him to view the deceptions and corruption that have always surrounded him. In presenting the web, we hope to make visible the semi-hidden matrix of racism and examine its scope, its depth, and its many connections. Any one chamber of this maze is problematic and of concern, but taken together the sites and locations of the web of racism potentiate one another, increasing their ability to exclude and deny. Although some parts of the web, such as racial profiling

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**FIGURE 4.1 Web of Institutional Racism**

*Note: Connecting lines are arbitrary and for illustration; in reality, each form of institutional racism connects with each other form in multiple ways.*

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(in which motorists are stopped because of their race), are overtly racist, what is particularly insidious is that much of the web includes institutions and policies that are viewed as race-neutral, such as transportation and environmental policy.

We emphasize five aspects of the web here:

1. It is systematic and comprehensive, not a case of isolated pockets of “leftover racism.”

2. It exists on many levels. For example, educational racism at the macro level shows a racialized pattern of unequal funding for schools, at the mezzo level the insufficient number of teachers and administrators of color working in many school districts, and at the micro level racial microaggressions are being perpetrated against students by other students and teachers.

3. It combines formal and informal practices, some overt and others covert. For example, residential segregation is maintained by formal lending policies and many people of color, particularly African Americans, have more difficulty than Whites qualifying for mortgages. More informally, some real estate agents guide prospective homeowners to some properties and neighborhoods and not to others, or landlords and property sellers are willing or unwilling to do business with people by virtue of their race. Predominantly White communities, in which many White people grew up or live, were not formed by accident or coincidence; they resulted from many strands of the web of racism.

4. It is cumulative, not just contemporaneous. Today’s web is built on webs going back hundreds of years, resulting in disinvestment and disempowerment; it is the legacy of generations of outright oppression, systematic exclusion, and loss of opportunity. It has resulted in an inability to generate and maximize social and economic assets (Brown et al., 2003; Shapiro, 2004). Thus, the web is historical, as well as reflecting current social phenomena.

5. It exercises influence and projects power—the power to make laws and policies, to enforce them, to fund them, to define and present them, and to create a public narrative and discourse that normalizes them.

The web of institutional racism encompasses neighborhoods and housing, education, employment, upward mobility, environment and health, mental health, racism within the criminal justice system, political racism, media racism, and immigration racism. We explore each of these parts of the web in turn. Additionally, Exercise 4.1 encourages an expanded understanding of the web.

**RESIDENTIAL RACISM: NEIGHBORHOODS AND HOUSING**

We discuss residential racism first because it is a bedrock of racism, “normal” yet insidious, influencing other strands of the web and casting a long shadow over those excluded from some neighborhoods and trapped in others. Although there have been instances of desegregation—even since the Great Society, significant numbers of African Americans and other people of color have moved to suburbs and middle-class neighborhoods—residential segregation still is a fixture of American life. Many poor African Americans continue to live in hypersegregated, deprived, and isolated neighborhoods,
at times called ghettos, and continue to be the most residentially segregated racial group in the country (Brown et al., 2003; Feagin, 1999; Massey & Denton, 1993). However, Latinos and Asian Americans are also increasingly living in segregated neighborhoods, although they have more social mobility than African Americans (Logan & Stults, 2011). Whites live in predominantly White neighborhoods, whether in cities, suburbs, or rural areas, and yet are the least convinced of major racial/ethnic groups that segregation still exists (Logan & Stults). White flight from communities that have increasing numbers of people of color, a demographic trend since the end of World War II, has contributed to racial segregation. This has created “Whitetopias” (Benjamin, 2009), almost exclusively White neighborhoods where residents have fled the burden of poverty and crime that they perceive as being caused by people of color. Residents in these White worlds rarely have contact with poor, urban neighborhoods of color and imagine life in those neighborhoods through the filters of media-amplified, White, middle-class stereotypes. How does this happen?

Although the home-ownership rate for African Americans has grown to 49%, it still lags well behind the rate for Whites, which is 76% (Pelletiere, 2005). Since the late 1950s, federal lending policy has favored loans to predominantly White suburbs (Brown et al., 2003) and transportation policy has privileged the building of highways that serve suburbs over public transportation in metropolitan areas. Shapiro (2004) argues that segregation is supported by racial discrimination enacted by real estate brokers and mortgage lenders, along with White racial attitudes that restrict people of color from trying to move into neighborhoods. The police—or self-appointed vigilantes such as George Zimmerman, who killed a Black teenager, Trayvon Martin, in his predominantly White suburb—monitor their neighborhoods for signs of African Americans who “don’t belong here.” This segregation is reinforced by zoning regulations that exclude rental and public housing from some neighborhoods and result in high concentrations of such housing in others.

The use of paired testers (one White, one Black, seeking to rent or buy the same property) continues to document residential racial discrimination (Oh & Yinger, 2015). In addition to that described earlier, it operates through “racial and ethnic steering” toward or away from certain properties by real estate agents, showing more or fewer units to buyers/renters, willingness or unwillingness to rent or sell by landlords and owners, and in variations in the asking prices for rents and sales. Mortgage lenders are less likely to grant mortgages to people of color, particularly African Americans (Brown et al., 2003; Feagin, 1999; Massey & Denton, 1993; Shapiro, 2004). According to the Urban League (2004), African Americans are denied mortgages at twice the rate of Whites. Credit is harder to establish and the terms of loans are more severe for African Americans (Manning, 1999). Middle-class African Americans also face higher hurdles with home financing than their White counterparts. African American homeowners often have less equity than Whites to begin with and are more likely to borrow “sub-prime” loans, which allow them to make a lesser down payment but saddle them with significantly higher interest rates and debt (Brown et al., 2003; Pelletiere, 2005; Shapiro, 2004).

Social and psychological factors have fueled segregated housing as well. In the 1950s, overt manifestations—including mob violence, intimidation, and acts such as burning crosses on the lawns of African Americans—frightened people of color from moving into predominantly White areas (Brown et al., 2003). As the numbers of people of color
increase in a community, so does White hostility and the urge of Whites to move to another neighborhood (Taylor, 1998). Entire communities, such as Sherman Park, Wisconsin, and Yeadon, Pennsylvania, which once were predominantly White, became predominantly Black as African Americans moved in (Steinhorn & Diggs-Brown, 1999). Whites today seem to feel more comfortable with Asian and Asian American neighbors than with African American and Latino neighbors (Charles, 2000; Logan & Stults, 2011). This pattern is similar to the rates of intermarriage between Whites and people of color. And it is not only neighborhoods where suspicion, separation, and segregation occur; people with African American sounding names are 16% more likely to be rejected when seeking rentals through Airbnb (McPhate, 2015).

The consequences of segregation are profound, affecting education, access to jobs, health and economic well-being, and upward mobility. For people of color trapped in hyper-segregated neighborhoods, a vicious cycle ensues that further ensnares them and diminishes their life opportunities. Because neighborhood stores are sparse, shopping is difficult and prices at those few stores often are higher. Also, there is a dearth of banks, so residents tend to resort to check-cashing establishments and loan sharks for financial transactions, incurring high fees and rates of interest (Calhoun & Bailey, 2005). Hyper-segregated neighborhoods of poor people of color have worse schools, higher crime rates, and falling property values (Logan & Stults, 2011). African American homeowners living in predominantly Black neighborhoods risk having the worth of their property diminish over time, while for White homeowners, the value of their investment usually increases (Shapiro, 2004).

Because fewer jobs are available in these areas, some residents turn to secondary and illegal job markets for employment (outside of the mainstream and the law), and crime rises. As property values fall, residents lose even more of their equity—if they had any to begin with (Shapiro, 2004). Loans from banks and mortgage companies for repair and renovation become less available, and disinvestment stalks the community, which deteriorates further (Feagin, 1999; Massey & Denton, 1993).

As communities become less safe, people avoid being out in public and keep their children off the streets, which makes the neighborhood even more dangerous (Massey & Denton, 1993; Miller, 2001). Further, the police patrolling the neighborhood often feel threatened, alienated, and prone to overreaction, which contributes to an escalating cycle of tensions between residents and authorities. As residents become more socially isolated, fueled by the absence of adequate transportation and well-paying mainstream jobs, there are fewer role models for prosocial behaviors. Self-destructive subcultures can evolve, including the rise of gang activity (Wilson, 1987, 2011). The focus in public discourse is usually on the values, morals, and behaviors of people responding to residential segregation rather than questioning the pattern of institutional racism that fuels such responses. In sum, the integrity of the community is fractured and the implicit social contract between families and their neighborhood becomes frayed and tattered (Miller, 2001).

This is one side of the tragedy of residential segregation. Another side is the cocoon of Whiteness surrounding many children who grow up in predominantly White lower-, middle- and upper-class neighborhoods, suburbs, and exurbs. Socialized into a world of Whiteness where people of color are often defined as a denigrated “other,” Whites are apt to fear and avoid them (Miller & Schamess, 2000). Even in families that espouse the
values of equality, nonprejudice, and goodwill toward all, the actual social arrangements of their lives belie these values. Their behaviors and lifestyles conflict with their social ideals.

Residential isolation ensures that significant numbers of White people will have little or no awareness of their race privilege. They will internalize a sense of entitlement to live in a predominantly White world. They will hold stereotypes unchallenged by reality, undisturbed by those who are different from them, and unperturbed by those who suffer the consequences of racism.

EDUCATIONAL RACISM: PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Segregated neighborhoods are accompanied by segregation in public education. It would be bad enough if public schools literally reflected residential segregation, but parents have choices about where they send their children to school, and this leads to a pattern of educational segregation that is worse than residential segregation. This is the result despite attempts following the Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to desegregate schools. Efforts to achieve integrated schools, such as school busing, which was designed to offset residential segregation, often provoked a large White backlash. Many White parents withdrew their children from public schools in favor of private schools or moved to Whiter school districts. A more recent development facilitating White flight from multiracial public schools has been the growth of charter school programs (Mickelson, 2014).

These trends emerged in the wake of the court-ordered desegregation. For example, after court-mandated busing in Boston schools in 1974, where by 2000 only 25.4% of children under the age of 18 living in Boston were White, and half of those children attended private schools (Logan, Oakley, & Stowell, 2003). The Harvard University Civil Rights Project found that schools are becoming more segregated and, on average, Whites are attending schools in which more than 80% of students are White. White racial homogeneity is even more pronounced in private schools (Frankenberg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003). The same project described a significant number of apartheid schools, characterized by few White students, substantial rates of poverty, and limited educational resources—a return to “separate and unequal.” While some researchers have concluded that there was mild progress toward less school segregation in public schools, recent developments have mitigated that progress (Stroub & Richards, 2013). These include the charter school movement, Supreme Court decisions prohibiting school districts from desegregating their schools within their districts by using race as a factor for school assignment, and the release of many school districts from supervision orders monitoring segregation. By 2010 only 200 out of 16,000 school districts subject to desegregation supervision orders remained (Stroub & Richards, 2013).

Schools are funded primarily by property taxes, with additional aid from state and federal governments. Thus, the wealthiest communities, which usually are predominantly White, are able to pay more for their school systems and typically spend more per capita per pupil. Kozol (1991) observed what he described as “savage inequalities” in public school systems: Poor students were taught in unsafe, overcrowded, decrepit
buildings; did not have enough school supplies; and did not have access to technology. These schools were less able to attract and retain qualified teachers. Longitudinal studies of teachers in New York State indicate that those that have the best educational backgrounds and test scores and the most teaching experience usually are teaching White, middle-class students (Brown et al., 2003). There is increasing “tripartite” segregation by virtue of language, income, and race (Mickelson, 2014). Not surprisingly, segregated schools do not reduce prejudice, do not increase social trust between racial and ethnic groups, and are less likely to produce people committed to living and working in a multiracial society (Mickelson).

All of these factors contribute to lower quality education for many children of color, particularly those who are poor. Dropout rates and school suspension rates for Hispanics and African Americans are higher than for Whites. College attendance rates are considerably lower. In 1998 nearly 95% of Whites aged 25 to 29 had a high school diploma, and for Hispanics it was just over 60% (Council of Economic Advisors, 1998). Guidance counselors in predominantly White, middle-class school districts, more so than their counterparts in poor school districts of color, expect and encourage their students to attend college. Further, the former have more experience in navigating the application process and far more contacts in college admissions offices to boost the chances of admission for the students that they recommend. Predominantly White schools also are more likely than predominantly non-White schools to have advanced, college preparatory classes (Renner & Moore, 2004).

As if White students did not already have enough advantages over students of color in the college admissions process, state anti–affirmative action efforts have cut minority admissions in colleges. In California’s two flagship state schools (UC Berkeley and UCLA), non-Asian minority freshmen dropped from 21.93% to 10.54% in one year after the universities were banned from taking race into account in their admissions decisions (Bronner, 1998). Cutbacks in federal support of financial aid for college also have hurt students of color disproportionately (Brown et al., 2003). In 1995, although African Americans and Latinos comprised 28% of all 18-year olds, they constituted only 12% of the freshman class in “selective” institutions (Carnevale & Rose, 2003).

Once on campus, students of color frequently face stereotyping, cultural exclusion, and “racial microaggressions” from White students and White faculty (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). As one consequence, students of color strive to avoid confirming the stereotypes, which creates tension and performance anxiety among them (Leary, 1999). Thus, they face a greater stereotype threat, which undermines their academic performance (Steele, 2011). This dynamic is exacerbated when students of color find themselves few in number in the classroom, at times the only non-White student in a class (Thompson & Sekaquaptewa, 2002). Stereotypes, lower social status, and isolation contribute to their feeling alienated and disengaged and not trusting the fairness and validity of the educational enterprise (Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001).

Poor students of color are less likely to have had access to computers and the Internet before entering college and are less likely to have computers once they attend college (Harmon, 1998; Komar, 2003). In the end, far more Whites than Blacks or Hispanics graduate from college. Between 2006 and 2010, 29.3% of Whites held bachelor’s degrees while the numbers are 17.7% for Blacks, and 13% for Latinos and Native Americans (Ogunwole, Drewery, & Rios-Vargas, 2012).
Although economic and social classes are major variables that lead to educational advantage and disadvantage, race is a significant factor. The majority of poor White students have White teachers as role models, which is not true for many students of color. Although poor White students are often subject to social class stereotypes, they do not encounter racial stereotypes, nor do they encounter racial microaggressions.

All of these factors influencing educational experience and attainment have major implications for employment prospects and for the accumulation of wealth. We consider these two areas of institutional racism next.

**EMPLOYMENT RACISM**

Historically, racism has limited the job opportunities of people of color. In the past, legislation and informal practices prevented African Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, Chinese Americans, and Japanese Americans, among other non-White ethnic groups, from competing with White people in an allegedly free-market economy. These barriers included Jim Crow and Black Codes, outright discrimination, hostility in the workplace, exclusionary immigration and labor laws, hostility from trade unions, and a range of roadblocks limiting access to jobs. This also created a vicious cycle because with a lower presence in the formal job sector, there were fewer social networks to facilitate employment. It was harder for people of color to learn about jobs, successfully apply for jobs, have the same job conditions as White workers when they were employed, get paid the same as White workers, and to benefit from promotion and upward mobility. All of these factors conspired to limit economic opportunity and reduced opportunities to generate capital and intergenerational wealth.

As we mentioned earlier, in modern times, many well-paying jobs have moved to the suburbs and exurbs, where many African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans don’t live. In the absence of adequate public transportation linking employment to urban centers, many residents were stranded without the means to earn a living (Wilson, 1987, 2011). This dynamic was driven by deindustrialization. For example, Holyoke, a small industrial city in western Massachusetts, saw an influx of Hispanic, primarily Puerto Rican, residents in the 1960s to the present, drawn by the low cost of housing (rental apartments built for mill workers) and family networks (Miller, 1999, 2001). But Puerto Ricans arrived in Holyoke when jobs were disappearing. While the Irish, French Canadian, and Polish immigrants who preceded them also arrived poor and without resources, they were able to gain a foothold on an economic ladder through factory work. For Puerto Ricans, the mills were moribund, with no entry-level jobs. Also, public transportation was insufficient to take people to jobs in surrounding cities and communities. Further, the Puerto Rican population was young and poorly educated. They often did not have the qualifications to be hired for some of the high-tech and white-collar jobs in the area. Finally, the quality of the public school system was and still is far below that of more affluent nearby communities, and the rate of college attendance is low. This pattern stalks many older, metropolitan areas in the United States.

Among other daunting barriers to getting jobs, people of color often do not have the necessary connections and social networks. As important as qualifications, merit, and
access are, many jobs are landed through the connections of family and friends. This is how, over time, various ethnic groups have cornered occupational niches and have accessed specific businesses, trades, and professions (Steinberg, 2001; Sullivan, 1989).

Another barrier is not having the requisite cultural capital to thrive in the workplace. Many people of color living in poor, isolated urban neighborhoods have few role models in how to talk, dress, and act in ways that fit with many predominantly White mainstream business establishments (Wilson, 2011). Discouraged, some may feel more comfortable operating in the informal, secondary labor market, which is less humiliating but carries more risks and little security (Bourgois, 1995). Cultural norms, too, erect a barrier to middle-class people of color, who may feel pressured to conform to White, middle-class norms at work, giving up some of their identity and sense of personhood (Cose, 1993).

But employment racism goes beyond culture. Promotional opportunities are fewer and salaries lower for people of color engaged in the same professions as Whites. College faculty members of color earn, on average, about 75% of what their White colleagues make with similar qualifications (Renzulli, Grant, & Kathuria, 2006). Kivel (2011) explains this by referring to a number of factors: the legacy of past discrimination that keeps people of color out of the academy; inadequate public schools and needing more time to complete postsecondary studies; having fewer colleagues of their race, ethnicity, and culture to form support networks within universities; and prejudice and discrimination by White faculty and administrators. All of these factors form a web of discrimination. Other considerations include the way that the web is internalized when a person is isolated in academia and the pressure caused by “stereotype threat” (Steele, 2011).

People of color are underrepresented in many professions and occupations. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2016) provides many examples of this pattern. (Keep in mind that African Americans make up about 12% of the U.S. population and Hispanics about 16%.)

- Among chief executives, 90.6% are White, 3.6% are Black, and 5.5% Latino.
- Among architects, 85% are White, 5.8% Black, and 5.7% Hispanic.
- In health care, 6.4% of doctors and 2.9% of dentists are Black, and the figures are 6.4% and 8.6% for Hispanics.
- In elementary, middle school, and high school classrooms, about 9% of teachers are Black and 8% Hispanic.
- Social work is an exception: African Americans comprise 22% of social workers, and the number of Latinos, 12.6%, is improving.
- In the legal profession, 89.6% of lawyers are White, 4.1% are Black, and 5% are Hispanic.

The New York Times has researched how White people dominate key positions of power in U.S. society and found that 8 of 102 CEOs of the biggest American firms are people of color (Park, Keller, & Williams, 2016). A similar pattern holds true for high-tech Silicon Valley companies. Only 1% of Google and Yahoo’s tech workers are Black, and Hispanics make up 3% of Yahoo’s tech force (Brown, 2015; Brown, 2014). According
to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), 39% of Whites and 49% of Asians and Asian Americans are employed in managerial and professional positions, while only 21% of Hispanics and 30% of Blacks are working at these levels. The unemployment rate for Native Americans and Alaska Natives is 9.9%; for African Americans, 9.6%; and for Latinos, 6.6%, compared to 4.6% for Whites. These indicators are stark and powerful reminders of the barriers that still exist for people of all ethnicities and races to participate fully in the entire range of occupational opportunities.

Once people of color have made it into law firms and corporations, they often do not progress as quickly as their White peers (Cose, 1993). For example, General Electric, representative of many other major U.S. corporations, has little racial, ethnic, or gender diversity in the top echelons of management. In 2000, only 6.4% of its corporate officers were women, and of the 20 businesses that contributed 90% of the company’s earnings, only one was headed by a person of color (Walsh, 2000).

Employment racism is not a historical vestige; rather, it is an active dynamic in American society. When “testers” of different racial backgrounds, using names that tend to connote White or Black identities, apply for jobs, they are less likely to be given an interview; even when they are interviewed, they are less likely to be hired (Pager & Western, 2012). Ultimately, employment racism has led to a situation where the unemployment rate for African Americans is steadily twice that of Whites (Higginbotham, 2013). Discrimination is notoriously difficult to prove, particularly in the eyes of the current U.S. Supreme Court, which demands actual specific evidence of intent to discriminate and will not accept the validity of proving racist patterns (Alexander, 2010); therefore, there is little recourse for those who face systemic discrimination. In modern-day America, White people do not acknowledge that they discriminate by race, which means it is nearly impossible to prove discrimination under the current standards set by the Supreme Court. While White managers who are responsible for hiring deny ever discriminating by race, asserting that they hire the most qualified person for the job, when interviewed about their attitudes toward different racial and ethnic groups they evince a great deal of prejudice toward African Americans and Latinos, indicating that “aversive” and “implicit” (both terms are discussed in later chapters) racism are at work (Pager and Western).

All of the nodes of institutional racism mentioned thus far—residential, educational, and occupational—interact with one another and contribute to the next nexus of institutional racism. We turn to disparities in accumulation of wealth and upward mobility.

**RACISM AND WEALTH ACCUMULATION AND UPWARD MOBILITY**

We acknowledge that there has been significant progress over many decades in lowering the income differential between people of color and Whites (Roberts, 1995). From 1960 to the mid-1970s, the gap between the median income for African Americans and Whites narrowed because of the civil rights movement, legislation from the Great Society (including affirmative action), and a tight labor market (Stoll, 2004). And in the 1990s, African Americans also made some less dramatic gains toward reducing the
wage gap (Stoll, 2004). However, there are still significant disparities in earnings by virtue of race. In 2015, the median usual weekly earnings for Hispanics was $604, for Blacks $641, for Whites $835, and for Asian/Asian Americans $993 (BLS, 2016). Yet these divergences pale when compared to racial discrepancies by virtue of net worth, or cumulative assets held by families.

Assets are accumulated over time, and are passed down from one generation to another in the form of college tuition payments and loans, gifts, and, of course, inheritances. The capacity to accumulate wealth is so racially disparate that it is one of the most profound examples of the opportunity-hoarding that characterizes durable inequalities (Brown et al., 2003).

Two of the most important assets in accumulating wealth are home ownership and higher levels of education. As we have learned, homeownership is more difficult to achieve for African Americans and Hispanics, and the web of racism prevents many African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians from educational achievement comparable to that of Whites. Even when they own their homes, interest rates for mortgages are higher and property values lower, contributing to a hemorrhaging rather than an increase in assets (Brown et al., 2003). “The way homes are bought and sold, where they are located, how the market values them, provides a contemporary foundation for racial inequality” (Shapiro, 2004, p. 53).

The same holds true for small businesses. African Americans are less able to secure loans and capital, denying them another way by which families and communities grow their assets (Urban League, 2004). All told, residential and occupational segregation continue to further the existing racial wealth divide (O’Connor, 2001) because of historical barriers and disadvantages.

No matter what measures are used, African Americans and Hispanics earn less than Whites and have significantly fewer financial assets (Oliver & Shapiro, 2013). The income wealth gap is twice as great for Whites as Hispanics and Blacks, but the wealth gap is six times as high when comparing Whites to Hispanics and Blacks (McKernan, Ratcliffe, Steuerle, & Zhang, 2013). While inequalities in wealth have grown for all racial groups, the ratio for White wealth compared to Black and Hispanic wealth has increased. White wealth is now 13 times that of Black wealth after being 8 times as high in 2010, and it is 10 times as high as Hispanic wealth after being 9 times as high in 2010 (Kochar & Fry, 2014). Even having a college degree does not close the gap: The median net worth of African Americans who held college degrees dropped by 56% between 1992 and 2013 while for Whites it rose 86% (Cohen, 2015)!

Financial assets can be “transformative” over the life cycle, helping family members purchase houses and attend college without incurring massive debt, which can boost a family beyond where their jobs and earnings alone would land them socially (Shapiro, 2004). The flip side is that poverty rates are higher for most groups of color, particularly American Indians, Blacks, and Hispanics, than they are for White families (Blank, 2001). The gap in wealth between Whites and African Americans, Hispanics, American Indians, and some Asian American groups is a profound consequence of racism. Shapiro (2004) concludes that “it is virtually impossible for people of color to earn their way to equal wealth through wages” (p. 2).
ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH RACISM

Although all forms of institutional racism are abhorrent, two particularly insidious forms of institutional racism are environmental racism and health racism. Together, they expose people of color to greater health risks: injuring, hurting, and maiming bodies and spirits; depleting and devastating communities; and abrogating life chances—a graphic reminder that racism literally kills people. It can be argued that environmental racism began when Europeans began to settle North America, replacing a Native American cosmology where people are not separate from their environment with a pre-capitalist and eventually capitalist orientation where the environment could be exploited and pillaged for settlement and profit (Robyn, 2002). Examples of this range from White settlers indiscriminately shooting buffalo from the windows of trains, nearly exterminating a species and important food source and cultural wellspring for Native Americans, to cheating Native Americans out of land rights in places where oil was discovered.

Environmental racism today intersects with residential racism as White families continually move farther from communities of color, leading to ribbon development (where homes are built along a main roadway), longer commutes, and further environmental degradation and pollution (Powell, 1999). Environmental racism correlates with race and class. Poor people of color are more likely to live in neighborhoods sandwiched by highways, where they are subjected to increasing levels of noise and air pollution. And they are more likely to live near toxic chemical dump sites, in neighborhoods with elevated rates of cancer and other major diseases. One example is the elevated rates of cancer in the Hyde Park neighborhood in Augusta, Georgia, thought to be a consequence of the carcinogen polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) from a wood treatment plant dumped in a community that was 90% African American by a company called Chemical Waste Management in the late 1970s (Loomis, 2015).

One of the largest uranium contamination zones in the United States is around a village on a Navajo reservation in New Mexico (Frosh, 2014). This comes from debris from over 500 abandoned uranium mines from the Cold War era. The land has social, cultural, and historical meaning to its residents whose health is endangered and yet they are loath to abandon their home.

A more recent example of environmental racism is the toxic water supply for Flint, Michigan, a deindustrialized, predominantly African American city near Detroit. In January 2016, the state of Michigan changed the source of the city’s water from Lake Huron to the Flint River. The Flint River is highly corrosive and soon the levels of lead in the drinking water were high enough to cause lead poisoning (Ganim & Tran, 2016). This threat was identified by outside researchers and a local pediatrician because the state kept reassuring residents that the water was safe. State officials not only tried to cover up the catastrophe but initially condemned those who blew the whistle (The New York Times, 2016). It is difficult to imagine that this would have happened in a community of White, middle-class residents.

Hazardous exposure is a consequence of the interaction of race and class. In Massachusetts, communities with a median household income of less than $30,000 have triple the cumulative exposure to hazardous locations and facilities than communities with higher income levels (Faber & Krieg, 2001). Race exacerbates the problem: If people
of color make up more than 25% of a community's population, the hazardous exposure rate is nine times the rate of communities with less than 5% people of color (Faber & Krieg, 2001).

Poor people of color are more likely to live in areas prone to natural disasters, such as low-lying floodplains, as was sadly illustrated by the “social ecology” of Hurricane Katrina (Park & Miller, 2006). Poor people of color are more apt to live in apartments with lead paint, more likely to live in roach-infested apartments, and they have much higher rates of asthma than do White, middle-class children (Acevedo-Garcia & Osypuk, 2004; Yinger, 2000).

A report by the Natural Resources Defense Council (Quintero-Somaini & Quirindongo, 2004) documented environmental health risks for Hispanics. Many Latinos live in cities with high levels of air pollution, which increases the risks for cancer and asthma, and older housing stock results in Hispanic children having twice the rate of dangerous lead levels as White children. A significant number of Latinos live in “colonias,” unincorporated communities near the United States–Mexico border, where inadequate drinking water and sewage disposal increase the risks of waterborne diseases such as giardiasis, hepatitis, and cholera. In Western states, many Latinos drink water contaminated by arsenic, chemicals, and fertilizers. Those working as farm workers face high exposure to pesticides, which increases the risks for cancer.

Taken together, these environmental hazards create major health risks for Hispanics, who as a group are least likely to have health insurance, although this also is a problem for African Americans and some Asian American groups such as Koreans (Brown, Ojeda, Wyn, & Levan, 2000). These are a few examples of the many environmental perils faced by people of color.

People of color, particularly African Americans, Latinos, and American Indians, receive lower quality health care than Whites (National Academy of Sciences [NAS], 2002). In addition to having less insurance, people of color have less access to health services. Health facilities that are used are often more crowded, with longer waiting periods and in older and less well-kept facilities. People of color are less likely than Whites to find doctors who mirror them ethnically and have a good understanding of their culture. People of color also are more likely to be misdiagnosed and less likely to have necessary tests, while being more vulnerable to undergoing invasive surgery such as amputations and castration. For example, African American women have a 40% higher death rate than White women from breast cancer due to significant delays in diagnosis and treatment when compared to Whites (Freeman, 2014).

Doctors and other health care providers, as with the population at large, may be unaware of their own stereotypes, biases, and prejudices. Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) report that emergency room doctors give Latinos anesthesia for long-bone fractures half as often as White patients; yet a follow-up study with the same physicians indicated that they did not think that Latinos were in any less pain. Health care providers are themselves often the target of racism (Garran & Rasmussen, 2016), with very little institutional support, in the form of training or other interventions.

Despite progress in public health initiatives over the years, people of color endure more illness and injury from birth until death. African American babies are more than twice as likely as White babies to have a low birth weight (Acevedo-Garcia & Osypuk,
This, in turn, contributes to higher rates of infant mortality and lifelong developmental challenges and learning difficulties. This trend is exacerbated as poor children of color face higher risks of injury in hazardous living situations, along with more exposure to lead paint (Acevedo-Garcia & Osypuk, 2004). Poor, isolated neighborhoods also are more dangerous, placing residents at higher risk for being victims of violence. All of these factors have negative consequences for developmental, medical, behavioral, educational, and social outcomes.

Adults of color have higher rates of disease and injury because of their greater exposure, yet they have less adequate health care when they are stricken (NAS, 2002). Blacks are more likely to die from heart disease (Williams, 2001), have a significantly lower survival rate from cancer (Joiner, 2004), and, along with American Indians and Hispanics, have higher death rates than Whites from diabetes (Williams, 2001). African Americans also have much higher rates of hypertension, which may be related in part to the ongoing stress of racism (Kingston & Nickens, 2001).

In research by Woody and Green (2001), African Americans of all social classes reported that they confront constant stereotypes and discrimination and are concerned about losing jobs. Thus, they work longer hours and take less time for vacations, which affects health as well as family life. African American men in particular report strong feelings of vulnerability as well as an acute awareness of their lower life expectancies and higher risk factors in all aspects of life, leading to a diminished sense of well-being compared to Whites.

African American men also are more likely than Whites not to have a doctor, a consequence of the conditions mentioned earlier and also borne of mistrust about the aims of the medical profession, generated in part by revelations about medical abuse. A prime example is the infamous Tuskegee experiment, in which Black men were left with untreated syphilis for research purposes (Joiner, 2004). Given this accumulation of risk factors, it is not surprising that 40% of Black men die prematurely, compared to 21% of White men, and that Blacks have a significantly shorter life expectancy than Whites (Joiner, 2004; Muhammad, Davis, Lui, & Leondar-Wright, 2004).

MENTAL HEALTH RACISM

The same structural barriers to health care that affect people of color disproportionately also apply to mental health services. Mental health services, however, sometimes are offered on a sliding-fee basis, a policy that expands the pool of people who are covered. At the same time, managed care has reduced the number of counseling sessions available to consumers, except those with the means to pay out of pocket. Provider biases and prejudices operate with mental health workers as they do for medical personnel, but the essence of therapy and counseling involves intersubjective meaning-making, so the corrosive impact of such biases erodes the relational foundation of clinical services. Internalized, unconscious stereotypes loom large when White practitioners engage in cross-racial or cultural counseling because of its intimate, interpersonal nature (Goggin, Werkmeister Rozas, & Garran, 2015).

Wade (1993) has argued that institutional racism is present in mental health policy and has a significant impact on diagnostic and treatment issues. Institutional racism is
at hand in the following areas: (a) access, (b) services offered, (c) who provides services, (d) the structure of services, (e) theoretical biases, (f) racism between people in the clinical encounter, (g) culturally insensitive counseling facilities, (h) lack of representation on policy-making boards, (i) lack of access to private practitioners, and (j) the misuse of diagnosis.

Access

The same issues of access apply to mental health services as to other health services (Davis, 1997). The uninsured have fewer mental health options and, due to the intersection of race and health coverage, the rates of insurance coverage are lower for many groups of color. Other considerations include the location of clinics and whether they are easily accessible by public transportation.

Middle-class consumers have a choice when selecting providers, whereas poor communities of color often have access to only one mental health agency. A recent emphasis on faith-based initiatives may lead to more religious agencies offering counseling services, although people from different denominations or who are not religious may feel uncomfortable about accessing them. Another inequity is that waiting lists for clinics serving poor clients of color are often longer.

Services Offered

Managed care has medicalized counseling. To receive reimbursement, a client requires a diagnosis acceptable to Medicaid or to a managed care company. Less counseling is available for the stresses of daily living, to help people cope with the consequences of illness and disability, to improve interpersonal communication, and to address developmental delays and learning disabilities—all of which are needs exacerbated by institutional racism. And there is not yet a diagnostic category that includes race-based trauma despite clinical evidence of its existence (Carter, 2007).

Who Provides Services

The issues facing community mental health centers are similar to those in public education who are concerned about the quality of services offered and who provides them. Counseling in clinics located in poor communities of color is stressful, with low pay, long hours, and stringent productivity requirements. Although some dedicated clinicians remain in these agencies, more often we see an exodus of qualified counselors seeking better working conditions and salaries by going into private practice or working in agencies in more affluent communities. This leads to high staff turnover. Overall, clinicians with less experience and training work in poor communities of color.

Seeking therapy involves trust and making oneself vulnerable in the presence of another. For those who are targeted by racism, it is often more challenging to develop a trusting relationship with a White clinician or a clinician of color from another ethnic group. Will the clinician understand the dynamics of racism? Will there be racial enactments in the clinical encounter? Is it safe to be vulnerable with this person? These are salient questions raised by the specter of racism in the clinical encounter.
Also, when clients speak languages other than English, there is a need for translation and interpretation, which is difficult to arrange and frequently unavailable. In some agencies, when indigenous workers are hired, cultural competency increases but clinical services may be offered by people with less professional training. Also, agencies have racial hierarchies. Although a significant number of line workers may be people of color, the staffing pattern whitens in the supervisory, managerial, and leadership ranks. The exceptions are agencies run by people of color, for people of color, with representative boards of directors.

**The Structure of Services**

Individual counseling and 50-minute sessions make certain assumptions about cultural styles, worldviews, and values. Many Asian American, Hispanic, and African American communities have more of a collective orientation, which deemphasizes the individual and stresses the importance of family and community. Yet, most U.S. counseling centers offer individual counseling in a 50-minute hour. This is reinforced by a financing and billing structure in which most clients are seen individually rather than in families (nuclear and extended), friendship clusters, or groups.

The emphasis on regular appointments, though important to staff, assumes a certain level of organization, adequate transportation, and does not allow for irregular working patterns or sudden and debilitating stressful events. The length of sessions, with an emphasis on starting and ending on time, also reflects middle-class Eurocentric norms of communication and social behavior.

**Theoretical Biases**

The counseling enterprise in the United States is founded on values, expectations, and beliefs derived from European psychologists and White practitioners in this country. As mentioned earlier, the focus on the individual and the value placed on separation-individuation is a clear example of this cultural and social bias. As Summerfield (2004) has argued, help-seeking is culturally informed—what do we seek help for, who do we seek help from, what do we expect when we seek help, what are the risks of seeking help from outsiders? These are questions often left unexplored and unanswered by theories of Western psychology.

These assumptions are exacerbated by expectations about disclosure and communication, as well as by Western notions of egalitarianism, which sometimes run counter to expectations about deference and hierarchy in other cultures. Even the notion of confidentiality, as important as it is, reflects cultural norms about privacy and the rights of the individual transcending those of the family. The same is true of the concept of professional boundaries, which evolved in Western European countries; not eating with or socializing with clients may be normative in Western counseling but is alienating and even perceived as being rude or disrespectful in other cultural contexts.

Finally, Western theories of counseling and therapy have often focused on deficits and problems, rather than strengths, cultural sources of wisdom, and resilience (Miller, 2012). Resisting racism takes courage and strength, which need to be validated in clinical encounters. Otherwise, the act of making oneself vulnerable, particularly with a person who may not “get it,” carries the risk that this will undermine one’s resistance in the face of racism.
Racism in Clinical Encounters

Therapists already hold a great deal of power in their relationships with clients, and this is magnified when clinicians are not mindful of the power and privileges that their race or ethnicity convey. A danger when White clinicians are working with people of color is that non-Western cultural patterns and behaviors might be pathologized or viewed as dysfunctional. This contributes to the potential for nonempathic, unhelpful services, ranging from culturally insensitive services to actual racist encounters during sessions (Carter, 1995, 2007; Pinderhughes, 1989; Ridley, 1995). Often, the transactional patterns of racism involve implicit or aversive racism by White clinicians, which contribute to microaggressions (see Chapter 5) in the clinical encounter. Racial transference and countertransference is operating in all cross-racial and cultural work, whatever the race or ethnicity of the client or therapist. Sometimes clients of color, understandably, are slow to trust White clinicians; will the White therapist be able to not only tolerate this dynamic but have the skills and foresight to take active steps to name and work with the cross racial nature of the relationship?

Culturally Insensitive Facilities

Waiting rooms and offices, like the clinicians themselves, typically reflect cultural biases and assumptions, as well as power relationships. Where a receptionist sits, how he or she treats clients, and how he or she is treated in return by professional staff send many messages. The reception area also communicates respect or disrespect for clients. What pictures or genres of art, if any, are on the wall, and what do they convey? Is there a television in the waiting room and, if so, what channel is it tuned to? What toys and magazines are in the waiting room? Is the telephone message in English only? While there have been improvements over the past decade in mental health facilities having a more culturally welcoming atmosphere, many of our clients of color have expressed unease and discomfort about waiting for and receiving services in facilities that for them encode White, middle-class ideas about how offices should be structured.

Lack of Representation on Policy-Making Boards

Most mainstream clinical agencies that are not established specifically to serve a specific ethnic or racial group do not have adequate representation of people of color on their boards, even when their clients are predominantly people of color. Boards of directors often do not offer enough board positions for consumers. Managed-care panels and Medicaid decision-making committees also are prone to exclude people of color or to have only token representation. This interacts with the Whiteness of the staff hierarchy at the higher levels of the organizational chart.

Lack of Access to Private Practitioners

Very few private practitioners, particularly White practitioners, work with poor people of color, and if they do, they often limit the hours of availability. This leads to a tremendous gap in potential clinical services for clients. It also limits the options of poor clients of color. If a consumer has had a bad experience with the only mental health agency serving his or her neighborhood and does not want to return to that organization,
or if in turn the agency has dismissed her as a client, the option of seeing a clinician in private practice is often not available.

The Misuse of Diagnosis

Diagnosis is an essential part of offering mental health services, particularly given the need to justify services to insurance companies and Medicaid in order to be reimbursed for services. As we illustrate in Chapter 11, racism itself is a cause of stress, emotional tension, and can even cause trauma (Carter, 2007). And yet, there is no diagnostic category used by insurance companies to capture this. Thus, people of color seeking services for problems that accrue from experiencing ongoing racism are often given other psychological diagnoses that have the capacity to be pathologizing; the consequences of social targeting and oppression are construed as psychological or reflecting characterological vulnerabilities and weaknesses. Even the efforts to resist and confront racism can be negatively interpreted as evidence of an “oppositional defiant disorder,” or anger management problems, or even paranoia.

In short, institutional racism, particularly when combined with class inequities, is pervasive at all levels of the mental health system, from policy making to what happens in the consulting room. The result is that people of color, who suffer the additional life stresses of racism, often have the fewest options for mental health services. And when they do receive counseling, it often reflects cultural biases and leads to further racist encounters and experiences.

RACISM IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

All forms of institutional racism are wrong and dangerous. Criminal justice racism is a stain on American society akin to apartheid. African Americans and Latinos constitute only 30% of the general population, yet comprise 58% of the prison population (Ghandnoosh, 2014). African Americans comprise 42% of the death row population (Higginbotham, 2013). When people of color are imprisoned so disproportionately, something is terribly amiss. When African Americans comprise the majority of death row inmates, an appalling caricature of justice is enacted in the name of all U.S. citizens.

These discrepancies cannot be explained by blaming the victims of institutional racism. What is taken as a normative pattern today was not yesterday’s prototype. In 1950, at the height of Jim Crow and virulent Southern racism, African Americans constituted 30% of the prison population; by the early 1990s, they made up about half (Hawkins, 2001). Ultimately, this is a crushing indictment of the web of institutional racism, in which all of the strands contribute to more vulnerability for involvement in the criminal justice system and pervasive racism within it.

On a macro level, segregated, isolated, economically depleted neighborhoods lack opportunities for quality education, well-paying jobs, and pathways to economic self-sufficiency (Massey, 2001). Lacking sufficient legitimate opportunities, some residents turn to illegal activities, such as drug dealing. (In predominantly White suburbs, there are also drug dealers, but they are far less likely to be under surveillance and arrested.) As these activities become more prevalent, the neighborhood becomes more dangerous.
This, in turn, leads to fewer citizens venturing out to public places, which makes streets even more dangerous (Geis & Ross, 1998; Miller, 2001).

Police officers, many of whom are White, patrol these neighborhoods and develop or reinforce negative stereotypes toward people of color, who report far more negative interactions with police than do White people (Ghandnoosh, 2014; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). Ironically, Whites live in neighborhoods where they are far less likely to be victimized by crime than are people of color and yet they fear crime more than people of color and have more punitive attitudes toward the punishment of criminals (Ghandnoosh, 2014). The police guard urban neighborhoods with high concentrations of poor people of color in much the way the military guards occupied territory. They may overreact and sometimes commit brutal and sadistic acts, such as the well-publicized beating of Rodney King, the slaying of Amadou Diallo, and the rape and torture of Abner Louima. Experimental studies have documented how White people, whether police officers or civilians, hold implicit biases toward African American men and are more likely to shoot an unarmed Black person in an ambiguous situation than an armed White person (Sadler, Correll, Park, & Judd, 2012). In the past 2 years there have been well-publicized murders of unarmed young Black men by police officers: Tamir Rice, John Crawford III, Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, and Rumain Brisbon. (As we write this second edition, there were two more publicized shootings of unarmed young Black men, Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Philando Castile in St. Paul, Minnesota. Sadly, less than 24 hours later, five police officers were murdered in Dallas after an evening of peaceful protest against these shootings.) Residents, then, not only fear drug dealers and gangs but also the law enforcement officers who supposedly “protect” their community. This is all a prelude, occurring before institutional racism in the criminal justice system comes into play.

Prior involvement with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are risk factors for adult association with the criminal justice system. African American children are more likely to be the subjects of protective investigations, more likely to be placed out of their homes, less likely to have permanent placement or reunification plans, and on average spend a longer time in foster care (Lu et al., 2004; Roberts, 2002). In Chicago, 95% of foster children are Black (Roberts, 2002).

Black children, too, are more likely to be moved from one foster home to another. Children without family or stability in substitute care, living in more dangerous neighborhoods and attending under-resourced schools, are more prone to educational difficulties. This leads to a greater likelihood of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system, gangs, and, thus, greater risk of police harassment.

African American children are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system. Youth of color are treated more severely at every stage of the juvenile justice system (Building Blocks for Youth [BBFY], 2001; Poe-Yamagata & Jones, 2000). African American youth are more likely than White youth to be charged for the same offense, and more likely to be placed out of home. They are given longer sentences, are more likely to be referred to adult court, and are less likely to receive probation (Poe-Yamagata & Jones, 2000). In Cook County, Illinois, 99% of juvenile offenders referred to adult courts are African American or Latino (BBFY, 2001).

One of the single most important factors in determining whether a youth offender does not reoffend as an adult is to be able to change either the peer group or the
community (Laub, 2000). But with disproportionate sentencing and incarceration of youth of color, combined with less social mobility, the peer group becomes entrenched and increasingly deviant. These factors increase the risks for engagement with the criminal justice system as adults (Laub, 2000).

Although African American men do have slightly higher rates of engagement in violent crimes than White men, this difference is not large enough to explain the discrepancies in the demographics of the prison population (Ghandnoosh, 2014). The majority of prisoners are not incarcerated for brutal crimes (Alexander, 2010), and while the prison population has grown dramatically over the past 20 years, the murder rate has been dropping (Massey, 2001).

Many people are in prison for violating drug laws, which have built-in racial biases. Crack cocaine carries mandatory minimum sentences, whereas powdered cocaine does not (Kennedy, 2001). Because Whites use powdered cocaine proportionately more than Blacks do, the sentencing patterns are racially divergent. In 2000, African Americans constituted 80% to 90% of those imprisoned for drug offenses (Alexander, 2010). Although the majority of drug users and dealers are White, three quarters of those imprisoned for drug offenses are Black and Latino.

Recently, there has been a lot of public discussion about how drug addicts, now increasingly White, have an illness and should receive treatment rather than incarceration. There are public discourses asking for addicts to be treated with compassion and sympathy, but where were these voices when the crack epidemic was sweeping predominantly African American communities? African American addicts were characterized as pathological thugs and criminals and the response of the criminal justice system was to arrest and incarcerate them (Yankah, 2016). Alexander (2010) asks how the United States would have responded if the “war on drugs” had been conducted in White suburbs, where equally high rates of drug use were occurring, resulting in the incarceration of young, White, middle-class men.

In addition to “drug sweeps,” Alexander (2010) has described the process that results in such high rates of Black and Latino imprisonment. People of color are more likely to be stopped by the police if walking and pulled over if driving. For example, in Florida in 2014 Black people were twice as likely as White people to be stopped and given a ticket for not wearing a seatbelt (Alvarez, 2016). The rate of being stopped by the police while driving is up to five times as high for Black drivers in some parts of the country and is a problem throughout the nation (LaFraniere & Lehren, 2015). If there is a legal problem, such as unpaid traffic tickets, this is more likely to be uncovered. African American and Latino men are more likely to be searched and if carrying a drug, such as marijuana, have it discovered. They are more likely to be charged and face higher charges. They are less likely to have the resources or adequate legal representation to enable them to settle charges without punitive consequences. They are more likely to be viewed as a threat by the police officers who stop them and through the interaction of implicit bias (see Chapter 5) and external violence suffer the consequences. They are more likely to face trial (often with White judges and predominantly White juries that harbor implicit bias) than White defendants and more likely to be convicted and given stiffer punishments. They are more likely to be placed on probation or parole when not in prison. At every step of the criminal justice system—being stopped, being searched, being charged, being
arrested, facing trial, sentencing, incarceration, and parole—African Americans and Latinos are disproportionately represented and face stiffer penalties (Ghandnoosh, 2014; Johnson, Austin-Hillery, Clark, & Lu, 2010). Accordingly, Black men are five times more likely than White men to be under the supervision of the criminal justice system (Council of Economic Advisors, 1998; Human Rights Watch, 2000). In 2006, one in every 14 Black men was in prison compared with one in every 106 White men (Alexander, 2010).

Other contributing factors to the high Black prison population are states’ “three strikes” laws, which disproportionately affect African Americans because they are more likely to have been arrested and charged in the past for reasons already stated. This is part of a trend that favors punishment over treatment. Once in prison, there has been a move to deny prisoners’ educational services, disadvantaging their job and career prospects when released (Boyd, 2001; Western, 2001).

A vicious cycle occurs (Ghandnoosh, 2014). Whites, many of whom have very little contact with African Americans and Latinos, harbor negative stereotypes about African Americans and Latinos and view them as dangerous and predatory. Much of this comes from media stereotypes and many studies have confirmed that there is internalized implicit bias within the general White population. White politicians respond to these fears by promising and promulgating more punitive legislation. Consequently, more African Americans and Latinos are stopped, charged, sentenced, and imprisoned, reinforcing White stereotypes of criminality. Because of unfair treatment, many people of color mistrust the criminal justice system and are less likely to cooperate with it, while Whites have fewer and more positive interactions with law enforcement. The media selectively reports on crime by people of color, continuing to fuel White fears, overplaying the threats of men of color toward White victims, underplaying the racist criminal justice system, and the cycle continues.

Consequences of racism in the criminal justice system amplify racism in the political process, as more and more states are depriving felons of the right to vote—in some instances for the rest of their lives. By 2000, more than 4.2 million Americans had been disenfranchised from voting because of past or present incarceration; and in Alabama and Florida, 31% of African American men have lost their right to vote (Sengupta, 2000). This right is often forfeited for very minor crimes (Alexander, 2010). The United States is the only democracy in the world that disenfranchises convicted felons, which has disturbing echoes of the Jim Crow era (Boyd, 2001; Simson, 2002). In fact, voter disenfranchisement for felons has more effectively suppressed Black votes than at the height of the Jim Crow era (Alexander, 2010).

The costs of all of this to communities are immense. Many men who are socially integrated in their communities and who are fathers are taken out of their communities (Sabol & Lynch, 1997). This means that potential breadwinners are no longer available, which contributes to the family’s inability to accumulate social capital, as discussed. It also leads to a loss of eligible marriage partners. It is also more difficult for former felons to find jobs and receive social welfare benefits (Alexander, 2010). Children lose father figures. Reintegration programs are few and inadequate, so those who try to return to their communities after incarceration often lack skills, counseling, training, and other necessary supports, all of which contribute to high rates of recidivism. And because of hyper-segregation, most of the men in prison come from a small number of
urban communities of color (Sabol & Lynch, 1997). Ironically, according to former Attorney General Eric Holder (2015), states that saw their prison population decrease had lower crime rates.

By the middle of 2003, the United States had nearly 2.1 million people in U.S. state and federal prisons, earning the dubious distinction of having the most people incarcerated in the world (Sentencing Project, 2004). This is only the tip of the iceberg, as there are over 7-million people under some form of correctional supervision (Alexander, 2010). The United States incarcerates 25% of the world’s prisoners, and if all prisoners were brought together in one place, they would constitute the 35th most populous American state (Boyd, 2001). Black men in the United States are incarcerated at four times the rate that Black men were imprisoned during the apartheid era in South Africa, and that number is now more than that of Black men enslaved during the height of the U.S. slave era (Alexander, 2010). In the past quarter century, the United States has created a racial gulag through its criminal justice system (Boyd, 2001) and has reinstituted racial apartheid.

**POLITICAL RACISM**

Power in society resides in many sites—industry, the military, the media, among the wealthy, and—when there are social movements—among the people. One of the most visible and significant locations of power lies in government and politics. Over the course of its history, this nation has repeatedly denied political representation and power to people of color, such as denial of citizenship and the right to vote by legal and illegal means. Accordingly, racism not surprisingly extends throughout the political system. It is manifested in who is elected (and who is absent), who is appointed, who can and cannot vote in elections, and who wields power behind the scenes.

Since writing the first edition of this book, the United States elected its first non-White president, Barack Obama, who is a multiracial African American, winning two terms as president, achieving a milestone that deserves recognition and celebration as a significant marker in the struggle against racism. However, this accomplishment has been marred by overt racism and hostility toward President Obama by his political opponents (discussed in Chapter 3) (McIlwain & Caliendo, 2014), the formation of the Tea Party in direct response to having an African American president (Zeskind, 2012), and White flight to the Republican Party (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015). We first consider some historical trends preceding this historic election and then examine current efforts to suppress the votes of people of color.

After the Civil War, the first African American senators and representatives were elected, but the backlash to Reconstruction and successful efforts by White Southerners to restrict voting meant that shortly afterward, no African Americans served in Congress until the election of an African American representative from Illinois in 1928 (Patrick, Pious, & Ritchie, 2001). In the entire history of the U.S. Senate, there have been only 26 senators who were people of color (Park et al., 2016). In the 2016 U.S. Senate, the number is 6 out of 100 senators (Park et al., 2016). In the history of the Supreme Court, there have been two Black justices. In recent decades, there have been a number of firsts: Colin Powell became the first African American to serve as the head of the Joint
Chiefs of Staff and the first Black Secretary of State under the second President Bush, followed by Condoleezza Rice. The numbers of people of color in cabinet-level positions increased under both Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, and even further under President Obama, including his appointment of Eric Holder as the first non-White U.S. Attorney General. President Obama also appointed the first Latina to the Supreme Court, Sonia Sotomayor.

The first Latino cabinet members were appointed in the 1970s. However, the few Hispanic congressmen and senators holding national office in the United States today do not mirror the percentages of Hispanics in the general population, which is about 16%. Hispanics only constitute 5% of federal judges (Patrick et al., 2001). There have been three Native American congressmen, two of whom went on to serve in the Senate, although at this writing there are no Native American senators. There have been no Native American nor Asian American Supreme Court justices. Asian Americans were not elected to Congress or the Senate until the 1950s, when their numbers were boosted by the admission of Hawaii as a state in 1959. Few staffers of color work for elected officials. For example, in a survey taken in 2000, in Massachusetts, of 151 congressional staffers, only 15 were “minorities” and no congressional office from any state was headed by a person of color (Associated Press, 2000). In 2015, the combined numbers of people of color in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate were the highest ever (17%) but did not reflect the growing diversity of the U.S. population (38% people of color) (Krogstad, 2015). Only 4 out of 50 U.S. governors are people of color (Park et al., 2016).

The dearth of adequate representation of people of color does not stop with the federal government. Many cities and states lack a fair proportion of elected and appointed people of color. One mechanism that supports this inequity at the local level is the practice of electing at-large candidates to city councils and school committees. In a city where perhaps one-third of the residents are people of color, this practice can mean that people of color will be in the minority for every contested seat and, therefore, unable to elect people representing their interests.

In suburbs around Hartford, Connecticut, for example, people of color have moved to Bloomfield, East Hartford, West Hartford, Newington, Wethersfield, and Windsor in significant numbers; yet, a number of these communities have only—or mostly—White city councilors and school board members (Altimari, Budoff, & Davis, 2001). This underrepresentation goes beyond elected officials, extending to the warrens of commissions and city departments, often staffed by people who are patrons of the elected people who appoint them.

This lack of access to political offices at the local level means that people of color do not gain the experience and develop resumes propelling them to state and national office. The high costs of campaigning coupled with the unrestricted growth of Political Action Committee (PAC) donations also hampers the capability of people of color to forge political careers.

There have been recent negative trends that have weakened the power of people of color in the political process: unbridled spending, the evisceration of the voting rights act, voter suppression laws passed at the state level, and taking away the vote from people convicted of criminal behavior. The Supreme Court decision known as Citizen’s United allows PACs to spend unlimited amounts of money to influence elections; in
many cases, PACs do not need to identify their donors (Vandewalker, 2015). Given that people of color have much less wealth than White people in the United States, their ability to participate in this free-for-all of buying political advertisements is much more limited. PACs have allowed for more heated rhetoric, including negatively coded messages directed toward White voters about people of color. PACs are also less accountable for being factually accurate. Political advertisements can be racialized in many ways (McIlwain & Caliendo, 2015):

- Associating people of color with racist stereotypes—such as presidential candidate Romney’s advertisement that “Obama is not working”—not directly accusing Obama of being lazy but activating a racial stereotype about Black people not working with White voters.
- By deploying props—such as showing candidates talking with White voters or voters of color to prime feelings about whom their allegiances are to.
- By spreading racialized rumors, such as the advertisement during the 2012 Presidential Election run by a PAC associated with the Tea Party showing an African American woman crowing about Obama giving out free phones to supporters, which not only distorted facts but activated a number of racial stereotypes.

The Voting Rights Act, passed in 1965, ensured that in states and localities that historically denied African Americans the right to vote, there was federal supervision of the voting plan that ensured full participation of all racial and ethnic groups. It dramatically increased the political participation of African Americans and other groups of color that had been systematically excluded from the political process for many decades. Shortly after its passage, 800,000 African American voters were registered and the number of Black office holders jumped to 10,000 from 300 (Higginbotham, 2013). Although there were attempts to dismantle the act from its inception, there was overall support for the Voting Rights Act from all three branches of government and both major political parties (Berman, 2015). However, this changed in 2014 when the U.S. Supreme Court voted to overturn the need for these places to have federal approval of their voting plans unless there were overt attempts to subdue votes based on race or ethnicity. In the United States today, no policy explicitly states that it is racist, but many policies that purport to achieve other goals are intentionally racialized (Mcllwein & Caliendo, 2015). The Supreme Court decision effectively permitted the passage of a slew of laws that not only made it more difficult for registered voters to exercise their constitutional right to vote, but carried restrictions particularly suppressing the votes of people of color (Waldman, 2015). In our view, this was intentional, as were efforts to suppress the votes of people of color before the Voting Rights Act was passed. Since 2010, 24 states have passed voter suppression laws and there is a very strong correlation between Republican control of the state political process and the passage of restrictive voting legislation (Weiser & Opsal, 2015).

Many of the laws were passed in response to alleged, largely uncorroborated “concerns” about voter fraud. Voter ID laws disproportionately suppress the votes of people of color, the youngest and oldest of voters, and voters with disabilities (Weiser & Opsal, 2015). The laws make it more difficult for people who move more frequently and are
less likely to have driver’s licenses or other “acceptable” documentation, where the cost of obtaining the ID may be prohibitive (Waldman, 2015). Many of the laws also did away with early voting, which was more utilized by the groups listed earlier (Weiser & Opsal, 2015). In addition to this, precincts with large populations of poor voters of color have longer lines to wait before voting due to fewer available voting sites and machines or less modern voting equipment (Famighetti, Mellilo, & Perez, 2015).

A congressional investigation found that voters in “low-income, high-minority” districts were sometimes 20 times more likely than voters in other districts to have their votes discarded in the 2000 national election (Minority Staff, Special Investigations Division, Committee on Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives, 2001). In South Dakota, American Indians complained that certain maneuvers, including complicated registration procedures and dubious identification requirements, were attempts to suppress their vote (Cohen, 2004). Tactics such as these are eerily reminiscent of voting restrictions that characterized the Jim Crow era.

But this is not all. Many states have passed restrictive voting legislation barring many people with criminal records from ever voting again. Couple these laws with the criminal justice racism described earlier and there is a highly racialized process of African American and Latino voter suppression. The stunning statistic that nearly a third of Black males are permanently denied the right to vote in certain states such as Florida (Weiser, 2015), because they have been convicted of a felony is but one way to deny votes. The presidential election of 2000 raised many concerns about attempts to suppress the Black vote in Florida, either by striking people of color from voter registration rolls before the election or by making it difficult for them to vote during the election (Fritz, 2001).

It is not surprising that the Republican Party is committed to voter suppression of people of color. As the party has increasingly tacked to the right and appealed to those who are White, while opposing legislation that provides social, educational, and health services supported by many people of color, many people of color have moved to the Democratic Party and Whites to the Republican Party (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015). Thus, there is a vicious cycle where the Republican Party increasingly relies on White voters and their political hegemony is threatened by people of color voting in large numbers. And as the party supports restrictions in voting, it pushes voters of color further into the Democratic camp. Sadly, the voter suppression has worked and probably influenced the outcome of the 2014 senatorial race in North Carolina in the Republican’s favor, along with the gubernatorial elections in Kansas and Florida (Weiser, 2015). Having one party that has become so blatantly associated with White privilege and power in this modern era has been a stunning setback in the struggle for racial equity and justice (Wines & Fernandez, 2016).

This trend is not new and began in the 1960s when Richard Nixon pursued his “Southern strategy,” which shifted White voters from the Democratic camp to the Republican Party through explicit and implicit racially coded messages to White voters (Edsall & Edsall, 1991; Polikoff, 2004). President Ronald Reagan used coded racialized imagery when he talked about “welfare queens,” and the first President Bush appealed to similar sentiments in his now infamous Willie Horton advertisements while running for president against Michael Dukakis. This raised the specter of unbridled sexual and physical assault by Black felons, a stereotype promulgated throughout the history of the racial project of the United States. Although his son, George W. Bush, had a better track
record of appointing a more diverse cabinet, both of his election campaigns were marred by numerous efforts to suppress the Black vote, and many of his policies increased the tax burden on poor people of color while cutting health and human services.

The lack of adequate representation has consequences for people of color. The nation's leaders do not fully grasp the experiences and implications of racism. Consequently, at best, these issues are neglected, and actually exacerbated by support for anti–affirmative action initiatives, restrictive immigration laws, miserly social benefits, and stiff, unequal drug penalties. There has not been a serious attempt to implement an urban policy since the Great Society.

Leaders set a tone and offer role models. When leaders legitimize coded racist imagery, they encourage and permit others to do so as well. Leaders can divide and exacerbate social schisms (Miller & Schamess, 2000). They are highly visible opinion shapers in what becomes a public discourse that no longer is concerned about racism and inequities but, instead, focuses on how people of color are freeloaders and “cheating the system,” gaining unfair advantage through government programs and affirmative action policies, while the rights of “good, hardworking” White people allegedly are under siege. In the primary election of 2016, most Republican candidates talked about “taking back our country” to largely White audiences. Who were they trying to take the country back from?

“Tax relief” is proposed for the wealthiest, thereby reducing federal expenditures on the development of assets by the poorest. This one-dimensional discourse closes off legitimate social and political options as economically unfeasible or politically untenable. Opposition leaders who try to speak for the marginalized are discredited, and when the oppressed speak for themselves, they are viewed as touting their own interests—as if they are the only group in society that advocates for their own interests (Miller & Schamess, 2000; Whillock, 1995).

### MEDIA RACISM

What inner models do people internalize to understand race and racism, and where do those images and concepts come from? People are exposed to a racial discourse from birth. The discourse is not hegemonic, but the dominant narrative is one that privileges White people and presents doing so as fair and normal. This narrative is transmitted by parents to children, and they are not alone: Children’s books help to tell the story with racialized choices of characters, settings, and plots (van Dijk, 1995).

The narrative is furthered in preschool and school, where teachers, books, videos, and other media presentations continue the racial saga, often without reference to race and racism. In some U.S. states, such as Texas, history text books used in public schools, in a form of historical “erasure,” do not mention Jim Crow or the Ku Klux Klan, and treat slavery as a peripheral issue during the Civil War (Sehgal, 2016). Children are exposed to an idealized history, such as The Story of Thanksgiving and the relationships between Pilgrims and Indians, which neglects to describe the Native American holocaust. This discourse shapes attitudes and encodes stereotypes that people often carry with them for life. The distorted narratives lead in turn to cognitive distortions that often remain unchallenged given the degree of residential and educational segregation.
that persists in the United States, as described earlier. The narratives subtly diminish people of color and establish White people as society’s dominant group (van Dijk, 1995).

Adults are exposed to the racial discourse through television shows, news broadcasts, films, books, magazines, advertisements, music, and the Internet. Most people have internalized stereotypes from childhood, and they continue to be bombarded with complementary stereotypes: Whites presented as heroes, leaders, decision makers, central characters, experts, and talking heads; while people of color frequently are constructed as “other,” different, deviant, quaint, exotic, and stereotyped (van Dijk, 1995). Or people of color are just missing. Whether it is the lack of people of color nominated for Hollywood Oscars or the paucity of people of color as “talking heads,” White dominance is the norm. Specialized news shows on public radio—for example, “Only a Game”, “On Being”, “Wait-Wait, Don’t Tell Me”; “On the Media”—offer a preponderance of White presenters and White people being interviewed.

A recent study by the Media, Diversity, & Social Change Initiative and the University of California’s Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism is particularly damning about Hollywood (Coyle, 2016). After analyzing hundreds of films and television shows from 2014 to 2015, the researchers found that only 28.3% of actors in speaking roles were “minority,” although people of color make up about 37% of the population. Directors were 87% White and broadcast television directors are 90.4% White. There was also severe underrepresentation of women and lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and indeterminate (LBTQI) identified actors, directors, and characters. Over 50% of the content that was examined did not feature one Asian/Asian American character. This may be due to only two people of color out of 19 people being involved in deciding which television shows will be made (Park et al., 2016). When it comes to deciding which films are made, only one of 20 major studio executives in those positions is a person of color (Park et al., 2016). And in the music industry, of Billboard’s 20 most influential music executives, only one is a person of color (Park et al., 2016).

The print media is another area that erases the presence of people of color. Most major poetry anthologies in the 1960s and 1970s ignored major poets of color (Michael Thurston, personal communication). When The New York Times selected the most powerful people in the publishing industry who decide which books are published, two out of the 20 were people of color (Park et al., 2016).

When people of color are visible for media discussions, it is often because the focus of the story is about “minority” issues. And in the rare moments when racism is directly addressed, it is often portrayed as a question of individual attitudes and behaviors determined by whether White people and people of color can talk to one another and be friends (DeMott, 1995). The realities of the web of institutional racism and the legacy of the “racial contract” are rendered invisible. There is little or no historical context. A fantasyland of individual relationships without reference to historical and sociological legacies and constraints dominates many storylines.

When it comes to the news, people of color consistently are portrayed in a negative, stereotypical fashion. Sometimes this is done through codes that do not refer to race and yet have racial meanings for readers and viewers, as was described earlier in Mitt Romney’s campaign slogan “American is not working.” Or it can come from having threatening visuals of men of color when there are stories about crime in a local community (Ghandnoosh, 2014). The terms broken families, teenage mothers, welfare mothers, inner-city crime, and crack
all conjure up racial stereotypes (van Dijk, 1995), as did the Willie Horton advertisements used in the election campaign of the first President Bush (described earlier).

Most staff working for mainstream magazines and journals are White. According to The New York Times, of the 12 most powerful executives in both print and network media, only two are people of color (Park et al., 2016). Even liberal and left-leaning publications have only about 10% of people of color working for them (Arana, 2014). When most editors and television producers are White, they may not recognize that they are colluding with racial stereotypes (Gillens, 1999). Some media executives, however, do know what they are promoting, and they strive to maintain high ratings through news that titillates and stirs people up (Westin, 2001). White editors, executives, and reporters also shape what issues are covered (“agenda setting”) and how issues are framed—such as focusing on “illegal immigration” while flashing images of immigrants of color, even though this is a small percentage of all immigrants (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015). Even in liberal news outlets—such as The New York Times—negative stories on immigration outnumber positive stories 3:1 (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015). What gets lost is how we are a nation of immigrants and how many contributions immigrants make to U.S. culture and society.

Of course, there are exceptions to this: Some stories do seriously engage with racism. There are some actors of color who are recognized and many artists of color in the music industry. There are some models who are not White and news anchors who are people of color. But these are exceptions; rarely does the media reflect the actual demographics of U.S. society. And exceptions can give cover to media industries that consistently and systematically exclude and demean people of color, creating the illusion of equal opportunity and equity.

Whatever the motivation, the choice of images and words, how stories are presented, and who presents them create a racialized tapestry of meaning. When people of color are used as presenters or “talking heads,” they often are enlisted to talk about issues seen as pertinent to racial issues, while mainstream, allegedly nonracialized issues more often are the domain of White experts. When people attempt to present programs that feature people of color in a positive light, they encounter barriers, including concerns from producers that the programs will not appeal to Whites and, thus, will not fare well in the ratings derby (Westin, 2001). Advertisements, too, are prone to portraying White men in leadership roles and African American men as aggressors (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000).

The saturated ubiquity of Whiteness in the media promulgates an ongoing narrative reinforcing racism while rarely drawing attention to racism as a central social problem. It is nearly impossible to withdraw or escape from this unending drumbeat of culture, style, morality, and meaning. It is the cloak that shrouds and obscures the web of racism by normalizing it. Recognizing, decoding, and resisting take a great deal of time and effort.

**IMMIGRATION RACISM**

A relationship has always existed among immigration to the United States (voluntary and involuntary), racism, and nativism. Just about every ethnic group that was not Northern or Western European experienced racism upon arrival. As described in Chapter 3, the immigration history of the United States is one of excluding immigrants of color from
voluntarily entering the United States until 1965. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was a game changer, abolishing national origin quotas and instead focusing on skills and family relationships (Lee & Bean, 2007). This led to a much more diverse pool of immigrants, in particular increasing those from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. A quarter of Americans are now immigrants (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015). In 1969, seven out of eight immigrants hailed from Europe, whereas by 2010, nine of 10 came from other continents (Gjelten, 2015). The United States is much more multiracial and multicultural as a result, with consequent growth in intermarriage and multiracial families (Lee & Bean, 2007). This trend has also changed the dynamics of U.S. politics, as the majority of non-White immigrants vote Democratic and the Republican Party has increasingly become a refuge for Whites concerned about immigration, which influences the immigration policies that each party supports or opposes (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015). It also influences support or lack of support for social welfare programs that offer opportunity and benefits for immigrants, as well as how much Whites are willing to spend on education versus how much for law enforcement and prisons (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015).

Abrajano and Hajnal (2015) have described some of the profound social shifts that have occurred due to these seismic changes in U.S. immigration over the past 50 years. One has been a political shift to the right among White Americans and the Republican Party. There are many more “immigrant threat” narratives in the media. These tend to focus on immigrants taking jobs from other Americans, bringing crime and disorder, being lazy, and bilking the United States by taking educational and social benefits. Despite many studies that disprove these narratives, facts are less important than the emotional traction generated by this discourse. Thus, the majority of White Americans support building a fence between the United States and Mexico and support Arizona’s SB1070 law that allows law enforcement to stop people based on how they look and demand to see their documents. While only one fourth of immigrants are undocumented, the majority of Whites think that they constitute the majority of immigrants. Concern over undocumented immigrants receiving any services or benefits was what precipitated Representative Joe Wilson of South Carolina yelling “You lie!” at President Obama when he delivered his State of the Union presentation in 2009. President Obama had said that the Affordable Care Act would not cover undocumented immigrants.

Ultimately, views on immigration are very similar to views about race: Are people seen as being “like us” or as representing difference—different values, behaviors, and work ethics (Bikmen, 2015)? Immigration racism interacts with media racism, where narratives are constructed that emphasize difference and threat, rather than unity and commonality; on taking rather than contributing; on exclusion rather than inclusion. The cultural and political climate allows politicians like Donald Trump to characterize immigrants from Mexico as “criminals … rapists … killers” as he runs for the Republican nomination for president (Moreno, 2015) and to receive cheers from White audiences for “telling it like it is.”

Ultimately, the consequences of this form of institutional racism are that immigrants of color are treated with greater suspicion, have their civil rights abrogated through searches and other intrusions, and are often treated with fear and suspicion. This can make it harder to find work or housing in some neighborhoods. They have to endure demeaning stereotypes and are the brunt of denigrating public discourses that question their morals and integrity. This can result in ethnic slurs, lead to attacks, and fuel daily
microaggressions directed toward them. This does not uphold the ideals of a country proud of its identity as a “nation of immigrants.”

**Islamophobia**

A particular form of immigration racism that is prevalent in the United States today is fear and hostility directed toward people who are spiritually Islamic or who are nationally and ethnically from the Middle East. Islamophobia is directed not only toward immigrants but also toward people who share this religious or ethnic identity and who have lived for generations as U.S. citizens. This is a good example of how racism toward immigrants is also directed toward citizens with similar ethnic identities and vice versa. Islamophobia affects who is allowed to immigrate to the United States, how they are treated when they arrive, and how native Muslims are treated. Like other forms of racism, Islamophobia is fueled by myths and distortions about the nature of Islam and generalizations about Middle Eastern and Muslim people. This response has grown since 9/11 and the seemingly endless “war on terrorism.” It became a flash point issue during the 2016 race for the U.S. presidency as Republican candidates clamored for restrictions against Muslim or Middle Eastern immigrants, despite the humanitarian crisis afflicting millions of refugees.

Studies of Muslim Americans document the extent of racism, hatred, and fear that they encounter. In one study, nearly 60% of Muslim participants stated that they have encountered discriminatory acts, 4% have been physically assaulted, 86% were subjected to anti-Muslim comments, and 68% experienced excessive security checks while flying (Abu-Raiya, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2011). Anti-Muslim behaviors can range from microaggressions (see Chapter 5) to attacks, including murder. People who White Americans think look like Muslims or Arabs, such as Sikhs, have also experienced such assaults (Ahluwalia, 2011). As with all forms of racism, the media plays a complicit role, often portraying Muslims and Arabs as violent, heartless, different, and untrustworthy (Halse, 2012). What is particularly insidious is the portrayal of Muslims as terrorists. The vast majority of Muslims reject terrorism, as do the majority of Christians, Jews, Buddhists, and Hindus, although terrorist acts have been perpetrated in the name of all of these groups. In the United States, according to Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) statistics for 1980 through 2005, 96% of domestic terrorist attacks were carried out by non-Muslims (Global Research, 2013).

Concerns about Muslims by White Americans echo discourses about other immigrants who are viewed as being different from mainstream White America. Such nativist discourses have been activated when Jews, Italians, the Irish, and other ethnic groups now socially constructed as White emmigrated to the United States. They are consistent with the anti-immigrant discourses that are affixed to immigrants from Latin America, Africa, and Asia. They reflect a pattern of “othering” and intergroup conflict that is discussed in Chapter 6.

**IMPLICATIONS OF THE WEB OF RACISM FOR THE HELPING PROFESSIONS**

The web of institutional racism is painfully obvious to the people of color caught in its strands, yet nearly invisible to many White people who pass through it unimpeded.
White people hold the illusion that many societal institutions, policies, living and working arrangements, programs, and organizations are race-neutral. As we have argued, this is not possible in a racialized society. Thus, identifying and mapping the web of institutional racism, pinning it on the wall of individual and collective consciousness, is a step toward confronting racism. It no longer can be denied or relegated to museums and history.

Recognizing and understanding institutional racism is particularly essential for the helping professions. Exercise 4.2 builds on this point. Clinicians must appreciate that racism affects everyone. No one is immune. Some are targeted by it, others benefit from it, and still others have experiences of both privilege and oppression. Even though some can ignore racism, it is always present and certainly is a dynamic involving those in the helping professions. Essential questions include: Who is offering the services, and to whom? How are the services being provided? What assumptions are being made about the nature of the problem, what will be helpful, and where should that help come from? And where do these assumptions come from?

A second implication is that every organization is affected by the web, and in some ways is part of it. The web influences which agencies or programs are funded and under what conditions. Racism is part of the mission statement of every organization, whether by commission or omission: Is there an explicit commitment to antiracism, multiculturalism, and social justice, or are these factors absent in the organizational mission? The web shapes who works in organizations, what qualifications they have, how they enter the organization, what capital they bring with them, and how quickly or slowly they progress after they arrive. It influences where organizational power resides.

A third implication is that the web shapes interactions between providers and consumers and also between colleagues. The web operates in everyone’s lives, but differentially. It influences worldviews, values, and assumptions. A person’s experience with the web will shape his or her beliefs about how fair and equitable the world is, which in turn will influence how open or guarded the person is. One way that social service organizations can deal with this dynamic is to have ongoing dialogue groups among staff members, as well as workshops that help them identify their cultural and social assumptions and values.

The web also influences training and qualifications. Racism increases the challenge for some people of color to gain an education or acquire the resources necessary to become professionally qualified. The web enables many White people to receive a college education, increase their professional training, and find jobs where they gain important experience. In turn, these inequities influence what jobs people are qualified to take within organizations; what they are paid, even with similar credentials and work history; and, of course, who is positioned to move into supervisory and management positions.

The web of racism also determines what is taught when people receive their training, how they are trained, and what is viewed as normative professional behavior. In the helping professions, racism is always present and may be tackled, partially confronted, or ignored. As Kivel (2011) has written, institutionalized racism in organizations determines what gets addressed, how it is addressed, who participates in addressing it, and what options are considered viable or untenable. See Exercise 4.3 to consider how the web can change over time.
CONCLUSION

Higginbotham (2013) posits that racism and White supremacy have been upheld by three interlocking dynamics throughout U.S. history: (a) a belief in White superiority and Black inferiority; (b) separation and segregation of the races; and (c) assaults on people of color, particularly African Americans. The web of racism is the structure by which racism endures and persists. It is historical and contemporary; some parts shift the surface ways in which they are manifested, but one thing has endured throughout U.S. history—it benefits White people while hurting and holding back people of color. It limits opportunity for many people of color, while increasing risks for individual bodies, minds, and spirits and disrupting systems of collective unity and support. Many White people are unaware of it. It is a direct descendent of the implicit racial contract undergirding the foundation of the United States. Although public and political discourses place the locus of responsibility for racial differences in wealth, power, incarceration rates, and success with individual effort and cultural and ethnic work ethics, the web of racism demonstrates that society is structured unequally, and how racism continues to privilege White people and oppress people of color. That the web is so ubiquitous and yet so invisible to the majority of White people in the United States is perplexing. The reasons for this and how this ignorance helps to ensure that racism in the United States remains so entrenched is the subject of the next chapter.

EXERCISE 4.1 The Web of Racism and Passports of Privilege

Consider the web of racism. Have you had experiences where you have been caught in the web, or have you had a passport of privilege that has permitted you to pass through it? For those who have experienced the web, which parts have been most problematic? For those with privilege, which parts were you least aware of?

Discuss your experiences with the web in small groups. Are parts of the web evident in your school or agency? What steps could be taken to unravel the web of racism on a local level?

EXERCISE 4.2 The Trajectory of Institutional Racism

The dynamics and manifestations of institutional racism are always shifting. Some aspects of institutional racism have been ameliorated or diminished while others have barely changed at all. Rarely does change or progress happen in a straight line; there are cycles of repression and liberation. For example, when post–Civil War Reconstruction ended, all states from the former Confederacy passed voter suppression laws that were presented as race neutral but drastically suppressed the votes of African Americans. The Supreme Court at the time upheld the legitimacy of the state's claims to race neutrality. From 1965, when the Voting Rights Act was passed, until 2013, a consensus among the president, Congress, and Supreme Court upheld the act, which led to dramatic increases in the participation and election of people of color. The trajectory during this period was one of progress against political racism. But in 2013, the Supreme
Court gutted the Voting Rights Act and numerous states passed “race-neutral” laws that are already suppressing the votes of people of color and have influenced elections—what was accomplished is now being undone.

Take any aspect of institutional racism covered in this chapter and research its effects during certain historical periods and continuing to the present.

1. What has been its trajectory? Has it remained the same, gotten better or worse, or have there been cycles?

2. If there has been progress, contrast the most racist periods with the most progressive periods. What social and political conditions contributed to repression or progress?

3. What conclusions or lessons do you draw from your research about what is needed to ameliorate institutional racism? What can undermine successes in the struggle against racism? What can be done to prevent backsliding?

EXERCISE 4.3 Update the Web!

The data for the web of racism are often contested and always changing. Once we have written this book, it is frozen in time and always needs to be updated. Research a particular aspect of the web of racism and consider how data can be used to support or undermine arguments used in this chapter. How would you organize the data and frame the issues? What changes have already occurred in data and patterns that you would use to update a particular section of this chapter?

REFERENCES


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