

Doing Race

An Introduction

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I

WE DO RACE AND ETHNICITY — ALL OF US, EVERY DAY.

Consider the following events, which stirred emotions and kept people talking for months. In each of these national or international events, race or ethnicity was in some way central to how the event unfolded, how it was reported, and how it was understood. Yet what these concepts meant in each case and why they mattered to the situation was both confusing and controversial.

Mexifornia. In May 2005, billboards advertising a Spanish-language television news show were prominently displayed along the freeways of Los Angeles. The billboards showed newscasters posed in front of the L.A. skyline, with a well-known Mexico City landmark, the Angel of Independence, inserted into it. Over the newscasters' heads were the words "LOS ANGELES, CA." The "CA" was crossed out and replaced with the word "MEXICO" in large red letters so that the sign read "LOS ANGELES, MEXICO." The only other words on the billboard, which were in Spanish, read "News 62" and "Your City, Your Team." Following a huge outcry by some commuters offended by the idea of a Mexican takeover of Los Angeles, the billboards were hastily removed (Gorman and Enriquez 2005).

Model Minority. In April 2007, an undergraduate student at Virginia Tech University, Seung-hui Cho, shot and killed thirty-two students and faculty members and wounded many others. He then turned the gun on himself. Cho, a South Korean national, had lived in the United States since he was eight years old. Many South Koreans in the United States responded by expressing shame, embarrassment, and collective

responsibility. Several community leaders—even those who did not know Cho or his family personally and lived on the other side of the country—rushed to apologize to the families of the victims, fearing that the killings would reflect poorly on Korean Americans as a whole. Many Americans outside the Korean community were puzzled by this reaction; they could not imagine feeling responsible for the actions of an obviously troubled stranger, even one who was a member of their own ethnic or racial group (Steinhauer 2007).

You Can't Say That! Also in April 2007, CBS radio and television talk show host Don Imus sparked a national uproar. After the Rutgers women's basketball team lost the NCAA championship to Tennessee, he described the Rutgers women as "nappy-headed hos." Following vehement protests by prominent African American leaders, CBS employees, and corporate sponsors—all of whom were outraged by the racism and sexism of the remarks directed at blameless student athletes—CBS suspended Imus's show for two weeks. When that did not quell the firestorm, the network finally canceled his show (Faber 2007).

Change Has Come? In November 2008, Barack Obama, the son of a Kenyan immigrant father and a white Kansas-born mother, was elected president of the United States. Around the globe, headlines heralded the dawning of a new age: "Change Has Come," "A New Dawn," "A Changed Nation," "A New Hope," "America Chooses Change," "A Dream Realized," and "Race Is History." Within weeks of Obama's inauguration, a series of events suggested that some of these headlines were overly optimistic. The *New York Post* printed a cartoon depicting President Obama as a dead monkey, while the mayor of a small town in California sent around an e-mail with a cartoon portraying the front lawn of the White House as a watermelon patch. The response to these and similar cartoons was rapid and mixed. Some people were outraged; others defended the *New York Post's* journalistic freedom and responsibility to stir debate by playing with stereotypes. Meanwhile, a black journalist chided her white colleagues for worrying about appearing racist even as they avoided talking about substantive issues involving racial representations. "Why can't we debate," she asked, "why a mug shot of a black defendant is four times more likely to appear in a local television news report than one of a white defendant?" (Kelley 2009).

Change is surely on its way, but race is far from a relic of history.

It's Not Our Fault! Prior to the G20 Summit that took place in London in March 2009, the president of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, met with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown. At that meeting, da Silva

vented his frustration about the effect of the global financial crisis on his country. Suggesting that poorer countries like Brazil should not have to pay for the mistakes made by richer countries, he laid the blame for the financial meltdown squarely at the feet of Western bankers: "This crisis was fostered and boosted by irrational behavior of some people that are white and blue-eyed. Before the crisis they looked like they knew everything about economics, and they have demonstrated they know nothing about economics." Subsequently, defending himself against charges of racism, Lula responded: "I only record what I see in the press. I am not acquainted with a single black banker" (Watt 2009).

Events like these occur frequently, provoking strong emotions and heated reactions. And while the events narrated here may have largely receded from collective memory, similar ones are no doubt happening as you read these words. Such newsworthy incidents involving race and ethnicity are simultaneously engrossing and disturbing. They result in charged private and public conversations that reveal a mix of feelings and states—anxiety, fear, hostility, suspicion, ignorance, hope, and trust. Besides underscoring the continuing importance of race and ethnicity, these sorts of events point to huge differences among people in their understanding of how these phenomena shape our lives. Moreover, such events raise basic questions that challenge us as individuals and as a society. How important are race and ethnicity? Does your opinion about their importance depend on your own race or ethnicity? Is noticing or referring to them the same as being racist? If these things matter, *why* do they matter? How much do race and ethnicity influence our life chances? Are we responsible for the actions of people—some of whom were dead long before we were born—who share our race or ethnicity? How much responsibility do we bear for those who do not share them? Do we get to choose what race or ethnicity we are? If not, who gets to choose for us? And finally, who is allowed to say what about race?

These questions are not new, nor are they easily answered. They are as old as our republic and as current as the reality that a majority of voters have elected a man with visible African ancestry as the forty-fourth president of the United States of America. But even though race and ethnicity pervade every aspect of our daily lives, many of us become deeply uncomfortable whenever the conversation turns to those topics. The discomfort takes a variety of forms and affects people differently. Some people believe that the United States has successfully moved beyond

what were painful racially conflicted chapters in its national history; others think that race and ethnicity are unrelated to their own lives and should be the concern of those in barrios, ghettos, and ethnic studies programs. Some worry about race and ethnicity but avoid talking about them for fear of being thought racist. Yet others think that even noticing race and ethnicity is wrong and that these concepts should not be taken into account when someone is deciding how to interact with another person. Still others believe that U.S. Americans have not begun to talk seriously about these topics and that no one can understand society without analyzing how race and ethnicity are linked and deeply intertwined with wealth, status, life chances, and well-being in general.

Given the wide range of possible reactions, we might ask, Why are race and ethnicity so central to our lives and at the same time so difficult and taboo?

In this essay, the authors propose an understanding of race and ethnicity that, at first, may be hard to accept. Contrary to what most people believe, race and ethnicity are not *things* that people *have* or *are*. Rather, they are *actions* that people *do*.¹ Race and ethnicity are social, historical, and philosophical *processes* that people have done for hundreds of years and are still doing. They emerge through the social transactions that take place among different kinds of people, in a variety of institutional structures (e.g., schools, workplaces, government offices, courts, media), over time, across space, and in all kinds of situations.

Our framework for understanding them draws on the work of scholars of race and ethnicity around the world, including professors associated with the Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity (CCSRE) at Stanford University. Over the past several decades, the topics of race and ethnicity have become increasingly central to the research and theorizing of sociologists, psychologists, and historians as well as scholars in the humanities, the law, and education. Psychologists most often focus on why people stereotype others and on the multiple negative outcomes for those who are the target of these stereotypes (e.g., Baron and Banaji 2006; Dovidio, Glick, and Rudman 2005; Eberhardt and Fiske 1998; Jones 1997; Steele 1992), while sociologists often concentrate on racism as a system of beliefs that justifies the privilege of the dominant

¹ Although the term *doing race* has yet to gain wide currency either within or outside the academy, several race scholars have previously used the phrase to mean something very close to what we use it to mean. See, for example, John Jackson's *Harlemworld* and Amy Best's "Doing Race in the Context of Feminist Interviewing."

group (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2003; Brown et al. 2005; Feagin 2006; Omi and Winant 1994; Massey and Denton 1998; Wilson 1990). For their part, historians reveal the sources of various notions of race and how these notions are perpetuated in both informal and formal practices over time (e.g., Fredrickson 1971, 2002; Roediger 1991). Philosophers focus on the philosophical foundations of racist schemas (e.g., Alcoff 2005; Goldberg 2009, 1993; Mills 1998; West 1993; Fanon 1952), while literary critics focus on meanings conveyed by the motifs, images, and narratives that recur in the representations of racialized people and characters (Gates 1988; Lott 1993; Morrison 1992; Said 1978; Sundquist 1993, 2005). While scholars from different disciplines take a variety of approaches to the topics, they share the view that race and ethnicity are central to understanding both individual and societal experience in the twenty-first century.

To illustrate the central point of this essay—that race and ethnicity are everyday doings involving routine social interactions as well as the institutional policies and practices of our society—we begin by describing eight conversations people commonly have about these topics. We conclude Section I by providing new and comprehensive definitions of these terms. In Section II, we reveal the centrality of race and ethnicity to the U.S. American story (Omi and Winant 1994; Higginbotham and Andersen 2005) and show why current popular understandings of them create widespread confusion and discord. We further show that *all of us*—regardless of the races or ethnicities we claim or to which we are assigned—are involved in doing race and ethnicity, often in unseen and subtle ways. The workings of race and ethnicity, we contend, are the result of universal human endeavors and concerns. In Section III, we explain why achieving a just society requires attending to, rather than ignoring, race and ethnicity. We then return to a discussion of strategies for forging new, more productive conversations about them. Finally, we conclude with some alternative and positive ways people can appreciate ethnic and racial differences, and propose six suggestions for how we can all learn to do race and ethnicity differently.

EIGHT CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE AND ETHNICITY

In the process of teaching a course called Introduction to Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity, the authors of this essay have identified eight types of conversations that people have with one another as they make sense of events in which race and ethnicity figure prominently (see Table i.1). By "conversations" we mean interpretive frameworks, or

TABLE I.1 | EIGHT CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE AND ETHNICITY

1. We're beyond race.
2. Racial diversity is killing us.
3. Everyone's a little bit racist.
4. That's just identity politics.
5. It's a black thing—you wouldn't understand.
6. I'm _____ and I'm proud.
7. Variety is the spice of life.
8. Race is in our DNA.

what other scholars—depending on their disciplinary training—might call models, schemas, discourses, or scripts. As a literary scholar (Moya) and a social psychologist (Markus), we have chosen the term “conversation” as a disciplinary compromise. We also hope it might appeal to students who are not yet committed to a particular disciplinary way of describing the world we live in.

Each of the eight conversations identified with a characteristic phrase in Table i.1 uses a set of assumptions, words, images, and narratives to interpret the confusion and uncertainty generated by events involving race and ethnicity. No one of these conversations is, by itself, either accurate or complete; rather, each is a partial way of understanding the racial and ethnic dynamics that gave rise to the conversation in the first place. Even so, the conversations as a whole are crucially important. People from across the political spectrum rely on some version of one or more of these readily available and malleable conversations to help them manage the pervasive tensions surrounding race and ethnicity. Which conversation someone uses to help make sense of an event will depend on that person's social circle, identity, and past experiences. For that reason, analyzing the conversations is an important step in understanding and changing the way our society creates and reacts to human difference.

Importantly, all eight conversations contain powerful hidden assumptions about the importance, nature, and meaning of race and ethnicity in the United States. However, they do not all have the same status in U.S. society. Some cross the color line, while others are more common among certain ethnic or racial groups. Some conversations are relatively new, while others have been around for as long as the concept of race has existed. Some conversations overlap, while others flatly contradict each other. The more common conversations tend to be especially robust and to come in different versions.

1. We're beyond race.

This conversation is pervasive among middle-class Americans and it often comes up in discussions of affirmative action for college admission or employment. It is the conversation that says, “Sure, there are lots of differences, but racial and ethnic differences are merely superficial. At the end of the day, wherever you go, people are just people.” Like some of the others, this conversation comes in several versions, the first of which might be called “I'm color-blind.” This version shows up in the way a teacher in a multi-ethnic high school talks about her students. She explains, “We have a lot of different kinds, but I don't see color. None of us really do, we just see all our students as the same. That's what is so wonderful about [this school]” (Olsen 1997, 180).

A second version of the *We're beyond race* conversation says, effectively, “race doesn't matter any more.” This version first surfaced in the mid-1990s with the claim that the twenty-first century will be “post-race” or “post-ethnic” (Hollinger 1995). It reappeared among the supporters of Barack Obama during his presidential campaign: after Obama's win in the South Carolina democratic primary—a win that came in the wake of racially charged accusations between him and his primary rival, Hillary Clinton—supporters at his victory party began chanting, “Race doesn't matter” (*USA Today* 2008). The idea that race no longer matters has proved popular in both academic and corporate circles and has prompted a spate of conferences and books proclaiming the dawn of a “post-race America.”

Finally, a third version of the *We're beyond race* conversation shows up in discussions and political activity around mixed-race identity, especially activity involving the U.S. census. Advocates of mixed-race identity imagine a world in which more and more “brown” and “beige” people are born of parents who claim different races. They envision that race as we currently know it will gradually disappear and something else, something post-racial, will take its place. In an ironic response to this notion, novelist Denzy Senna—herself the daughter of an African American father and a white mother—has suggested that we are entering a new “Mulatto Millennium” (Senna 1998).

2. Racial diversity is killing us.

This multidimensional conversation comes in several versions, some of which are less mean-spirited than others. The mildest version says, “If you want to come here, fine, but you have to check your ethnic coat at

the border.” This perspective accepts cultural or linguistic difference but only as long as that difference is quickly abandoned in favor of what adherents of this position understand to be the “American way.”

A harsher articulation of the *Racial diversity is killing us* conversation is the “Seal the border now!” version. It is common among people who imagine themselves as the racial or ethnic “gold standard” of the United States and who would like to prevent people who differ from that standard from immigrating into the country—or, in the unfortunate event that they are already here, would send them home. A historical example can be found in the American Colonization Society, a U.S.-led movement that began in 1816 and advocated the “colonization,” or repatriation back to Africa, of freed black slaves. That effort, which resulted in thousands of freed black Americans going to Africa, was responsible for the 1847 founding of the country of Liberia in Africa.

Contemporary examples of the “Seal the border now!” version of this conversation are common. One example can be found in the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, a self-appointed (and predominantly white) vigilante militia that currently patrols the U.S.–Mexican border with the intention of ending undocumented immigration from Mexico and Central America. Another can be found in the work of Samuel Huntington, professor of government at Harvard University. Huntington advocates the maintenance of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant values and traditions that he believes are the bedrock of this country. Expressing worry that the large wave of immigrants from Mexico and Central America is changing the country in fundamental and negative ways, Huntington contends that “Mexican immigration poses challenges to our policies and to our identity in a way nothing else has in the past” (2005).

Finally, some politicians use the “Seal the border now!” version of the *Racial diversity is killing us* conversation to stir up racial distrust and create political divisions. Such an effort was evident in an August 16, 2006, appearance by Congressman Ted Poe of Texas on the program *Your World* on Fox News. In his interview with the show’s host, Neil Cavuto, Congressman Poe worked to forge a connection between Mexican and Central American immigration and Islamic terrorism:

CAVUTO: Could I ask you this, Congressman, do you believe that if there is another terror attack here it will somehow have originated from those who came into this country illegally?

CONGRESSMAN POE: Yes, that is a, a tremendous possibility because we know the southern border, of Texas especially, is open, and in-

dividuals, we have heard that individuals of Al-Qaeda persuasion have gone to Mexico, have assimilated into the population, have learned the language, have learned the culture, and then they have moved across into the United States pretending and posing to be immigrant Mexican workers, which they’re not. (Cavuto 2006)

3. Everyone’s a little bit racist.

The strongest version of this third conversation is very familiar and might be called “You’re a racist.” In part because many people believe that we are now “post-race,” calling someone a racist usually involves a serious assault on his or her character. Indeed, being the target of such a remark can undermine a person’s claim to being a decent and moral human being and can seriously damage his or her reputation. For that reason, the “You’re a racist” version is one of the most charged and feared discussions about race that anyone can engage in.

Because there is no shared understanding of what race is, and therefore what it means to be a racist, people use the “You’re a racist” version of this conversation across a wide range of situations. Sometimes a person is accused of being racist when he or she denies another person fair and equal treatment because that person is from a different racial or ethnic group. At other times, a person who merely refers to his or her race or ethnicity, or to another person’s, is charged with being a racist. For example, after President Obama nominated Judge Sonia Sotomayor for the Supreme Court, several conservative commentators were quick to condemn what they labeled as Sotomayor’s racism. The source of their ire was that Sotomayor, in public speeches and especially when talking to law students, had often spoken about growing up as a Puerto Rican Latina in the United States. Because she mentioned race and ethnicity as factors that contributed to her ability to make good judgments, people—including former Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich and the conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh—called Sotomayor a racist and demanded that she withdraw her name from consideration. The stakes regarding whether Sotomayor was, in fact, a racist were very high, even though there was not (and is not) one agreed-upon standard regarding what counts as racism. The controversy was quelled only after Sotomayor testified at her Senate confirmation hearings that she did “not believe that any ethnic, racial or gender group has an advantage in sound judgment.”

A second version of the *Everyone’s a little bit racist* conversation provides a way of sidestepping or calming the heated exchanges that follow

most explicit accusations of racism. Like the “You’re a racist” version of the conversation, this one recognizes the existence of racial and ethnic differences. However, it differs in that it spreads around the blame for racism by claiming that we just have to acknowledge that people will pay attention to race and that they will make judgments based on it. Moreover, since judging people according to racial and ethnic stereotypes is just an inconvenient truth of life, we should not be so worked up about it—whether we are the target or the perpetrator of the racist action or word. In the movie *Crash* (2005), for example, a mix of people in contemporary Los Angeles—the white cop, the Arab storeowner, the black cop, and the Asian human trafficker—all make unfair and seemingly unavoidable racist judgments about each other. The title refers both to the automobile crash in the movie’s opening scene and also to the movie’s guiding motif—the idea that urban America is so racially and ethnically diverse that people cannot help bumping up against and “crashing” into each other.

Most of us have participated in the *Everyone’s a little bit racist* conversation if, after a racially insensitive remark, we have ever said to someone “Don’t be so sensitive!” or had someone say that to us. This attitude shows up in the signature song of the award-winning *Avenue Q* (Lopez and Marx 2003), a Broadway production inspired by the muppets of the popular and long-running children’s television show *Sesame Street*. At a key moment in the plot, three lead characters (all of whom are twentysomethings trying to make their way in a diverse New York City) cheerfully admit that since “everyone’s a little bit racist,” telling ethnic jokes and stereotyping are perfectly acceptable. The chorus sings:

*Everyone’s a little bit racist today.
So, everyone’s a little bit racist. Okay!
Ethnic jokes might be uncouth,
But you laugh because they’re based on truth.
Don’t take them as personal attacks.
Everyone enjoys them — so relax!*

4. That’s just identity politics.

The *That’s just identity politics* conversation is common among people who think that race and ethnicity are irrelevant to, or a distraction from, the more important universal human concerns we all should be paying attention to. According to this view, race and ethnicity are superficial

and do not mark important and consequential differences in people’s history, contexts, or perspectives. The *That’s just identity politics* conversation is a favorite of those who think that drawing attention to one’s race or ethnicity is a strategy used by weak people to gain unfair sympathy or advantage. They attach the word “identity” to the term “politics” to convey the idea that someone who advocates something on the basis of racial or ethnic identity is acting illegitimately. Sometimes this conversation says “I’m tired of all this emphasis on race and ethnicity.” At other times it surfaces as an accusation that an opponent is “playing the race card,” or through sarcastic comments like “When is *white* history month?” The *That’s just identity politics* conversation expresses a frustration that those who “have” race or ethnicity are getting some special privilege that will be unfairly denied to those who “don’t have” race or ethnicity and who must therefore play by standard race-neutral rules. People who use this conversation often complain that if they object to the pervasiveness of race talk in the United States, they will be branded as “politically incorrect” and even as racist.

A second version of this conversation common among white Americans is the one that says, “Race isn’t relevant to me.” Many whites are quite comfortable with the idea that race (especially) and ethnicity are things that Asians, Latina/os, and blacks have to contend with, but that white people do not. They regard themselves as a neutral or standard, without race or ethnicity, or as a member of the “human race.” This line of thinking is apparent in the comment made by a student who, when asked by one of the authors of this essay to fill out a questionnaire about racial attitudes, left the questions blank and wrote across it, “I’m white.” Moreover, when experimental social psychologists ask people to describe themselves on open-ended questionnaires, white people tend not to mention the racial or ethnic aspects of their identity (Tatum 2002). They are likely to describe themselves in terms of personality traits (i.e., “I am friendly; I am optimistic; I tend to be shy”). Nonwhite people, by contrast, will generally include their race or ethnicity in their self-descriptions.

While the *That’s just identity politics* conversation is common among whites, people of color sometimes participate in it as well. African American commentator Michel Martin invoked the “race isn’t relevant” sentiment after Barack Obama’s early win in the Iowa primary. She wrote: “Even if the Obama steamroller ends tomorrow, his success so far has proven that race is no longer the determinant of human potential in this country. A passion for excellence is—or can be” (Martin 2008).

Similarly, the African American comedian Bill Cosby's exhortation to African Americans to stop whining about racial disadvantage and discrimination and instead to work hard, show individual fortitude, and take personal responsibility for their own success or failure, is also a variant of this conversation. His statements can be seen as a way of expressing the core idea that an undue concern with racial identity is a distraction from the more important issues at hand.

5. Variety is the spice of life.

People who participate in this conversation appear to be more comfortable than some others with talking about the positive importance of race and ethnicity. They mark an appreciation for other people and cultures by saying, "I love ethnic diversity—it's what makes the world interesting." In the course of this conversation, people usually talk about their favorite ethnic foods, the world music festivals they have gone to, or the good times they have had while traveling around the world.

A version of this conversation can be seen in the "It's a Small World after All" ride popular with people of all ages at the Disney theme parks. In this attraction, passengers embark on a small boat and take a voyage around the world. As they float past the seven continents, passengers encounter groups of dancing, singing dolls. Some dolls are dark-skinned, others light, and while the Hawaiian dolls wear grass skirts, the Eskimo dolls wear hooded, fur-lined parkas. Despite their surface differences, all dolls are basically the same, smiling and belting out these lyrics: "It's a world of hopes/It's a world of fear/There's so much that we share/That it's time we're aware/It's a small world after all."

This conversation is also central to the clothing retailer Benetton's advertising campaigns, which consist of striking color photographs accompanied by the tag line "The United Colors of Benetton." A typical Benetton image shows a group of young, highly attractive, smiling people in casual Benetton clothing arrayed in a line or other close formation as if they were members of a sports team. Because they are all similar in age, attractiveness, attitude, and dress, the only obvious visual differences among them are skin and eye color, and hair color and texture. Both the Disney attraction and the Benetton ads convey the same basic message: we may look different, and those differences are intriguing, but they are only skin deep. By embracing each other and sharing similar human feelings, we can easily transcend the superficial (and appealing) differences between us.

The last version of the *Variety is the spice of life* conversation also understands differences as basically positive. However, it sees differences as consequential rather than merely superficial. Many school and workplace settings emphasize the value of what is often called "multiculturalism." This often translates into having meatballs, pierogis, tacos, samosas, and sushi at the end-of-the-year picnic, and saying "Happy Holidays" rather than "Merry Christmas" in December. An example comes from the General Telephone and Electronics (GTE) Corporation. GTE ran a recruitment advertisement featuring a beautiful quilt with patches of different colors and textures accompanied by the following message: "A community is made up of dreams, ideas and hard work. It is a blend of the ideals of men and women from diverse backgrounds, like woven threads in a colorful tapestry. . . . Each new idea inspires us to work and grow within this diverse fabric called community."

6. It's a black thing—you wouldn't understand.

Just as some conversations might be more common among whites, this conversation is more frequent among people of color. Those who have this conversation are proclaiming a certain pride in their racial or ethnic identity while also claiming an exclusive relationship to a wide range of experiences and cultural products typically associated with their racial group. Although sometimes these experiences or cultural products are seen as hip and valuable—such as a sensibility for jazz or hip-hop improvisation—they are just as often meant to refer to more painful experiences such as what it is like to be a victim of racist stereotyping. The main idea behind this conversation is that, as a result of one's racial identity, one's life is different in significant ways—ways that cannot be adequately understood by outsiders whose experiences have been very different from one's own. It follows from this idea that outsiders have no authority to interpret the meaning of one's racialized life, even if they mean well. Rather, they should sit back, listen, and learn instead of trying to contribute what could only be false knowledge to the conversation about what it means to be a person of color.

The slogan *It's a black thing—you wouldn't understand* is a sound bite for a whole set of attitudes and beliefs about how race works in U.S. American society. This particular saying was popularized in the late twentieth century on T-shirts worn by young black people, often but not exclusively, on college campuses. It was intended as a rebuke to those people who might assume, too quickly, that they could understand

what it was like to be black or that they could be easily accepted into a black community. On one level, this slogan and the conversation behind it might be viewed as an attempt by some blacks to discourage poseurs (i.e., nonblacks who dress hip-hop style or use African American English). On another level, it might be understood as an aggressive insistence on the significance of race for shaping experience and knowledge. It is a refusal to entertain and accept the sentiment expressed by the “It’s a small world after all” conversation and is a pointed rejection of the liberal assumption that all human experience is universal and thus can be shared, via reasonable discussion, with others (LaVaque-Manty 2002).

7. I’m _____ and I’m proud.

Like the previous one, this conversation is common among racial minorities, and comes in many ethnic variants: I’m black and I’m proud, Asian pride, yo soy Chicana/o, and so on. Although this conversation persists into the present, it first came into full flower in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. Ethnic civil rights activists—primarily young people involved in the Black Power movement, the American Indian movement, the Asian American movement, and the Chicano movement—strongly rejected the idea that being nonwhite meant that they were less intelligent, less moral, or less worthy than those with exclusively European ancestry (Louie and Omatsu 2001; Muñoz 1989; Smith and Warrior 1997; Ture and Hamilton [1967] 1992). These activists further turned their backs on the assimilationist and accommodationist behaviors of their forebears by demanding recognition of and respect for their particular racial identities. They took denigrated racial identities that had been imposed upon them by others and then *claimed* them as positive sources of belongingness, pride, and motivation.

When those who are associated with the dominant racial group participate in this conversation, it often has a different set of meanings and consequences from the ones it has when racial minorities employ the conversation to counter marginalization and denigration. For example, white supremacists, including those who belong to fringe groups such as the Aryan Nations, White Nationalists, Skinheads, Ku Klux Klan, or the American Nazi Party, use it to make an explicit claim for European racial superiority. People who belong to White Pride groups bemoan what they see as the possible disappearance of the white race due to miscegenation and a low white birthrate and call alternately for kicking all

nonwhites out of the United States or for returning to Europe where they can create a homogenous white nation.

8. Race is in our DNA.

The final conversation on our list is both one of the oldest and one of the most current. It is the conversation that says race cannot be ignored because it is an essential part of a person and that race can be found in a person’s blood, genome, or culture. The idea that race is in the blood has been the basis of many different discriminatory policies, ranging from laws in the United States to prevent people associated with different races from marrying each other, to the genocidal murder of millions of European Jews during World War II. Following German Chancellor Adolf Hitler’s defeat in World War II, this conversation appeared to go into decline as people tried to avoid the topic of race or had the *We’re beyond race* conversation. It turns out, however, that the *Race is in our DNA* conversation had only gone into hiding.

Recent developments in biology and medicine have sparked this conversation anew. For example, DNA testing that gives people information about their genetic heritage has become increasingly available to the average consumer. Internet ads claim that with a simple cheek swab and \$199, you can learn about your past and “who you really are.” These new DNA testing techniques are exciting and have the potential to reveal very significant information about people’s individual ancestry and the history of human migrations across the globe. However, these techniques also reinforce the centuries-old notion that race is a biological entity inside people’s blood or bodies and that it marks something significant about their characters or behaviors (Koenig, Lee, and Richardson 2008).

One important variant of the *Race is in our DNA* conversation says, “It’s their culture; it can’t be helped.” Although this version focuses on culture rather than biology, it similarly regards people as essentially unchanging and determined by the circumstances of their birth or early upbringing. This version of the *Race is in our DNA* conversation draws on a narrow and outdated understanding of culture as being so deeply rooted in a person, and so stable and predictable in its effects, that even important changes in a person’s social environment are unlikely to make a difference in his or her values and behavior.

Nobel Prize winner James Watson, who helped discover the double helix structure of DNA, is one of the latest and best-known contributors to the *Race is in our DNA* conversation. Watson noted in a 2007 speech

that he was “inherently gloomy about the prospect of Africa” because “all our social policies are based on the fact that their intelligence is the same as ours—whereas all the testing says not really.” He added that while many of us have a natural desire to believe that all human beings should be equal, “people who have to deal with black employees find this not true.” Watson was strongly criticized and he apologized for his remarks. Nevertheless, the fact that a highly respected and accomplished scientist would make this kind of statement shows that confusion about what race is and what it means is still frighteningly widespread (Dean 2007).

Taken together, these eight conversations show some of the most common ways of thinking and feeling about race and ethnicity in the United States today. Clearly, U.S. Americans both appreciate and fear our racial and ethnic difference. On the one hand, we are proud of our diversity: as a nation of immigrants, we want to incorporate racial and ethnic differences into our lives. We celebrate our differences (*Variety is the spice of life*), proclaim them (*I'm ____ and I'm proud*), argue for their reality (*Race is in our DNA*), and believe that they matter in our lives (*It's a black thing—you wouldn't understand*). On the other hand, we are worried about the changes to the country and to our lives that racial and ethnic differences bring with them: we are panicked by differences (*Racial diversity is killing us*), try to minimize their significance (*Everyone's a little bit racist*), ignore their relevance to our own lives (*That's just identity politics*), and proudly claim that differences no longer matter (*We're beyond race*). However we feel about race and ethnicity, they are clearly central to who “we” are as U.S. Americans.

At the heart of all the conversations are questions about ethnically and racially associated human differences: what they are, where they come from, and what we should do with them. An even thornier question involves who the “we” is who gets to decide which differences count. When people are deemed to be racially or ethnically different, who are they different from? Which group gets to represent the “norm,” and which groups are forced to represent the “difference?” Answering these questions in a way that does not involve racial or ethnic discrimination, ethnic cleansing, or even genocide requires us to have a better understanding of race and ethnicity than any of the eight conversations discussed above can provide. In the service of moving toward a better understanding, we offer new and comprehensive definitions of race and ethnicity as *doings*, that is, as systems of social relations involving everyday interactions, as well as the institutional policies and practices of society.

RACE AND ETHNICITY AS DOINGS

Consider the graphic representations in Figures i.1 and i.2. In Figure i.1, race and ethnicity are shown as essential characteristics that reside within people and that distinguish them from other people who have different essential characteristics. In the case of race, especially, these characteristics are understood to be negative, and often biological and/or genetic. The individual people shown are designated as “dots,” “squares,” “triangles,” or “stars” because they have “dot,” “square,” “triangle,” “star,” or “triangle/star” (i.e., mixed-race) qualities inside of them. They are grouped with others who apparently share these innate characteristics (e.g., skin color, hair texture, intelligence, athletic ability, mathematical propensity). So “white” people are grouped with other people who have “white” characteristics, while “Asian” people are grouped with other people who have “Asian” characteristics, and “mixed race” people have a mix of racial and ethnic characteristics. This is the way almost all of us are used to thinking about race and ethnicity; we imagine that people fit

FIGURE I.1 | RACE AND ETHNICITY AS ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS

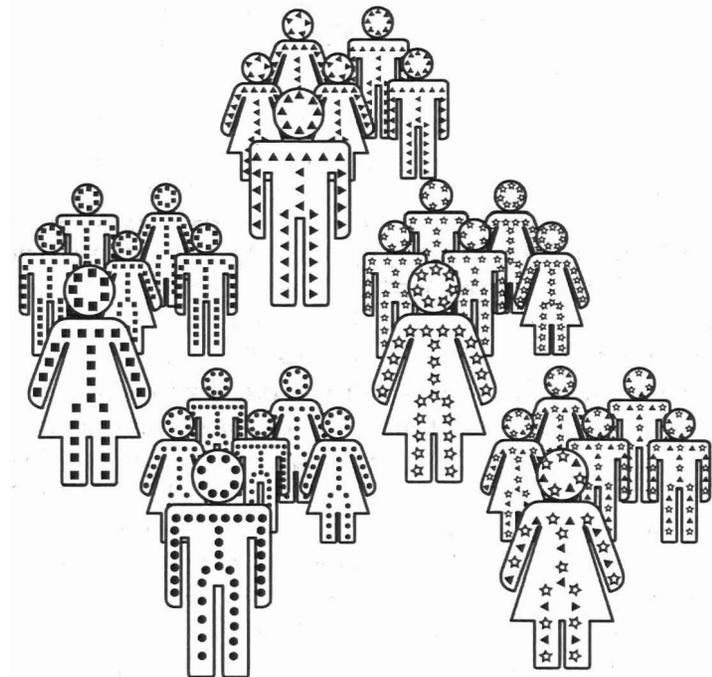
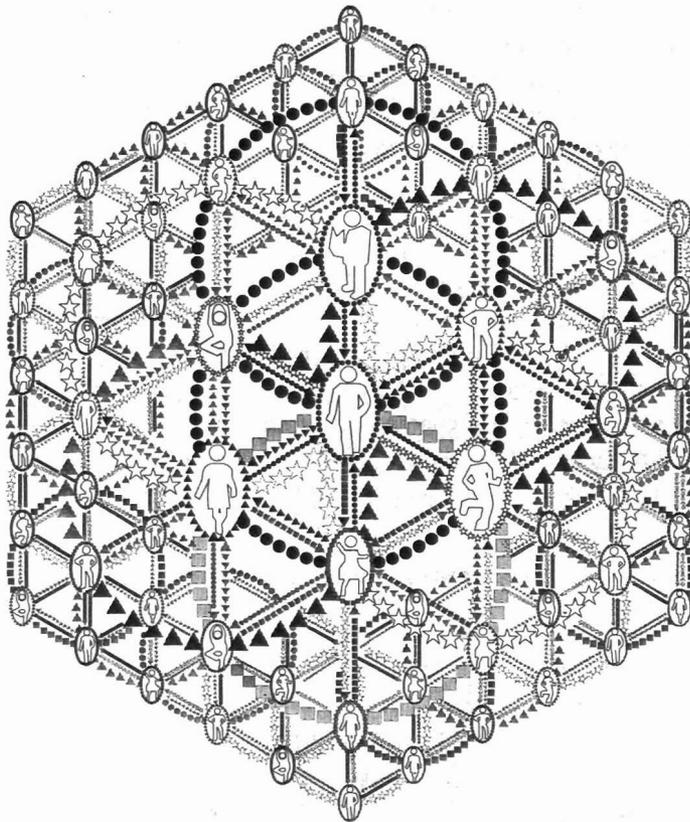


FIGURE 1.2 | RACE AND ETHNICITY AS SOCIAL PROCESSES



easily within one or another category because they have the same internal or “racial” characteristics as other members of the group.

In Figure i.2, by contrast, race and ethnicity are shown as social processes rather than as essential characteristics. The people are shown not as the same with different essential characteristics, but as different from each other because they are both doing and having different actions done to them. The categories of “dots,” “squares,” “triangles,” or “stars” emerge as people try to make sense of themselves and their social worlds. The designations arise as answers to universal questions like “Who am I?” “Who are we?” and “Who are they?” So, for example, small dots outline the person in the very center of the Figure i.2; unlike in Figure i.1, this person does not have the dots inside him or her. This visual representation conveys the idea that the person is not inherently a “dot” but

becomes one in *relationship* with the surrounding others. The reason he or she is a “dot” is because the people surrounding that person see him or her as a “dot,” assume he or she is a “dot,” explain what it means to be a “dot,” and treat that person as if her or she is a “dot”—in other words, they *make him or her into* a “dot.” The arrows made up of smaller dots pointing toward her indicate this process.

The people surrounding the “dot” person in the middle of Figure i.2 represent the person’s immediate social context. They include parents, teachers, peers, employers, bankers, judges, religious leaders, and medical workers. They also include powerful and influential people such as government officials and media personalities with whom the “dot” person might not have any direct contact. All these people can play a powerful role in how the person in the middle thinks about being a “dot.” Everyone with whom this person comes into some kind of contact makes use of widely accepted meanings and representations of “dotness.”

The larger dots making up the outer ring around the “dot” person in the middle represent formalized laws, institutions, media, and shared societal ideas of what it means to be a “dot.” If “dots” in a particular society are privileged and have a lot of social power, then the widely accepted meanings and representations in that society will be largely positive, and “dot” people will experience themselves as being in charge of how they are seen and treated by others. If, however, “dots” have less power or are regarded as inferior, then the meanings and representations are likely to be largely negative, and “dot” people will experience themselves as having much less control over how they are seen and treated.

Of course, each person who is made into a “dot” will respond somewhat differently. Some will resist and try to counter the ideas, actions, and practices that come their way. Others will try to ignore, or will fail to notice, how race and ethnicity are done. Still others will accept or incorporate these ideas and practices into their sense of what it means to be a “dot.” Regardless, no one lives outside the web of relationships that create and maintain race and ethnicity. Even when someone resists having “dotness” imposed on himself or herself, his or her identity will be formed in relation to that process.

Each person in the matrix participates as both giver and receiver of the different ideas of what it means to be a “dot,” although each person does not do so equally. Some will have more power to shape the meanings and consequences of what it means to be a “dot” than will others. Finally, the gray periphery denotes these social processes as they occur across time and throughout history. It demonstrates that people do not make each

other and themselves into “squares,” “dots,” “triangles,” and “stars” from scratch. Rather, they do so through the images, narratives, metaphors, conversations, policies, and everyday social routines that are already part of their worlds. Figure i.2 illustrates some of the important elements common to what we call here doing race or doing ethnicity.

As will become ever more evident over the course of this essay, much of the confusion around race and ethnicity stems from a misunderstanding of them as essential characteristics that people either *have* or *are*, as depicted in Figure i.1. The preceding illustrations are graphic representations of how race and ethnicity are commonly understood (Figure i.1) and how they could be accurately understood (Figure i.2). As depicted in Figure i.2, race and ethnicity are social, relational processes that take place over time and across space. Moreover, they cannot be the work of an individual alone but are the product of society as a whole.

DEFINING RACE AND ETHNICITY

Before we go any further, we need to say that the human differences marked by race and ethnicity can be a source of either pride or prejudice. So, for example, when people have the *It's a black thing—you wouldn't understand*, or *I'm _____ and I'm proud* conversations, they often intend to claim positive commonalities with others in their group as a way of conveying a sense of belonging, pride, and motivation. People who have the *Variety is the spice of life* conversation sometimes do this and even more. In addition to claiming positive commonalities with others in their group, they usually want to express admiration for the ethnic particularities of one or more other groups. These all point to positive ways of understanding the differences commonly marked by race and ethnicity. By contrast, when people have the *Racial diversity is killing us*, *Everyone's a little bit racist*, *That's just identity politics*, and *Race is in our DNA* conversations, the purpose and/or outcome is frequently to target, and impose negative characteristics on, those people who do not share the conversation participants' own racial or ethnic associations. Finally, the *We're beyond race* conversation appears, on the surface, to be neither positive nor negative. As we will see, however, this increasingly popular conversation fails to recognize, or else knowingly ignores, the claiming and imposing of ethnic and racial differences involved in the social transactions that make up everyday life in the twenty-first century.

In what follows, we outline two different social processes—one negative and the other positive—commonly associated with the terms “race” and

“ethnicity.” For the sake of analytical clarity, we will call the negative process “doing race” (see Table i.2) and the positive process “doing ethnicity” (see Table i.3). In actual practice, however, the distinction between the two processes, and between the two terms, is much muddier. Under certain conditions, the reverse can be true: the term “ethnicity” can be associated with negative consequences, while the term “race” can be associated with positive ones. In other situations, the two processes overlap to such a degree that they are impossible to distinguish from each other.

As the definitions show, both race and ethnicity are much more than simple terms or concepts. Rather, they are complex systems of ideas and practices that do important personal and societal work. Specifically, they help people to answer the basic identity questions of “Who am I?” and “Who are we?” Asking and answering the questions of who one is and where one belongs are universal human activities—although the possible answers to these questions necessarily depend on the context in which they are asked. In the present historical moment, at least, race and ethnicity are undeniably significant bases for organizing human communities and societies. For that reason, everyone is associated with one or more racial and/or ethnic groups. Of course, race and ethnicity as organizing systems are not inevitable, nor are they the only ones that matter to twenty-first-century global society. Other important organizing systems, while not the focus of this book, receive similar

TABLE I.2 | DEFINITION OF RACE

Race is a doing—a dynamic set of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices that

- sorts people into ethnic groups according to perceived physical and behavioral human characteristics that are often imagined to be negative, innate, and shared.
 - associates differential value, power, and privilege with these characteristics; establishes a hierarchy among the different groups; and confers opportunity accordingly.
- emerges
 - when groups are perceived to pose a threat (political, economic, or cultural) to each other's worldview or way of life; and/or
 - to justify the denigration and exploitation (past, current, or future) of other groups while exalting one's own group to claim an innate privilege.

TABLE I.3 | DEFINITION OF ETHNICITY

Ethnicity is a doing—a dynamic set of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices that

- allows people to identify, or be identified, with groupings of people on the basis of presumed, and usually claimed, commonalities, including several of the following: language, history, nation or region of origin, customs, religion, names, physical appearance and/or ancestry group.
- when claimed, confers a sense of belonging, pride and motivation.
- can be a source of collective and individual identity.

attention and analysis from scholars working in related fields: gender, religion, age, able-bodiedness, social class or caste, and sexuality.

As is clear from the definitions of race and ethnicity, the processes involved in doing them overlap in important ways. In addition, the terms “race” and “ethnicity” are sometimes used interchangeably. In the United States, for example, a person’s race and a person’s ethnicity can both be claimed as sources of pride and identity. This is not the case, however, in Europe, where the word “race” is almost never used. Nevertheless, we define “race” negatively because the term has historically been tied to asymmetries in power and privilege—to inequality. In the same spirit, we define the term “ethnicity” positively because it is more often used, in the United States, to refer to endorsed or claimed differences. Again, this is not the case in Europe and some other parts of the world. In Europe and elsewhere, ethnicity is commonly used to refer to cultural, linguistic, religious, and/or geographical “others.” As a result, ethnicity often functions in Europe the way race usually works in the United States.

Race, then, is a complex system of ideas and practices regarding how some visible characteristics of human bodies such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture relate to people’s character, intellectual capacity, and patterns of behavior. According to this definition, race is a doing that involves several, often simultaneous, actions: (1) noticing particular physical characteristics like skin color, hair color, or eye or nose shape; (2) assuming that those characteristics tell us something general and important, such as how intelligent or how hard-working or conscientious a person is or has the capacity to be; (3) participating in the maintenance and creation of social and economic structures that preserve a hierarchy in which people associated with one race are assumed to be superior to

people who are associated with another; and (4) justifying or rationalizing the resulting inequalities. Although people can do some of these actions to themselves, doing race is very often a one-sided process in which people associated with one group impose a set of negative characteristics on people associated with another group (usually, but not always, one with less power) and relegate them to an inferior status. For the most part, people do race *to* others; they do not do race to themselves.

Because the negative, inequality-producing process associated with the concept of race has developed across time in response to changing, locally specific economic, political, cultural, and technological conditions, race has referred to different configurations of human difference in diverse environments over the course of history. Even so, the concept has at its core the idea that people can be classified into distinct and readily identifiable races based on inherited and unalterable biological characteristics that indicate who is worthy of having access to respect and resources. Importantly, race is given tangible and visible form in the structures and institutions of a society, as well as in people’s everyday beliefs and attitudes. The ideas and practices of race do the work of explaining, justifying, and promoting emergent (as well as long-standing) conditions of racial inequality among different groups of people. This is why changing individual people’s prejudicial attitudes is only one part of addressing the inequalities promoted by race. Another crucial part will involve reforming the existing societal institutions that reflect, and further enable and constrain, individuals’ attitudes and actions.

Ethnicity is also a complex system of ideas and practices. We distinguish it from race as being a more mutual, power-neutral, and positive process (see Table i.3). But, as we have taken pains to emphasize, any group, even one considered an ethnicity, can be the target of the negative, inequality-producing process we call race. The conflict between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994, for example, was widely reported and understood as an ethnic conflict. Yet, at the heart of that conflict (as with most ethnic conflict) was a long history of Rwandans doing to each other what we call here doing race. That is, in the course of reproducing a social order imposed on them by their Belgian colonizers, Rwandans were sorting people into ethnic groups according to perceived physical and behavioral human characteristics; associating differential value, power, and privilege with these characteristics; establishing a hierarchy among the different groups; and conferring opportunity accordingly (Gourevitch 1999).

Just as ethnicity can be associated with the negative inequality-producing process we call doing race, so can race be associated with the positive

identity-generating process we call doing ethnicity. We see this when people who have had a stigmatized racial identity imposed on them by others turn around and claim, for example, “black” or “American Indian” as a source of belonging, pride, and motivation. During the ethnic civil rights movements of 1960s and 1970s, young people of African descent in the United States collectively declared that “black is beautiful,” while people from many different Native American tribal communities came together under the rubric of “American Indian.” To understand why we might see these as examples of a positive use of race (or an ethnicizing of race), we need keep in mind that people of African descent who currently live in the United States are a very diverse bunch. The African people who survived the grueling voyage across the Atlantic to be enslaved in the United States came from several different geographic regions, spoke a variety of languages, and had different religious and cultural practices. Even so, the laws of the early American republic treated these people as if they were all the same, with the same set of interests, desires, and capacities. They were, in effect, created as a single, minoritized racial group without ever having been a single ethnic group. And yet, when their descendants joined together in the black civil rights movement to assert a feeling of pride and solidarity *as* black people, they were participating in the creation of a (politicized) black ethnic identity.

For similar political purposes, young radicals whose people were indigent to what is now North America looked past their real differences of language, culture, tribal affinity, and geographic origin to claim an identity (American Indian) that had been originally imposed upon them by the U.S. government. In both cases, individual people were identifying with a group on the basis of presumed and claimed commonalities of history (in both cases a history of racialized oppression in the United States), nation or region of origin (Africa in the case of blacks, North America in the case of American Indians), values and ideals, and physical appearance. Also in both cases, the politicized ethnic identities that came into being in these ethnic civil rights movements conferred a sense of belonging, pride, and motivation on those who simultaneously created and claimed them. It is for this reason that the term “black,” for example, can be used to refer to both a racial identity and an ethnic identity. What the term “black” means in a given situation depends, as with all language, on the context in which it is used.

Because there is a delicate balance between the positive and negative aspects of noting human ethnic or racial difference, the negative and positive processes we detail above occasionally overlap or even work together. For example, a person who is doing ethnicity (by claiming

positive commonalities with others in his or her group to convey a sense of belonging, pride, and motivation) can easily slide over into doing race. This happens when someone who is claiming positive commonalities with others in a given group construes his or her own group’s way of being as normative or superior while also imposing negative characteristics onto people in other groups. Such a slide is evident, for example, in the beliefs and practices of the neo-Nazi White Pride groups discussed above in the *I’m _____ and I’m proud* conversation. It is similarly evident in the Samuel Huntington example presented in the *Racial diversity is killing us* conversation. Most dramatically, the overlap between the processes of doing ethnicity and of doing race was manifest in World War II. Under Hitler, Europeans experienced firsthand the way German ethnic nationalism, paired with European racial superiority, justified the genocide of over six million Jews and people in other minority groups. Indeed, Europeans, and especially Germans, are so well acquainted with the negative consequences of doing race that they are understandably reluctant to use the word “race” at all. It is for that reason that the German word for race is almost never used in polite company or scholarly work. German scholars who study the kinds of processes we identify in this introductory essay use the terms “ethnic groups” or “immigrants” to refer to the communities of people who, in the United States, we might refer to as racial minorities.

As fundamentally social beings, humans want and even need to identify with and feel connected to others who are like (in one way or another) themselves. There is nothing wrong with recognizing someone else’s ethnicity or with claiming one’s own, because there is nothing negative or pernicious, *per se*, about ethnic groupings. Group differences in history, language, religion, name, ancestry group, physical appearance, nation or region of origin, and/or customary ways of being are and will continue to be evident in diverse societies like our own. Moreover, because these groupings reflect alternative perspectives and practices, they can be important resources for creativity, innovation, and societal well-being. In a society where race and ethnicity have been and still are so central, paying attention to them is not only important, it is necessary.

DOING RACE AND ETHNICITY: EXAMPLES

In the course of our everyday social interactions, people in the United States collectively perpetuate sets of ideas and practices about what it means to be white, Latina/o, black, Asian American, or American

Indian. Sometimes people actively and intentionally devalue and treat people associated with groups other than their own as if they are lesser or unequal. Very often, however, people do race unknowingly and unintentionally just by participating in a world that comes prearranged according to certain racial categories (Adams et al. 2008a). We can see the consequences of the fact that people have done (and continue to do) race everywhere we look. We can observe, for example, that even in states where there are substantial Latina/o or Asian populations, there are very few Latina/o or Asian newscasters and pundits. We can see the effects of race when committees in charge of awarding construction contracts, educational fellowships, prizes for essays or art works, or engineering competitions are entirely made up of white people or have only one committee member who is associated with a minority racial group. Most crucially, we can see that the chances of being in poor health, having no insurance, and dying young are much greater for people associated with a minority racial group. These are institutionalized patterns that reflect and perpetuate the inequality resulting from centuries of doing race.

The following examples illustrate race and ethnicity as actions done by *all of us*, regardless of our own ethnic or racial associations. Race and ethnicity are actions we do individually and institutionally, sometimes with awareness of the consequences and sometimes without. The examples show, moreover, that simply noting an ethnically or racially associated difference is not—as many of the common conversations about race and ethnicity assume—the same as doing race. Whether one is doing race depends on *what* is noted, *how* it is noted, *why* it is noted, and *what one does* with the information gathered as a result of that noting.

Take the hypothetical case of Leticia, a Latina in tenth grade in the Houston Independent School District. Leticia has been absent from school for the last month and nobody at school knows why. The African American assistant principal, who does not know Leticia personally, told her first-period teacher, who is South Asian, “not to worry,” that Leticia’s absence from school was not at all surprising. He explained, “Well, you know those Hispanics. They don’t value education that much. Her mother probably just wants her to stay home.” For at least two reasons, this is an example of doing race. The first is that the African American assistant principal has not made an effort to know or take into account the circumstances of Leticia’s individual case but instead judges her in light of a negative and false generalization about the essential interests, desires, and capacities of all Latina/os. In other words, he stereotypes her in the manner represented graphically in Figure i.1. Second, his

directive “not to worry” implies that the source of the problem is Leticia and her ethnic group rather than the kinds of interactions her school and mainstream society are having (and have had in the past) with her and others in her ethnic group (as indicated by Figure i.2). The South Asian teacher, who has an overenrolled first-period class, is relieved to let the matter rest. The responses of the assistant principal and the teacher to Leticia’s absence thus fail to account for the social, political, and historical context supporting Leticia’s behavior within the educational system, even as they fail Leticia as an individual student. By imagining that there is little that either they or the educational system can do to create a better learning environment for Leticia, and by failing to pay attention to the specifics of Leticia’s situation, the African American assistant principal and the South Asian teacher together explain away the problem by using the cultural version of the *Race is in our DNA* conversation. They see the problem in terms of the essential characteristics of Leticia and her group and thus divest themselves, the school, and the educational system of any responsibility for her well-being.

Now, consider another example of doing race that is less personal but that is in some ways more powerful because it appears, on the surface, to be race-neutral. Public officials sitting on city councils and county commissions all over the country make decisions about where to locate chemical plants and toxic and solid waste dumps, or through which communities to run rail lines or freeways. More often than not, these facilities are located in or near minority communities. Far from being a coincidence, the decisions about where to locate a plant, dump, or freeway are made in ways that, expressly or inadvertently, do race. Officials often believe that putting a plant or a dump in a minority community is a rational thing to do because the land is relatively cheap or because industrial operations already exist nearby. Additionally, the officials may assume that the people in these areas are less likely to vote or mount a successful protest, and sometimes they are right about this. Occasionally, they argue that the minority community wants the facility as a source of jobs or income. However, a decision about where to locate a chemical plant or toxic waste dump has huge ramifications. It increases incidences of environmental illness, depresses the values of homes, decreases the likelihood that businesses will invest in the area, lowers the tax base, and isolates communities from mainstream commerce and society. And yet, were a community member to object to the locating of a dump on the grounds that the officials are doing race, the officials involved would likely point out that they have been asked to solve a legitimate problem

and that race really has nothing to do with it. They would likely, in other words, answer with the *That's just identity politics* or the *We're beyond race* conversations. Moreover, some might sincerely believe that they are color-blind, that race had nothing to do with the outcome, and that the decision-making processes were rooted in practical and economic considerations for the larger community as a whole.

Together, these two examples show that race is done in multiple ways. While doing race sometimes involves people making stereotypical and hostile judgments about others, the process of doing race does not require “racists” (Bonilla-Silva 2003). As illustrated in Figure i.2, race is simultaneously individual and institutional because individual people are institutional actors. Just as individuals do not live outside social systems, social systems operate only with the involvement of individuals. It is in this sense that race is done personally and impersonally, individually and institutionally, with awareness and without.

Now consider another set of examples showing that the mere act of noting a racially or ethnically associated difference is not, by itself, the problem. The problem arises with the validity of the evidence people use to make an observation, how they explain the origins of the noted differences, and what actions they take as a result. For this set of examples, we refer to another group of people frequently stereotyped in the United States—the diverse populations of people often grouped together and labeled “Asian Americans.”

The first notable difference is that East Asian American university students often do very well in math and science classes and outperform their student peers. This observation is supported by data on the grade point averages of East Asian American math and sciences students in universities across the country and has held true over a period of time (Tseng, Chao, and Padmawidjaja 2006). This is a difference that is valued positively by others and would be proudly claimed by many East Asian American students. Now, bear in mind a noting of difference that is similarly directed at people of Asian descent but that involves negative valuation and would not be claimed by most Asian people. According to a popular stereotype of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Asian people are inscrutable—it is impossible to tell what they are thinking and feeling, and whatever they are thinking or feeling is probably something crafty and sly.

The second example, the one involving the “Asians are inscrutable” stereotype, is a clear instance of doing race. To begin with, unlike the example involving math and science grades of East Asian American

university students, the origin of the observation involved in the “Asians are inscrutable” stereotype is anecdotal as opposed to evidentiary. Second, the “Asians are inscrutable” stereotype is tied to a long history of racist portrayal of Asians in the United States (Chang, this volume). And finally, the consequence of describing as inscrutable a very diverse group of people is to make the group of people identified by others (and sometimes by themselves) as “Asian” seem different and lesser.

Even if we take seriously the source of the stereotype of “Asian as inscrutable,” we need to remember that people associated with one race or ethnicity often have difficulty interpreting the behavior and communicative codes of people associated with a different race or ethnicity. A behavioral characteristic that appears to someone from an out-group as inscrutability, for example, might be understood by someone from the in-group as appropriate and decorous behavior. Understanding that “inscrutability” is not an essential characteristic of a group of people but rather a judgment that rests on the particular perspective of the person making the observation requires an acknowledgment that there are other viable ways of being in the world. It also requires the recognition of multiple legitimate perspectives on what is considered culturally “normal” or “neutral.”

It should be clear, as well, that the problem with noting racial or ethnic difference does not result solely from bad evidence; it results also from how the differences are explained and what actions are taken as a result. In the case of the high-performing East Asian students, for example, the evidence for the difference is fairly reliable. However, we would still be doing race if we were to assume that the group difference in scores or GPA meant that *every* East Asian student is superior in math and science to *every other* student of another racial or ethnic group. We would also be doing race if we were to assume that the difference results from some essential (fixed and unchanging) aspect of East Asian biology or culture. In fact, any simple explanation would be equally suspect; the only way we might be able to give an adequate explanation would be by attending to the particular social and historical contexts within which the difference occurs. So, while it is not wrong or “racist” to look out on the world and notice difference, explaining those differences in terms of attributes inside people rather than in terms of social relations and economic conditions over time can, in fact, be racist.

Think about this next example and about the diverse ways the noting of a difference can be explained and acted upon. Currently, Latina/os have a disproportionately high school dropout rate. Moreover, the dropout rate

is increasing dramatically in California, especially among girls. We might explain this trend in at least two ways, only one of which involves doing race. The first is by following the example of the assistant principal at Leticia's high school—by implying that Latina/os are not smart, that they are not interested in education, that they refuse to learn to speak English, and so forth. In this scenario, we would be assuming that the poor performance of Latina/os in school is a result of an essential characteristic of their biology or culture about which nothing can be done.

Alternatively, we might begin our explanation by looking at the social processes (see Figure i.2) that contribute to the high Latina/o dropout rate. We might consider the often negative interactions Latina/os have now and have had in the past with mainstream society, the quality of the underfunded schools Latina/os are likely to attend, the training of the teachers they usually have, and the relative lack of role models and support systems they encounter (Darling-Hammond, this volume). We might further consider the radical instability many Latina/os face because they may well have family members who are directly threatened by the immigration rhetoric and policies of the United States—policies that stigmatize all Latina/os and construct them as “not-American.” How might this instability affect these students' sense of well-being? Also, we can look to research done by social psychologists and educational researchers that shows that Latina/os, like people from all ethnic groups, are products of their historical circumstances and sociocultural environments, and that their performance in school is related to their socioeconomic status as well as to the educational opportunities they encounter (e.g., Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova 2008; Fryberg and Markus 2003; Perry, Steele, and Hilliard 2003).

Again, the problem is not simply noting racial or ethnic difference but what follows from this noting. Regardless of how we explain the high dropout rate among Latina/os, in both cases we are noting a correlation between the race or ethnicity of a particular group of people and a pattern of behavior. But only in the first case—the scenario in which we explain Latina/os' high dropout rate by attributing it to some essential biological or cultural characteristic that cannot be remedied—would we be doing race. Not surprisingly, the two different ways of explaining the phenomenon lead to radically different policy directives. If, on the one hand, we do race to Latina/os, excusing our history, our institutions, and ourselves from any responsibility, then we might try to exclude as many Latina/os as possible from the United States—seal the border, lower the birthrate, and deport all illegal aliens now! Additionally, as has been done in the

past, we might subject Latina/os to a program of intense “Americanization” (Deutsch 1987; Gutiérrez 1995). If, on the other hand, we believe that any given student's behavior—her intellectual capacity, her athletic ability, her moral judgment—is not a fixed entity but instead emerges as a transaction between her and her environment, we might instead decide to make changes to the educational practices and institutions responsible for training our future workforce (Cohen et al. 2006; Dweck 2006; Fryberg and Markus 2003; Steele 2010). For instance, we might work to communicate to students that they are valued and belong to the school community, equalize school funding, put more time and resources into teacher education, increase the percentage of Latina/o teachers, make the curriculum more inclusive to accurately represent the participation of Latina/os in the development and defense of the United States, and find a workable solution to the problem of undocumented immigration. Explaining the situation in this way is a good example of how we might *do difference differently*, an idea to which we return in Section III of this essay.

Racial and ethnic differences are everywhere. We cannot sweep them under the rug or assume it is possible to judge people only as individuals, on the “content of their character.” Everyone has racial and ethnic associations, and those associations affect their lives in consequential ways, both positive and negative. On the one hand, our current ethnic diversity is an impressive record of past human creativity and learning, besides being a great future resource. As a species, we humans have been successful precisely because we have adapted to whole new sets of circumstances, contexts, and environments. On the other hand, ethnic and racial differences serve as crucial indicators of persistent racial and ethnic inequality; they point to the work that has yet to be done to realize social justice in the United States.

The question, then, is not whether we should deal with difference, but rather how we address the differences we encounter. Which differences are noted? Which differences are valued? Why are some differences valued while others are put down? Who decides which differences are worth noticing or valuing? How do the decisions made on the basis of noticing and valuing differences affect the way status and resources are distributed? What actions should we take in light of the information we have gathered?

The primary way people have approached ethnically associated human differences in the past has been to do race. But, as we have shown, doing race leads to misunderstanding, discord, and pervasive societal inequality.

To the extent that we accept the unequal arrangements of the world as natural or neutral and do not challenge or work to change them, we are responsible for perpetuating inequality. While we may not be actively attributing negative characteristics to individuals, consigning them to an inferior status and discriminating against them, we are, nonetheless, part of a system that fosters racial injustice. While we may not be racists in the sense that we believe in our own inherent superiority or in the essential inferiority of any other group, we are all still doing race.

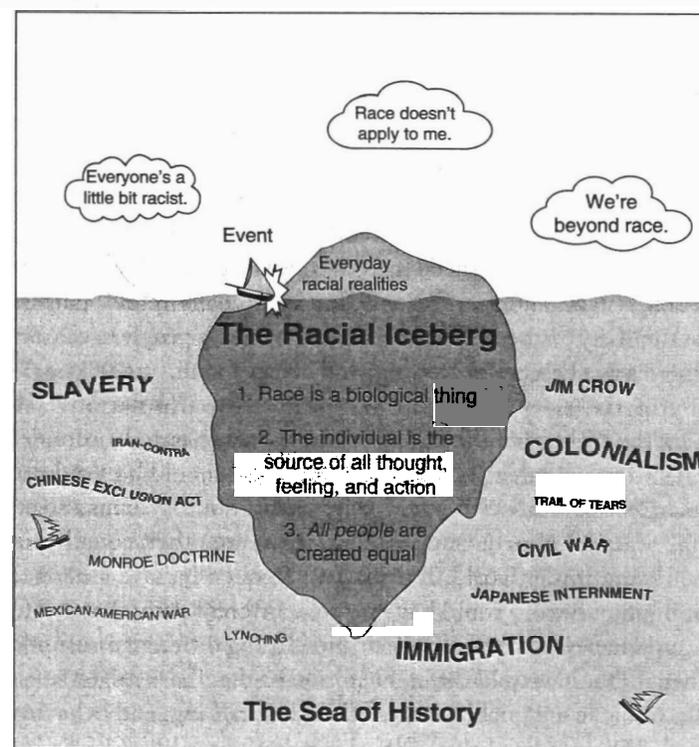
In Section II of this essay, we review the history of racial formation in the United States, examine the philosophical assumptions underlying our country's everyday racial realities, and propose some reasons that U.S. Americans are so uncomfortable talking about race. In Section III, we show that while differences are a feature of human life, we need not be imprisoned by our current ways of handling them. After providing a few examples of the many we could give showing how race has become institutionalized in the basic structures of our society, we return to our claims that race is a doing, and that it is pervasive in our society. We conclude by returning in Section III to the conversations and making some suggestions for how we can *do difference differently*.

II RACE IN THE UNITED STATES— TWO ASSUMPTIONS AND ONE IDEAL

Race is central to the U.S. American story; it has been here from the beginning and it continues to be a powerful force shaping our attitudes and institutions (Omi and Winant 1994). Yet, as we have seen, U.S. Americans have many different and contradictory ideas about what race is as well as what it means for our lives. To understand why, consider that what is commonly said about race addresses only the tip of what we might call, for the sake of illustration, a “racial iceberg.”

An iceberg typically has only about one-ninth of its mass above the surface, so that what an observer on the surface of the ocean sees makes up only a small part of the whole. Imagine that the sorts of events discussed at the beginning of Section I are like the collisions that occur when a ship hits an iceberg before sinking. The point of visualizing the process in this way is to emphasize that much of what affects our thinking about race lies below the surface of our awareness. Extending the metaphor further, we can think of the eight conversations as in the air around us. Whenever an event occurs, people use one or more of the

FIGURE I.3 | THE RACIAL ICEBERG



conversations to make sense of it—often with little thought about why we have these particular conversations and not others.

At the core of the racial iceberg are two fundamental but problematic philosophical assumptions and one powerful defining ideal (see Figure i.3). An assumption, by definition, is implicit—taken for granted, not questioned, fundamental. Until it is made explicit, it cannot be examined in detail, put into context, compared with other possible beliefs, and either affirmed or rejected. The assumptions concerning us here are that race is a biological thing and the individual is the source of all thought, feeling, and action. They are intertwined with a defining ideal of the United States—the ideal that all people are created equal. Together, the two assumptions and the ideal of equality shape our characteristically U.S. American reactions to, and ways of thinking about, everyday realities involving race and ethnicity.

Of course, *all* of our everyday realities—not just the ones involving race and ethnicity—make use of concepts, terms, assumptions, and ideals that have come down to us through history. Such concepts, terms, assumptions, and ideals are human inventions, products of our own or our ancestors' activities over the course of time and, as such, could have been invented differently. Making up the everyday realities of U.S. American lives are barely remembered (but world-making) historical events like the Trail of Tears and the Spanish-American War, significant (but often misremembered) social movements such as abolitionism and the United Farm Workers' boycotts, established (and evolving) institutions like slavery or the prison system, and foundational (but continually retold) narratives such as the "City on the Hill" story invoked by many people to characterize America as a beacon for freedom and liberty for all.

Many of the events, movements, institutions, and narratives that make up the realities of life in our country seem to us to be completely natural and universal, as just the way the world should be. And yet, as the existence of other societies with other institutional systems and other cultural practices clearly demonstrates, there are other, equally viable ways of being in the world. Even so, we frequently have a hard time imagining that history could have taken a different path; that our forebears could have built different institutions using different assumptions; that they might have told different stories; or that there might be other equally valuable and viable ways of thinking, talking, and behaving in the world. Despite our habit of thinking that our ways of being in the world are the right and normal ways, they are *not* universal; they are particular. Consequently, understanding how race and ethnicity have evolved in the United States requires analyzing the historical events, political movements, social and economic institutions, foundational narratives, social practices, defining ideals, and underlying assumptions that have made us who we are. In what follows, we illuminate in turn each of the assumptions, and the defining ideal, to show how they have shaped our understandings of race in the United States.

Race Is a Biological Thing

Racial Classifications across Time

The dominant understanding of race today, which began to emerge in the fifteenth century, holds that all people can be classified into distinct races based on inherited biological characteristics. During the Age of Exploration (fifteenth through seventeenth centuries), Europeans' encounters

with other civilizations—the resources and inhabitants of which they exploited as part of their imperial projects—created the need to place these civilizational "others" in some sort of relationship to themselves. The conundrum created in the European mind—who are these people and how do we relate to them?—was not easily or immediately resolved. As late as 1550, some sixty years after the first European encounter with Native Americans, the Bishop of Chiapas, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, engaged in a debate with fellow cleric Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda regarding whether the natives of Mesoamerica should be considered free peoples or natural slaves. The question at stake in the debate was whether the Spanish Crown was justified in its enslavement of the people they had succeeded in bringing under their dominion (Todorov 1999; Mignolo 1995; Quijano 2000).

The seventeenth century saw various efforts to settle upon the number and the characteristics of different "races," with various taxonomies proposed. However, it was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the publication of works by Swedish naturalist Carolus Linnaeus (*Systema Naturae* 1767), German anatomist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (*On the Natural Varieties of Mankind* 1776), and American anatomist Samuel George Morton (*Crania Americana* 1839) that the modern notion of race crystallized. Although noticing phenotypical and cultural differences between groups of humans has a much longer history, the modern concept of race is rooted in three claims: (1) that race is a *universal* scheme that can accommodate all observed human differences; (2) that it is a *scientifically based* system of classification; and (3) that it is *predictive* of humans' differing capacities and characters. The emergence of the concept of race was thus fueled by the more general Western scientific project of trying to make sense of the world by classifying and ordering its subject matter—plants, animals, and humans—according to observable physical traits (see Facing History 2002).

By the early nineteenth century, a scientific consensus had emerged regarding the existence of either four or five distinct races corresponding roughly to the different continents. Perhaps not surprisingly, the scientists doing the classifying found their own race to have the superior characteristics. Linnaeus, for example, divided humankind into four racial categories corresponding to the four largest continents and determined that each race had certain characteristics common to the individuals in it: Native Americans were reddish in color, obstinate, easily angered, and governed by custom; Africans were black, relaxed, negligent, and governed by caprice; Asians were sallow, avaricious, haughty,

and governed by opinions; Europeans were white, acute, inventive, and governed by laws (Linnaeus 1767; Smedley 2007, 164). To bolster their conclusions, several of these scientists developed procedures to test their arguments—procedures that have not survived subsequent scientific scrutiny. Morton, for example, believed there was a link between brain size and intelligence. He set out to measure the skulls of people of different races to determine their brain size. On the basis of his measurements, he concluded that Caucasians had larger brains than people of other races and thus possessed superior intelligence. However, in the 1970s, evolutionary biologist and historian of science Stephen Jay Gould examined Morton's data and measurements and found that Morton's results were drawn from an unrepresentative sample of skulls and that his measurements and conclusions were faulty. Furthermore, the real and crucial question—whether the size of someone's skull predicts his or her intelligence—was never tested by Morton but simply assumed by him (Gould 1996).

The Swiss-American naturalist and Harvard professor Louis Agassiz thought that people who were assigned to different racial categories were biologically very different from one another and even had different biological origins (Agassiz 1850). His view, polygenesis, was subsequently discredited. Current scientific knowledge holds that all humans derive from a common ancestor and that much of human evolution occurred while early humans were living on the continent of Africa. Scientists such as Morton and Agassiz were most likely not trying to mislead the public with their science. Rather, the commonsense ideas and conversations of their day shaped their scientific practice and predisposed them to look for, and then find, evidence in support of what they already believed.

Evolution and Heredity: Biologizing Race

After Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, his ideas about the way nature selects those traits and forms of life most likely to survive and thrive were taken up by “social Darwinists” who concluded that Morton's and Linnaeus's racial group rankings must be a reflection of human evolutionary development. Gregor Mendel's laws of heredity, developed in the mid-1800s, were similarly enlisted to support the belief that Europeans (and especially Northern Europeans) represented the epitome of human development. Some fifty years after Mendel published his findings on the inheritance of traits in pea plants, Francis Galton used Mendel's research to bolster his conviction that human intelligence was inherited. Galton's “eugenics” program advocated restricting sexual

relations and marriages between what he deemed to be “superior” and “inferior” races (Facing History 2002). The eugenics movement eventually spread to the United States, where its popularity was strengthened by nativist fears that the American gene pool was being polluted by undesirable immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. Eugenicist assumptions were so much a part of the everyday thinking of the time that even some very distinguished scholars subscribed to them. For example, David Starr Jordan, an ichthyologist, peace activist, and the first president of Stanford University, was an early and unapologetic leader of the American eugenics movement (Jordan 1911).

Further historical developments in the United States contributed to the promotion of eugenicist thinking in the United States. The biggest wave of immigration to this country, from 1880 to 1920; the buildup to World War I; and the establishment of compulsory education for all children were key in this regard. American policy makers, perceiving a need to classify immigrants, recruits, and students according to mental capacity, readily adopted the idea of “mental tests” that could identify those people who were “feeble minded” and therefore “unfit” for citizenship, service, or schooling. The implementation of mental testing fueled the assumption that intelligence was a fixed attribute of a person, and that some persons, by virtue of their racial group association, were more or less intelligent than others. For example, Stanford professor Lewis Terman believed that non-Northern European people were less intelligent than Northern European people. He adapted a test that had been developed in France to measure students' *performance* on specific academic tasks, and claimed that his test measured people's *innate intelligence*. Terman's Stanford-Binet test—which is a test that measures culturally specific knowledge—purported to be an efficient way of measuring the fixed mental capacities of large groups of people. Applying his test to non-Northern European immigrant children, Terman had this to say: “The tests have told the truth. These boys are ineducable beyond the merest rudiments of training. No amount of school instruction will ever make them intelligent voters or capable citizens” (Terman 1916, 91).

The establishment of the I.Q. or Intelligence Quotient test developed by Terman is an example of how a questionable idea that accords with popular opinion can too easily be taken as truth. When a scientist's conclusions support the status quo—when they tell us what we already believe—they often do not receive appropriate scientific scrutiny. Moreover, alternative hypotheses—for example, that good performance on an I.Q. test measures familiarity and comfort with culturally specific

objects and activities rather than the innate capacity of a person—are often not examined. This is the way that unwarranted scientific conclusions can be enshrined as the “truth,” at least for a time, even when they later turn out to be entirely wrong.

Race and Culture

Not until the early part of the twentieth century did some scientists begin to question the belief that cultural, linguistic, and behavioral differences among people were the result of inherent and fixed physical characteristics. An important figure in promoting a new understanding of race was Franz Boas, generally considered to be the founder of American anthropology. In 1911, Boas published *The Mind of Primitive Man*, which included his studies of Native Americans along the northwest coast of the United States. Boas’s research demonstrated that many of the most significant features of people’s behavior (their language, values, ways of cooking, kinship ties, child rearing, and so on) are not related to inherited biological difference. His research showed that all these cultural features overlap and vary independently of each other. So, for example, two populations who looked very similar might speak different languages and behave very differently from each other. Conversely, groups who spoke the same language and had similar cultural practices might differ greatly in terms of physical features (Boas 1911).

Boas’s research allowed scientists to understand in new ways the differences they noted among humans. Boas and his students, including scholars such as Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and Zora Neale Hurston, understood culture as fluid and dynamic. They held that cultural differences among people’s prevalent ideas and practices could account for important variations in individual behavior. They further understood these cultural patterns and processes as not fixed, but rather evolving, and regarded them as worthy objects of scientific inquiry. As a result of his and his students’ findings, Boas rejected the existence of a racial or ethnic hierarchy in which some groups are more evolved than others; he became a forceful proponent of cultural pluralism, which held that there are many equally evolved and viable human cultures.

After World War II, conversations about race in the United States continued to change in the direction of rejecting the idea of innate racial differences. Americans’ awareness of the horrors of Nazi genocide—a program of institutionalized murder that targeted Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and the mentally ill and that was justified on eugenicist grounds—further contributed to this shift. It was at this point that many

scholars switched from talking about “race,” a term that became associated with the Nazis and their “final solution,” to talking about “ethnicity” (Snipp, this volume; Sollors 1996). Many scholars began to avoid using the term “race,” even as racial thinking and heated debates about the role of nature versus nurture as determinants of human behavior persisted in the scientific community and in the public sphere.

The switch from talking about race to talking about ethnicity and culture did not signal an end to the thinking about ethnic and racial others in negative and essentialist terms. While considering the importance of culture in shaping people’s behavior bolstered arguments in favor of integrating the schools and the military, it also created the space for analyses like the one included in the infamous 1965 Moynihan Report, titled “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.” That report, published a year after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, was prompted by what Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan saw as a “new crisis in race relations.” The report located the source of African American poverty not in race per se but in the African American family structure. Moynihan argued that without a father in the house, black families became disorganized and isolated from mainstream values. This caused them to fall into poverty, delinquency, and crime (Moynihan 1965). The narrow analysis provided in the report failed to highlight the powerful and ongoing gaps in educational employment and housing opportunities that gave rise to and perpetuated this cycle. As a result, the report made it seem as if there were some fixed “thing” that could be isolated and identified as “black culture,” and that black culture (as an entity residing within people and their families) was to blame for the failure of African Americans to advance quickly to economic and social equality with whites. The effect of the report was to stigmatize the African American family as a “tangle of pathologies” in need of therapy. The Moynihan report had a negative impact on attitudes about African Americans. Even though the term *culture* was intended to refer to distributions of ideas and practices, following the Moynihan report, it came to be used in the same way race had been used, i.e., to indicate an unchanging essence or set of traits. As a result, many social scientists concerned with race avoided any discussion of culture.

Genomic Research and the Re-biologization of Race

Given the remarkable history of the concept of race and its impressive capacity to adapt to changing social circumstances, we should not be surprised that ideas and conversations about race continue to evolve in the present day. The recent discovery of ways to understand DNA sequencing

over the last thirty years has had at least one unfortunate consequence: the re-biologization of the concept of race. As the claims of nineteenth-century scientific racism were disproved in the second half of the twentieth century by scholars like Stephen Jay Gould (1981) and Richard Lewontin (1984), the idea that the concept of race had no biological basis was gradually acknowledged in many sectors of American society, if not in the minds of the American public at large. With the mapping of the human genome, however, the direction of thinking about race has reversed.

In part because the racial classification systems developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were tied to continental origin, recent developments in population genetics that allow scientists to determine, with a high degree of accuracy, an individual's continental origin(s) have reinvigorated old ideas about the biological significance of racial difference. It can be difficult, at first, to separate the fact that scientists can now determine the continental origins of an individual's ancestors, from the fiction that they are able to say—even to the extent of breaking it down into percentages—what someone's biological race is. To make the situation even more confusing, several Web-based businesses, genealogical societies, and even a few television specials have capitalized on the powerful desire of many of us to find out “who we are” by discovering our ancestral roots (Bolnick et al. 2007). Biogeographical ancestry groups (or populations) and race are not the same thing. Understanding the difference requires a close examination of the relationship between these two concepts.

As Marcus Feldman's essay in this volume makes clear, current research on the human genome indicates several important facts about biological diversity. First, all humans can trace their beginnings to a common ancestor who lived in the part of the world that we now know as the continent of Africa. Second, approximately 100,000 years ago, one or more groups of people migrated out of Africa, with the great majority of humans who were then alive remaining in Africa. Third, all the populations of humans that eventually came to reside in continents other than Africa are descended serially from these first groups of migrants. As some of the migrants settled along the way, some of their descendents pushed across Europe and the Middle East and settled in those regions. Eventually, smaller subsets of these people's descendents migrated into China and Russia, until even smaller subsets crossed the Bering land bridge into what is now America (Feldman, this volume).

We come now to the fourth fact indicated by current genomic research: about 89 percent of human genomic variation occurs *within*

populations of people, with at most 9 percent occurring *between* populations (Li 2008). What this means is that any given human being is much more genetically similar to any other human being than he is different and what genomic variation does occur between himself and another human being is more likely to be found within his own population than outside it. Moreover, most people who were alive when the migrations started stayed in Africa. This means that the greatest amount of human genomic variation in the world today exists *within* the different populations of people descended from those ancestors who stayed in Africa. By contrast, the least amount of within-population genomic variation occurs among the descendents of the ancestors who migrated the farthest from Africa: into South America.

A fifth important fact about biological diversity is that it is not patterned in such a way that we can cleanly divide people into completely separate and unconnected populations according to either genetics or observable physical features. As previously noted, most genomic variation occurs within populations. Additionally, observable physical features such as skin color, hair texture, and limb shape actually vary continuously across geographic space; there are no obvious sets of features that anyone can definitively identify as characteristic of only this or that particular population. So, for example, if a person were to hike around the world observing different populations of people, she would see that the physical features we often use to assign racial group membership blend into one other in a way that is consistent with the migratory path of ancient humans out of Africa and across the globe.

Even though humans cannot be divided up into completely separate populations, very recent advances in human genomic research have enabled scientists to identify genomic variations at the level of the single nucleotide (of which there are about three billion in the human genome). This ability to detect incredibly minute differences at a level even smaller than the human gene means that scientists can now sort most people into nondiscrete and overlapping, but nevertheless identifiable, population clusters. In his essay, Feldman refers to these biogeographically based clusters as populations or *ancestry groups*. When considering how the biogeographical concept of ancestry groups relates to the practice of human racial categorization, it helps to remember that—depending on how finely scientists draw the distinctions and which specific criteria they use to divide the human species into smaller groups—researchers can identify anywhere from 5 different human populations to 6,000. This is why even the concept of a biogeographical ancestry group, though firmly

based in biology, can also be said to be a socially constructed conceptual category. How finely to draw the distinctions and what criteria should be used are finally *social* decisions, made by people who participate in the larger societies of which they are part and who are subject to all the social pressures and common sense that are part of those societies.

What, then, do biogeographical ancestry groups have to do with the sociohistorical concept of race? In answering this question, we first have to remember that the concept of race continues to be persistently associated with biological difference. As our brief history of the modern and Western concept of race has demonstrated, race has long been tied—in the way it has been understood and represented—to inherited biological difference. As noted above, there was a period in the twentieth century during which cultural critics, anthropologists, and other behavioral scientists interrupted that persistent association in order to highlight the role that ideas and practices play in creating different populations of people. But perhaps because human genetics and race are both so poorly understood by most people, the advances in population genetics discussed above have tended to reinforce the association between race and biology. The resulting confusion poses a serious challenge for scholars of race and ethnicity interested in understanding the workings of race as a significant social identity category.

So is race biological? On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being “yes” and 1 being “no,” the answer would be about a 2. It is true that humans are biological beings. Moreover, it is clear that some aspects of physical appearance that traditionally have been used to assign racial group membership (including skin color, hair texture, and limb shape) are biologically inherited. These aspects of a person’s physical appearance are part of what make up her *phenotype* (the measurable or observable features of her organism). However, a person’s phenotype does not derive in a clear or obvious way from her *genotype* (all of the genes present in her organism). Other environmental factors (e.g., the availability and the quality of food, cultural ideas and practices, and the presence or absence of stress, trauma, disease, or environmental pollution) all interact with her genotype to make up what other people might observe or measure as her phenotype. Furthermore, nonvisible biological traits (e.g., blood factors, enzymes) that vary independently of visible physical features also contribute significantly to an individual’s phenotype (Feldman, this volume). What this means is that phenotypic features that are sometimes assumed to be racial characteristics (e.g., a person’s height, sickle cell anemia) may have *something* to do with biogeographical ancestry—but they

also may be greatly affected—even caused—by diet, social behaviors, or some other environmental factor that is independent of the continental origin(s) of a person’s ancestors. Scholars of race and ethnicity need to grapple seriously with the way race comes into being in connection with visible human biological difference.

Finally, *race* differs from *biogeographical ancestry groups* in that the concept of race comes loaded with a great deal of ideological baggage. Consider this: if a man has blue eyes and blond hair, and if he is successful according to some standard measure of our society, then many people will probably assume that the same genes that produced his blue eyes and his blond hair are also responsible for producing the specific behavioral and intellectual characteristics that made him successful. This is the fallacy of biological thinking in general, and an example of doing race in particular: we see the man’s pale skin and blue eyes and know that they are biologically caused; then we observe his material success and assume that it is similarly biologically caused; we conclude, mistakenly, that everything a person is or becomes is a direct result of his racial identity. The logical fallacy of biological thinking causes people to err when they look exclusively to a person’s genotype for answers to their questions about differences in people’s behaviors or capacities. The human genotype simply does not have all the answers to the kinds of questions about individuals and societies that people want to ask.

Examining the origins, associations, and uses of the concept of race helps us to understand why the recent ability of scientists to pinpoint the continent(s) of origin of individuals’ recent ancestors has contributed to the general, if mistaken, impression that race is a biological thing located inside people’s bodies. It is crucial to remember, then, that even though race is realized in connection with visible human difference, it is not something that can be located in our genes or examined in isolation from the environmental factors around it. As an organizing feature of our society, the concept of race has much more powerful effects on people’s lives than any set of genetic markers will ever have.

The Individual Is the Source of All Thought, Feeling, and Action

Independence and the Importance of the Individual

The second assumption that underlies all our conversations about and reactions to events involving race and ethnicity is the assumption that the individual is the source of all thought, feeling, and action. Indeed,

understanding the role of and the challenges posed by race in the United States depends on the recognition that our society is fundamentally individualist in character (Bellah et al. 1985). In core values and beliefs—in legal and political systems, in educational and care-taking practices, and even in interpersonal relationships—U.S. Americans have a certain idea of what it means to be a person. People are independent individuals who are free from the constraints of history, other people, and society. According to this way of thinking, each individual has her own preferences, motives, attitudes, abilities, and goals—all of which guide and motivate her thoughts, feelings, and actions. As an autonomous being, she holds the reins, captains the ship, or is behind the wheel of the Prius that is her life. Ideally, she is minimally beholden to those around her; other people can influence her, but she should not allow them too much control over her behavior. She is the main beneficiary of her actions, and she alone is responsible for them.

In fact, the independent model of the self is so thoroughly inscribed in American society that we often do not realize that there are other models of what it means to be a person. Research shows that outside middle-class North American contexts, there are other ways of being a self; being a person with agency does not require an independent model. In some societies, for example, people are not viewed as independent entities separate from others. Rather, they are viewed as fundamentally *interdependent* and responsive to the expectations and requirements of others. From the perspective of an interdependent model of the self, the individual is not alone responsible for his or her behavior; instead, people bear some responsibility both for themselves and for the others with whom they are related or connected. (Markus and Kitayama 1991, 2003).

Importantly, the independent model of the self is more than just a set of values that Americans hold. It is deeply ingrained in our daily lives: it shapes how we raise and educate our children, the way we interact with each other at work, and what we do on the weekends or when we retire. A good way to imagine its significance is to think of it as a “to do” list that organizes the flow of everyday American life. For example, American parents love and care for their dependent newborn babies, but they do so with the anticipation that their babies will grow up, leave home, and be responsible for themselves. To encourage and foster independence, parents (especially in middle-class European American contexts) put infants in their own cribs and sometimes in their own rooms. Very often, the events recorded in their child’s baby book are milestones on the child’s path toward self-determination: rolling over, sitting and standing

up, and walking. Even everyday admonishments reinforce an American child’s sense that she should march to the beat of her own drum: “If everyone jumped off the cliff, would you?” “Just be yourself, don’t worry about other people.” Parents urge their children to “stand up for themselves” on the playground, and to fight back when a classmate bothers them. Beyond home and school, many other institutions of society also stress the values of independence and uniqueness. For example, advertisers use these themes to sell every type of product. Gerber touts its baby foods as “A good source of iron, zinc, and independence.” Tommy Girl calls its cologne “A declaration of independence,” while Gap markets its widely appealing yet wholly unremarkable clothing basics with the command, “Individualize.” Perpetuating the lone hero model of history, Apple paired famous artists, scientists, and activists—for example Einstein, Picasso, César Chávez, the Dalai Lama—with the American mantra “Think Different” (Fiske et al. 1998; Shweder et al. 2006).

People who live within a society organized according to the independent model of the self do tend to experience themselves as autonomous. They see themselves as in control of their actions and imagine that they should be relatively free from other people or institutions. Although being an independent self is a learned way of being, the socialization process is often invisible. As a result, those who learn the independent way of being a person often believe that it is the good, the natural, and the only way to be a person.

The idea of the independent and self-determining individual is central not just to U.S. Americans’ daily lives but also to our systems of government, law, finance, and health care. Many of our most treasured ideals—freedom, equality, self-governance, the pursuit of happiness—are based on the idea of free individuals who have the right to govern themselves and to pursue the achievement of their full potential. The idea of the autonomous individual is an idea that underlies the “reasonable man” of the law, the “rational self-interested actor” of economics, and the “authentic self” of counseling and clinical psychology (Schwartz 1986).

Origins of the Independent Model of the Self

What is the origin of the independent view of the person? The idea of the self-determining individual can be found in various philosophical systems throughout the world at different points in history, but its rise to prominence in the West emerged from a confluence of historical, philosophical, religious, political, and sociological forces that began in the

late fifteenth century and continues until the present day. This confluence is referred to in some scholarly circles as “modernity/coloniality” to account for the link between European modernization, imperialism, and the founding of a hierarchical system of racial dominance (Mignolo 2005; Quijano 2000). Although modernity/coloniality is a notoriously difficult concept to define, a useful way to think of it is as a widespread socioeconomic and cultural changeover in ideas and practices that profoundly challenged traditional sources of authority and upset conventional understandings of how humans are able to know the natural world. So, for example, when in 1492 Europeans encountered the continent of what is now known as America, they literally had to remap their known world. When in 1514 Copernicus introduced the idea that the earth revolved around the sun, his observations radically upset the common wisdom (not to mention the Church doctrine) that the earth was the center of the universe (Copernicus and Wallis 1995). When in 1517, Martin Luther claimed that man could have a personal relationship with God without the priest as an intermediary, he spawned a movement that eventually posed a radical challenge to the dominance of the Catholic Church and its rigidly hierarchical structure (Luther [1517] 2004). Descartes famously declared in 1637 that “I think, therefore I am,” thus asserting his own thought as authoritative for proving his existence (Descartes [1637] 2006). John Locke, the seventeenth-century British philosopher, encouraged individuals to use reason rather than accept the dictates of authority or hold beliefs unsupported by empirical evidence. In Locke’s view, individuals existed prior to society; he saw societies as made up of autonomous individuals who enter into a social contract with other individuals to protect their right to self-determination (Locke [1689] 2005).

The idea of the self-determining and self-knowing individual was thus enabled by the gradual shift in authority from God (or the King as God’s representative on Earth) to Man that occurred during the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment. What gradually emerged in Western thought was a picture of the independent individual who could know the world through his own observation, imagine a kind of social mobility that was previously impossible, and read and interpret the scriptures according to his own conscience. This idea of the individual has had a profound impact on Europeans’ and Americans’ imagination of themselves and their place in the universe; it is still very powerful today. It is so broadly and deeply ingrained in our way of life that it is often hard for us to imagine how it could be otherwise (Fiske et al. 1998; Markus and Kitayama 1991).

One Cannot Be an Individual by Oneself

There is a problem, however, with the admittedly powerful (world-shaping, civilization-crafting) idea of the autonomous individual. The liberal individualism that abstracts and separates the individual from society makes sense of the practices of a capitalist society (D’Agostino 1998; Plaut 2002), but it can also obscure the reality that all people—including middle-class Americans—exist within, and as members of, various communities. Yes, people are individuals; but they are not *only* individuals. People everywhere live out their lives in families, neighborhoods, schools, teams, clubs, workplaces, and places of worship. Their thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others (Asch 1952). In fact, a significant evolutionary advantage of humans is that they enter a world filled with the ideas, goods, and institutions of those who have gone before them; they do not have to build the world anew. From a baby’s very first moment of awareness, she is saturated with the sounds, touch, sight, and rhythms of those around her. She is dependent on others for food, care, and company—if she is left alone, she will either die or fail to develop into a mature adult person. As a result, all people form bonds with other people; they love, help, depend on, learn from, teach, and compare themselves to those around them. They experience the world through other people’s images, ideas, and words. Becoming a person is a social project; in a very real way, people make each other up.

Because the idea of the autonomous individual is both powerful and appealing, accepting the notion that people are fundamentally *interdependent* can be difficult for many people who have grown up in the United States to accept. Nevertheless, no matter how tough or strong or self-reliant a person is, no one is completely autonomous. Consider this: when a person is first learning to speak, she does not invent the language. She does not make up the words or create the grammatical logic. Rather, she learns the words and acquires the logic of the language(s) she is exposed to; she uses them in conventional ways so that others will understand her. (Even if she becomes an avant-garde writer and experiments or plays games with the languages in which she is writing, she will still have to learn the linguistic conventions in order to bend them.) So, whether she is aware of it or not (and typically she is not), she is eating, dressing, walking, as well as thinking and feeling and acting not in neutral or basic or universal human ways but in culturally particular ways. Virtually all of her behavior is dependent on and requires others. It is not possible

to be a neutral, ahistorical, or asocial individual or to achieve an identity of any type without the contribution of others. People's thoughts, feelings, language, and actions are always influenced by (and also influence) the thoughts, feelings, language, and actions of others—even when their philosophy or ideology tells them they should not be so influenced. To say that other people constitute the self is not, however, to say that other people wholly determine the self. People are indeed individuals; they are intentional agents who can—within the constraints allowed by the social context—resist and contest the views of others.

In many other parts of the world (and outside a middle-class European American context), the reality of relatedness is more obvious. An interdependent model of self has long been prevalent in many of the cultures of East and South Asia, as well as in some minority communities within the United States (Doi 1973; Geertz 1973; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Marsella, Do Vos, and Hsu, 1985; Triandis 1995). From the perspective of an interdependent model of the self, people are understood to be inherently and fundamentally connected to others. It is not the individual alone but her relationship to family, clan, tribe, or work group that is the primary focus. It is a model of the self that stresses empathy, reciprocity, belongingness, kinship, hierarchy, loyalty, respect, politeness, and social obligations. People are expected to adjust to meet others' expectations and to work for the good of the relationship. Indeed, well-being comes not from being able to choose for oneself (as in a middle-class European American context) but rather from being part of relationships that are defined as good within the value-system of that society. For example, a Japanese mother does not typically ask for a child's preference but instead tries to determine what is best and then to arrange it. Punishing or reprimanding Japanese children often involves a threat to the relationship rather than a withholding of rights and privileges. Mothers might say, "I don't like children like you." Similarly, Chinese parents often use an explicitly evaluative, self-critical framework with their children. Parents in societies that put a premium on interdependence do not ignore their children's shortcomings or transgressions because the goal is to keep the children from losing their all-important relationships to others (Fiske et al. 1998).

Just as idea of the independent and self-determining individual is central to the basic practices and systems of U.S. Americans' daily lives, the idea of the interdependent and accommodating individual is central to the daily practices and systems of cultures in which interdependence is highly valued. In most East Asian preschools, for example, it is group

achievement rather than individual achievement that is celebrated, and children are not tracked according to ability or singled out for special instruction (Stevenson and Stigler 1992). Schooling practices often place a great emphasis on learning to live in society, and teachers emphasize the importance of discerning how others are feeling. Similarly, advertisements in Japan use the deep cultural themes of relating to others and meeting expectations to connect products to desirable people—usually a Hollywood celebrity. For example, Brad Pitt swoons over coffee, while Cameron Diaz reveals that the secret to her success is an English school. In the United States, movie stars often avoid associating themselves with ordinary objects because doing so might seriously undermine their essential coolness and uniqueness. But these same movie stars routinely partner with Japanese corporations to promote ordinary Japanese products. In Japan, where the focus is more on relationships and less on attributes, the advertised products gain in popularity because they provide a tangible link to admired and desirable others.

In societies organized around the value of interdependence, being a human individual means understanding and accepting that people are fundamentally social beings (Fiske et al. 1998). Individual behavior—one's thoughts, feelings, and actions—is experienced and understood as the result of a person's actively attending and adjusting to others. In such contexts, autonomous individuals who insists on expressing their preferences are considered immature. If flexible adaptation to the demands of the situation is the goal, then cultivating the expectation and habit of choice is counterproductive. People who live in societies that emphasize interdependence are as unaware of how their thoughts, feelings, evaluations, plans, and actions are organized by interdependence as most U.S. Americans are unaware of how our lives are organized by independence. Organizing values like independence and interdependence are difficult for us to perceive; they are like the air that we breathe, noticeable only in its absence.

In a society like the United States—where individuality and independence are valued above almost all else—the key to understanding how and why race and ethnicity work the way they do is recognizing that people are not just individuals. Individuals are also always associated with other people and with groups; they are known to themselves and to others through significant social categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, or religion. As a result, their identities will necessarily be shaped by how others regard the social groups with which they are associated. So, people *are* individuals, but they *are* also Americans, women, Texans,

Muslims, African Americans, Stanford alumni, Europeans, Democrats, lawyers, artists, Ford factory workers, baby boomers, Christian Evangelists, and Blue State dwellers. Such social identities are highly mutable (some more than others) and can be shuffled by context and circumstance.

Though malleable and constantly changing in terms of their meanings and personal significance, however, identities are much more than just labels. Identities provide sets of interpretive frameworks for making sense of the world, for understanding the past and present, and for predicting the future. Which of a person's many identities will be most salient in any given situation—which will organize his or her experience in that case—will depend on the nature of the situation and the other people involved in it. In any given circumstance, being seen by others in terms of one's social identities (and in particular one's racial or ethnic identities) will have real and powerful consequences (e.g., Mohanty 1997; Moya 2002; Steele, Spencer, and Aronson 2002; Thomas 1923). In Section III of this essay, we return to what some of those consequences can be.

All Men Are Created Equal

Individuality and Equality and Doing Race

Intimately linked to the growing significance of the individual in the modern era was the new and radical idea of equality—that is, the idea that individuals are not only self-determining but they are also in some important ways equal to each other. This link—the one between individuality and equality—requires particular attention in any attempt to understand why race is such an important part of American society. Like the two assumptions discussed above, the ideal that all men are created equal (and that they should have equal rights) is at the foundation of the American republic.

The idea of equality among individuals has roots in both ancient Greek and Hebrew traditions, but it became a more central and formative idea in the West with the advent of modernity/coloniality. Martin Luther's stand against the Church as the sole source of spiritual authority not only set the Protestant Reformation in motion but it also helped foster the modern liberal notion that free individuals are equal in their capacity to reason for themselves with no need of an intermediary. As Protestant notions of equal moral worth before God spread and were blended with Enlightenment ideals about secular authority, many Europeans began

to envision a world of free and equal individuals who could govern themselves and determine their own futures (Taylor 1989). In the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, French revolutionaries declared, "Men are born, and always continue, free and equal in respect of their rights." Thomas Jefferson reflected the same Enlightenment thought when he wrote the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Jefferson's forceful declaration, enshrined in what was to become a sacred American text, was antimonarchical and antihereditary. From this perspective, an individual did not just inherit his status. Rather, the individual was endowed, by a power higher than any king, with the essence of equality. The individual was then responsible for making himself; he was to be the author of his own earthly existence.

The inspirational and powerful Enlightenment ideals about individuality and equality that were reflected in the political revolutionary documents of the day and diffused throughout the West were also, however, deeply at odds with the reality of social and political life. Different groups of people lived in radically unequal circumstances and were treated unequally by a range of institutions. The existence of massive economic and political inequality, including slavery, in the midst of the rhetoric of equality required an explanation, and one ready tool was the concept of biological race. Perhaps, the reasoning went, some people were not equal to others because they were somehow inherently (that is, biologically) different.

History shows that as the heady ideas of individuality and equality developed and spread, so did the practice of using race as a system to rank humans. In fact, at the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, equality among individuals was meant to apply only to people of a certain race (white), class (property owners), and gender (male). At the founding of the U.S. republic, those people who had been brought by force from West Africa—who made up one-fifth of the U.S. population—were held as slaves. The U.S. Constitution counted slaves, for the purpose of political representation, as three-fifths of a person, even as it completely excluded Indians who lived outside the jurisdiction of the new republic from the imagined community.

Given the disconnect between the rhetoric of equality in documents like the Declaration of Independence and the reality of slavery and unequal

conditions of life in countries like the United States, the Enlightenment appeal to the equality of mankind set in motion a fervent debate about what was meant by the claim that “all men are created equal.” Does the term “men” refer to all humans? Is any one man equal to any other? If we grant that all men are equal before God, do we have to grant that they are all equal before the State? Even assuming that all men are equal in moral worth—does that mean they are all equal in talents? If not, then which talents are most important? What about women? Are they created equal? Equal to other women, or equal to men? How do we even measure equality? Should the measure of equality be one of opportunity, capacity, or outcome? Who will make these decisions, and how will they be made? These are not idle questions; they preoccupied the minds of our country’s architects and founders and they continue to occupy us to this very day.

Our country’s founders came up with a set of temporary answers and working solutions to the kinds of questions articulated above. Their temporary answers served the needs of the day, yet their solutions have had profound consequences for the history of race relations in this country. For example, Thomas Jefferson—the man who penned the phrase “all men are created equal”—was a slave owner who struggled to reconcile the ideals of equality and difference in his own personal life and for the country. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781), for instance, Jefferson showed that he admired Native Americans:

I may challenge the whole orations of Demosthenes and Cicero, and of any more eminent orator, if Europe has furnished more eminent, to produce a single passage, superior to the speech of Logan, a Mingo chief, to Lord Dunmore, when governor of this state. ([1781]1995, 62)

By comparing Native Americans to the icons of Western civilization and arguing that they were brave, kind, and affectionate, in addition to being superior orators, Jefferson represents them in this passage as being equal in capacity to white men.

As Jefferson’s later actions revealed, however, he did not consider superior speech-making sufficient to qualify Indians as ideal citizen-subjects of the new nation. When the U.S. colonies were expanding into Indian territory some two decades later, Jefferson was unsympathetic to Native Americans’ situation. In his Second Inaugural Address, on March 4, 1805, Jefferson showed his frustration with what he saw as Native Americans’ stubborn refusal to move from a “primitive” and collectivist way of life to an “enlightened” and individualist way of life:

These persons inculcate a sanctimonious reverence for the customs of their ancestors; that whatsoever they did must be done through all time; that reason is a false guide, and to advance under its counsel in their physical, moral, or political condition is perilous innovation; that their duty is to remain as their Creator made them, ignorance being safety and knowledge full of danger; in short, my friends, among them also is seen the action and counteraction of good sense and of bigotry. ([1805] 2001)

Along with Jefferson’s frustration came a willingness to remove those Indians who would not assimilate to European American norms and values. Moreover, his attack on the “customs” of the Native Americans in this passage reveals that he is unaware of how his own “customs” shaped his own particular way of interpreting the situation. He used the concept of race—what he defined as an “inculcated” difference in mentality and way of life—to justify Native Americans’ removal and mistreatment. Many others, like Jefferson, also found reasons to explain why some people could not or should not receive equal treatment. Scientific systems of ranking groups of people according to race were useful for this purpose and gained in popularity as the need to rationalize inequality and perpetuate exploitative socioeconomic systems became more pressing.

Doing Inequality While Claiming Equality: An Example

Many of the significant events of the next two centuries of American history are a direct result of the attitudes, norms, and organizational structures of a society that was struggling with the question of whom to include within the imagined community of U.S. American society. For example, in 1857, an enslaved man by the name of Dred Scott sued for his freedom. Scott was taken by his owner to a newly acquired territory of the United States—what is now Missouri—where slavery was illegal. In the Supreme Court decision of *Scott v. Sandford*, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney argued that slaves were “so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect” (1857, 407). We can clearly perceive, here, that the American legal system was doing race by justifying the continuing inequality between blacks and other Americans. The *Scott v. Sandford* case reflected a growing conflict between the slaving-owning, plantation-rich southern states and the northern states where many opposed slavery and its expansion into the new territories. This conflict culminated in the U.S. Civil War.

The eventual defeat of the South and the freeing of the slaves with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 did little to remedy the United States' problems with slavery and inequality. For a combination of economic, political, and social reasons, many Southerners continued to resist the idea of blacks as free and equal people. Such resistance was significant because at the end of the war, 95 percent of blacks lived in the South and made up one-third of the population of the South; by comparison, only 1 percent of the black population lived in the North (McPherson 1996). Many state and local laws in the South included a set of so-called "Black Codes" that prohibited blacks from voting, serving on juries, traveling freely, or working in many occupations. The Black Codes so clearly violated the ideal of equality enshrined in the U.S. Constitution that many Americans fought to overturn them. Finally, in 1868 with the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, the U.S. Constitution was amended to overrule the decision of *Scott v. Sandford*. The Fourteenth Amendment guarantees due process and equal protection under the law for all citizens. It broadened the definition of citizenship so that constitutional rights were finally accorded to former enslaved people and their descendants.

While the Fourteenth Amendment would eventually have far-reaching societal consequences, nearly a century passed before federal law guaranteed these rights. The initial reaction to the fourteenth Amendment by many whites who were opposed to black equality was the creation of a vast new set of practices, policies, and laws. These laws, referred to as Jim Crow laws, were rooted in a presumption of inherent white moral and intellectual superiority.² Between 1876 and 1965 in many southern and border states, Jim Crow laws mandated "separate but equal status" for whites and nonwhite racial groups (principally black, but also Mexican American in states like Texas). Jim Crow laws supported the segregation of neighborhoods, public schools, public transportation, restrooms, drinking fountains, swimming pools, and libraries.

In 1896, Jim Crow laws were challenged in the Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. At that point, the Court held that the idea of separate but equal facilities for whites and blacks did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment (*Plessy v. Ferguson* 1896). Despite the legal justification for these laws, enforced segregation between whites and nonwhites did not result in equal facilities but instead served to maintain and extend

² The name Jim Crow marks the deceptive nature of these laws and refers to a minstrel show character from the early nineteenth century that was typically performed by a white actor wearing black makeup.

inequality. For example, schools built for blacks and Mexicans during Reconstruction and the first half of the twentieth century were massively underfunded, poorly constructed, and inadequately maintained. These practices had the effect of further cementing the inequality between whites and nonwhite racial groups.

Thus, for almost a century, the Black Codes and Jim Crow laws structured social life and ensured a strict separation between whites and blacks. Even in the North, where such laws were not instituted, there was virtually no racial integration; separation between the races was maintained by a set of informal codes and practices of exclusion. Given the strict separation between races, as well as the developing debate during the 1920s and on through the 1960s on the biological basis of race and intelligence, it is hardly surprising that many whites continued to believe what their forebears had believed since the founding of the Republic—that whites were essentially superior to all other races. It was not until 1954, with the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling, that school segregation was declared unconstitutional (1954). Invoking the Fourteenth Amendment, the Supreme Court declared that separate schools were inherently unequal and that they denied black children equal educational opportunities. Some ten years later, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 overturned the remaining Jim Crow laws (United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary 1981).

All of American history has been similarly shaped by efforts to resolve the contradiction between an ideology that emphasized equality, and the reality of a hierarchy in which some individuals were not counted among those deserving of equality and so not worthy to control their own fates. In the example above, we have detailed the case at some length for African Americans to show how the ideal of equality has been paired with structures and practices that generated inequality. We could tell a somewhat similar story with respect to Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, Filipina/os, American Indians, and other minority groups (Takaki 1993).

Color-blindness: An Inadequate Solution to Inequality

With the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act in 1964 and 1965, respectively, legal barriers to formal racial equality were overturned. The civil rights legislation marked a milestone in the history of American race relations at the same time that it ushered in

a tumultuous era in U.S. society—one that has been instrumental in shaping our current race relations. Once those two bills were signed into law, U.S. citizens of all races across the country could, for the first time, claim equal rights and equal protection before the law. In the wake of these events, many in the United States believed that our country had turned a corner and could finally live up to its founding ideal of individual equality.

There were, however, a few remaining difficulties. Extending formal legal equality to blacks, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, Filipina/os, and American Indians could not, by itself, reduce the massive social and economic inequality that had been created and maintained between these groups and the majority European-origin population over approximately two hundred years. In the mid-twentieth-century United States, people associated with U.S. racial minority groups were mostly poor, undereducated, and underemployed. They held either no or relatively little property; they had long been excluded from networks of power and privilege; and they were often devalued, disrespected, and despised by many of those European Americans who held the keys to societal inclusion. While Irish, Italian, and German Americans had all similarly struggled as immigrants (or as the children of immigrants) to be accepted as full Americans following their arrival in the United States, they had the significant advantage of having European biogeographical ancestry (Ignatiev 1995). While they were certainly not immediately regarded as equal to the descendents of the early British, French, and Dutch settlers, they nevertheless held a higher rank in the racial hierarchy than did those people who were associated with non-European racial and ethnic groups. So, while the extension of formal legal equality to non-European-origin Americans represented a significant step in the path toward racial equality in the United States, there remains a long way to go on the road to real social and economic equality for racial minorities.

In the wake of the civil rights legislation, a debate soon erupted about the best way to resolve the newly reapparent contradiction between the ideal of equality and existing inequality. Throughout the twentieth century, the dominant American narrative regarding the treatment of cultural and racial difference was the metaphor of the “melting pot.” Native-born European Americans and European immigrants alike shared a strong expectation that full and equal participation required immigrants to “melt” into U.S. society by taking on the customs and linguistic traditions of the European American middle and upper classes.

The melting pot story resolved the equality/difference paradox by presuming that only those who successfully melted into the United States mainstream and became indistinguishable from the people in power merited equality. In this view, those who did not conform to white middle-class American values and ways of life were responsible for their unequal plight. It did not consider that many people *could not* conform—either because they were actively excluded on the basis of race or because they lacked the economic or cultural capital to do so.

Most of the activists who were involved in the various civil rights movements of the mid-twentieth century (e.g., Black Power movement, Chicano movement, United Farm Workers, Young Lords, American Indian movement, Asian American movement) were highly critical of the melting pot metaphor. They pointed out that the story behind it had been told with European-origin groups in mind. They argued that the narrative did not work for the groups with which they were associated, either because they had been involuntary immigrants (e.g., blacks) or they were several-generation U.S. citizens (e.g., Mexican Americans and Asian Americans). Most minority activists were not, in other words, immigrants; they were citizens of the United States, even though they had not always been recognized as such. Moreover, people who were perceived to have non-European racial origins and thus were racially nonwhite—that is blacks, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, Filipina/os, and American Indians—did not so easily melt into European American middle-class anonymity. In response to what they saw as the failure of the melting pot metaphor and as a marking and rejection of the unequal treatment to which their ancestors had been subjected for generations, the civil rights activists forwarded what was then considered a new and radical idea. They refused the expectation that to be full participants in the social and political order they needed to assimilate culturally and linguistically to a white middle-class American way of being in the world. Instead, they demanded respect for and recognition of their particular racial and ethnic identities and declared that the new era of race relations meant that nonwhite peoples in the United States would no longer have to occupy the place of second-class citizens (Ture and Hamilton [1967] 1992; Muñoz 1989; Smith and Warrior 1997; Louie and Omatsu 2001). It was at this point that the *I'm ___ and I'm proud* conversation came forcefully into being among U.S. American racial minority groups.

Adherents of the older melting pot narrative responded to minority claims for recognition by arguing that we should be color-blind—that the

best way to foster the development of a newly integrated society would be to ignore racial and ethnic differences. They argued that identity movements such as the Black Power movement, American Indian movement, or the Chicana/o movement were divisive and declared that the strength of the United States comes from the forging of one uniquely American identity out of many different types of people. Once legal barriers to equality had been removed, they contended, the best strategy would be to ignore the differences that had previously served to mark some people as full citizens and others not. Advocates of color-blindness claimed that to pay attention to group-based differences, whether in negative or positive ways, would be to stereotype or pigeonhole people as well as to deny people their uniqueness and curtail their freedom to be individuals. They figured that being “blind” to race was a recommitment to the founding principle of individual equality, as well as a morally good way to be.

The motivation behind color-blindness has been in many cases a worthy one. For many people, color-blindness describes the idea of trying to treat all individuals the same regardless of their racial or ethnic associations. Nevertheless, as a strategy of race relations, color-blindness could not begin to undo the inequalities that had, for so long, been built into the institutions, policies, representations and everyday social interactions of U.S. American life. A serious flaw in the ideology of color-blindness is its assumption that race and ethnicity are merely superficial characteristics of a person and that they should not matter to how individual people are seen or treated. A color-blind stance is reflected in comments like “I treat everyone the same,” or “Race doesn’t matter to me,” or “People are basically all the same.” In conversation, a claim of color-blindness often takes the form of suggesting that while there was some unfairness in the system in the past, legal equality is now a reality, so racial and ethnic differences ought to be ignored. Thus, the ideology of color-blindness ignores interdependence and participates in the classic confusion between the “ought” and the “is.”

The impulse to treat everyone the same is laudable and has the merit of rejecting the faulty assumption that race is a biological thing. Yet, in doing so, it relies too much on the problematic assumption that the individual is the source of all thought, feeling, and action. A color-blind ideology does not consider that people’s thoughts, feelings, and actions—not to mention their opportunities and resources—are often greatly shaped by their racial or ethnic group associations and by others’ views of these associations. Because color-blindness does nothing to counteract the effects of ongoing group-based advantages and disadvantages, it can

(and has) become a way to avoid or stall the racial transformation of U.S. society (Markus, Steele, and Steele 2000). As our further discussion of how race is done in the United States in Section III shows, simply avoiding the topics of race or ethnicity does nothing to counteract the real effects they have on people’s everyday lives.

Why Americans Are So Uncomfortable Talking about Race

At the beginning of this essay, we noted that although race is a pervasive presence in our everyday lives, talking about it makes many of us anxious and uncomfortable. Now that we have reviewed the history of racial formation in the United States and examined the philosophical assumptions underlying our country’s everyday racial realities, we can propose some answers for why Americans are so uncomfortable talking about race.

First, race is disturbing to many of us because we view it as a biological thing; we believe that race is predictive of people’s differing capacities and characters and that a person’s race can be determined according to a scientifically based system of classification. This faulty but very common view of race is what undergirds the belief (or in some cases, the fear) that the disadvantages that come with being nonwhite in U.S. society—whether those disadvantages be physiological, cognitive, or cultural—might be, in fact, insurmountable by individual effort.

Second, race makes us uncomfortable because many assume that the individual is the source of all thought, feeling, and action. Given our strong faith in the power of the individual, the idea that a person might be unavoidably associated with other people who share that individual’s gender, religion, race, or ethnicity is not always a welcome idea. Historically, such associations have been the foundation upon which group-based structures of oppression and inequality have been built. Because we value so highly the ideal of individual equality, we understandably want to reject anything that interferes with the achievement of the individualist ideal.

Both possibilities—that individuals might not be able to surmount the disadvantages of being nonwhite in U.S. society and that they might not be able to free themselves from their group-based associations—can be upsetting. The idea that a person might be inescapably associated with groups of people or histories of oppression with which she does not personally identify seems to undermine one of this country’s most cherished

narratives, the one known as the American Dream. This story says that no matter who people are or where they come from, if they work hard enough, they can achieve whatever they want to in the United States. The legend of the United States as the land of opportunity has been repeated in countless variations in our literature, movies, theater, music, and government documents and proclamations. It is such a powerful narrative that it gives hope to people from all over the world; it has been, and it continues to be, the motivating story for millions of global migrants who set out for our shores or our borders every year.

The American Dream was powerfully invigorated with the election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States. As the son of a Kenyan father and raised by his working-class white grandmother and single white mother in both Indonesia and Hawaii, Obama's meteoric rise to the leadership of the free world could not have been easily foretold. Apart from being a person with visible African ancestry, Obama was a hard-working scholarship student whose birthright did not include access to a ready-made political dynasty and whose childhood and adolescence did not place him in proximity to a ready-made political machine. For all these reasons, the prospect of his election to the presidency seemed, initially, to be unlikely at best and perhaps impossible.

With Obama's electoral victory and his inauguration to the presidency, this country's everyday racial realities appear primed to undergo some sort of change. The fact that he won may indicate either that many U.S. Americans no longer have entrenched racial prejudices or that they now see race and ethnicity as *one* aspect of an individual's identity—one that might be considered but that no longer trumps every other consideration (e.g., wisdom, ability to lead, moral character). The 2008 U.S. presidential election made one thing very clear: the people of the United States desired some sort of change. What is less obvious is the nature of the desired change and to what extent it reflects or prefigures a major shift in U.S. race relations.

Barack Obama's election to the presidency provides the people of the United States with the opportunity to re-commit to our founding ideal of equal opportunity and to change the meanings associated with having non-European ancestry in the United States. We need to be careful, though, to understand the pace as well as the process of real racial transformation; it is unrealistic to imagine that we can change the racial landscape of this country all at once. As tempting as it might be, it would be irresponsible to allow the Barack Obama story to conceal the reality that the activities involved in doing race—noticing that people in

other groups are different from people in one's own group, devaluing the other groups relative to one's own, creating and maintaining institutional structures and practices that advantage one's own group at the expense of the other groups, and then promoting ideas and narratives that justify the resulting inequality in a way that makes it seem natural—were present at the founding of our country and remain with us today. This country has more than two hundred years' worth of inequality-generating and inequality-reinforcing institutions, ideas, and practices that support a European racial hierarchy. Complicating the task, the concept of race no longer belongs solely to the West. The globalization of the world that began in earnest with the making of the modern world system facilitated the movement of ideas and practices along with the movement of material goods and financial capital. The concept of race has traveled well and has taken on geographically and culturally specific manifestations as it has combined with preexisting local traditions of social hierarchy.

Just as the playing field was not leveled with the passage of the civil rights legislation, so it is not leveled with the election of President Obama. The two problematic assumptions—that race is a biological thing, and that the individual is the source of all thought, feeling, and action—remain at the heart of this country's numerous inequality-producing institutions, ideas, and practices. Consequently, to really level the playing field, we need to reshape almost all of our existing institutions. And we need to do so while taking into account that race and ethnicity are not biological facts about people, and that all individuals are always known to themselves and to others through significant social categories including race, ethnicity, gender, or religion. In addition, we need to change the character of everyday social relations, both formal and informal, between people of different ancestry groups before real change can occur. In the words of Justice Harry Blackmun: "In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way. And in order to treat some persons equally, we must treat them differently" (*Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* 1978, 407).

The task facing us now is to fully take account of race. This involves identifying the wide range of inequality-producing institutions and practices that contribute to the way people in this country do race—often in unintended ways. We need to study how race emerges over time and across space in the most minute, and even banal, interactions that people who are phenotypically or culturally different have with each other.

Understanding race as a doing means acknowledging that, yes, we are biological beings, and that biology accounts for some differences in how we look (hair texture, skin color, facial features). But it also means recognizing that biology cannot account for more significant phenotypic differences involving health, temperaments, and capacities. More important to who we become—how we think, feel, and act—are the environments we create and by which we are shaped. In the next section, we sketch out some of the most important new research about race and ethnicity. This research is crucial to identifying the inequality-producing institutions and practices that contribute to the way we all do race.

III

DOING RACE—ALL OF US, EVERY DAY

Most people do not get up in the morning and make a conscious decision to discriminate against someone else on the basis of race. Although some people are intentionally discriminatory, very often we do race without a clear awareness of the negative consequences for ourselves or for others. As illustrated by the racial iceberg in Section II (Figure i.3), there is a lot underneath the surface when it comes to the way race works in our country. At least some of those unseen historical events, political movements, institutions, narratives, and social practices will have to be understood, and many will have to be transformed, before all people's life chances are free from the negative constraints of race.

Race, as defined in Section I, is a complex system of ideas and practices regarding how some visible characteristics of human bodies such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture relate to people's character, intellectual capacity, and patterns of behavior. It is a relational system that comes into being through the interactions between individual people, and through individuals' interactions with institutions that are set up in ways that—purposely or inadvertently—do race. As suggested in Sections I and II, our environments are crucially arranged by institutions—schools, courts, news sources, banks, legislatures, prisons, city councils, hospitals—that have been created over time through the assumptions and actions of others. Such institutions both inherit and produce ideas and practices involving race and thus have a lot to do with keeping racial inequality alive (Eberhardt and Fiske 1998; Sidanius, Levin, and Pratto 1998).

Among the most pervasive ideas that animate our institutions are stereotypes about various racial and ethnic groups. These stereotypes are often so entrenched in everyday life that they form the very lenses through

which we see the world. For example, while most U.S. Americans endorse the ideals of integration and racial equality, well over 50 percent of whites still rate blacks and Latina/os as less intelligent and more prone to violence than whites. Well over two-thirds rated blacks and Latina/os as actually preferring to be supported by welfare (Bobo 2004). A recent study of five- to seven-year-old white children from a diverse community in Texas revealed that these stereotypes are picked up early in life. When asked, "How many white people are mean?" the children responded, "almost none." When asked, "How many black people are mean?" they answered, "some" or "a lot" (Bronson and Merryman 2009).

People who are not subject to such stereotypes are often unaware of how powerful and pervasive they are, while those who are subject to the stereotypes are much more aware of how their lives are affected by them. Part of the experience of racialized minority individuals in the United States is living with the threat that negative stereotypes will be applied to them in any situation (Steele 1992, also this volume). Nevertheless—and however much we might want to—none of us can live outside the ideas, practices, and institutions that make up our society (Hames-García 2004; Fiske et al. 1998). As we go to school, rent an apartment, read the newspaper, use the Internet, pay our bills, and so on, the ideas and practices promoted by these various institutions strongly shape our behavior. People often do race unknowingly and unintentionally just by participating in a world that comes prearranged according to certain racial categories.

The imprint of the ideas and practices promoted by the institutions we live among can be tracked by noting some habits of thought (what social psychologists call "implicit associations") that are common to people who live in the United States. For example, many people in this country associate "American" with "white." Similarly, people with all types of racial and ethnic associations connect "white" with "good," and "black" with "bad" (Nosek et al. 2007; Devos and Banaji 2005). These associations are the basis for thoughts, feelings, and judgments that lead to actions with real consequences for people's lives. This can be the case even when we have no conscious desire or intention to discriminate on the basis of race.

Having a better understanding of how race works helps us to see why doing race in the twenty-first century can be so difficult to combat. To illustrate its pervasiveness, we provide below a variety of examples across many domains of life showing the ways that people—individually and institutionally, intentionally and unintentionally—do race to each other (and sometimes, even to themselves).

Employment

People's jobs or career are fundamental to their well-being. A job or career often determines how much money people make, how their time is spent, what kinds of other people they meet, where they live, whether they have health insurance, the quality of their health care, and where their children go to school. Employment is also fundamental to societal well-being. An effective democracy depends on the inclusion and participation of all types of people from many different groups in a healthy economic system. People who are not part of the economic system are unable to pay taxes or to spend money to stimulate the economy. They lack the resources, and sometimes the motivation, to participate in the democratic process.

Even though people associated with various racial and ethnic groups are no longer legally barred from particular occupations as they were under Jim Crow Laws, many occupations remain largely segregated by race, ethnicity, and gender. One major question facing policy makers concerns the cause of this segregation. Recent studies by economists and sociologists reveal a variety of subtle mechanisms at work. One study sent 5,000 similar résumés to 1,300 actual job postings in Chicago and Boston (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004). Sometimes the résumés carried typically white-sounding names such as Emily Walsh or Greg Baker; sometimes they had more typically black-sounding names like Lakisha Washington and Jamal Jones. The names were drawn from a list indicating the frequency with which various ethnic groups used each name. Each job posting received four résumés, of which two were from highly qualified applicants, one black, one white, and two were from less qualified applicants, one black, one white. The résumés with the white names were 50 percent more likely to receive a callback response than those with black names. This was the case even when the résumés indicated comparable educational and occupational experience.

In a second study, focusing on low-wage workers in New York City, researchers posed as prospective job applicants in interview situations (Pager 2007; Pager and Western 2005). The results were striking. White interviewees received many more callbacks than black and Latina/o interviewees, even though all of them had been trained to present themselves in similar ways with equivalent credentials. Notably, a second phase of this study revealed that white applicants *with a felony conviction* were as likely to be called back as were black and Hispanic applicants *without* a criminal record. Moreover, while white applicants were

sometimes channeled toward jobs that offered supervisory or managerial opportunities, black and Hispanic applicants tended to be offered positions that required more manual labor, less customer contact, and less authority than the job for which they had applied.

Bias in the workplace is not a problem solely for low- or middle-wage workers. Surveys reveal that although blacks have gained access to many professions from which they had been largely excluded—law, academia, medicine, and business—the highest echelons of leadership, as well as full-scale professional respect, remain elusive (Cose 1993). For example, prestigious law firms are increasingly hiring black lawyers, but those whom they hire rarely attain the rank of partner. The reasons this occurs are not clear—sometimes the lawyers feel unsupported or undermined and leave the law firm before coming up for partner; in other cases they are passed over because they are perceived to be less effective at bringing in new clients. President Obama's spectacular piercing of the political glass ceiling is notable, but much has to be done before it can result in the incorporation of blacks and other minority groups into leadership positions across the board.

Housing

Almost half a century after passage of the Civil Rights Act, American cities remain largely segregated along racial lines. Although disagreement exists about the exact causes of racial segregation, scholars and journalists have recently amassed a great deal of evidence to suggest that various people interacting in different ways with the U.S. housing system (e.g., as rental agents, loan officers, or prospective home buyers) may all do race in a manner that maintains the segregation.

For example, a recent study reveals ongoing racial discrimination by landlords and rental agents toward black prospective renters (Fischer and Massey 2004). Building on previous studies suggesting that the degree of racial discrimination varied according to a range of factors including gender, class, and type of accent, researchers wanted to find out if the location of the rental unit (i.e., geographic proximity to a predominantly black neighborhood) and the type of rental agent (i.e., private landlord or professional agent) made a difference to rental housing access for blacks. The researchers conducted a series of phone-based audit studies in Philadelphia in which they had six different callers—one each male and female speaking white middle-class English, black-accented English, or black English vernacular—call about the same

advertised rental unit. They examined what type of caller was more likely to gain access to rental housing. What they found was that *all* the factors (i.e., race, class, gender, location of the rental unit, and type of rental agent) made a difference regarding what type of renter was likely to get a positive response to an inquiry. Apparently, rental agents were making decisions about whether to call back, admit to the availability of the unit, and show the rental unit both on the basis of what the agent assumed about the prospective renter's gender, race, and class status from the sound of the renter's voice, and depending on where the unit was located. The study provides conclusive evidence that blacks—especially those who were perceived by private landlords to be lower class and female—have less access to rental units than whites. It also shows that rental agents are actively involved in doing race, whether or not they *intend* to act in prejudicial ways. Through the decisions they make, they end up determining where different kinds of people will live.

Rental housing is not the only realm in which racial housing discrimination occurs. In 2005, a watchdog report using federal data found that Latina/os who took out home loans in Santa Clara County, California, in the previous year ended up with high interest rates two to three times more often than whites or Asians (Lohse and Palmer 2005). Although Latina/os received only 14 percent of the total loans made in the county that year, they received fully 47 percent of the high-rate subprime loans. Because the type of loan and the rate of interest a homeowner is able to secure can affect the long-term cost of the loan by hundreds of thousands of dollars, the financial stakes of getting a fair loan can be high. Kevin Stein, associate director of the California Reinvestment Coalition, noted in the article: "If someone is paying even 1 percent more than they deserve, that's potentially tens of thousands of dollars of stripped equity that the homeowner no longer has available to finance a child's education, start a business, or prepare for retirement" (Lohse and Palmer 2005). According to the report, the racial disparities remained even for Latina/os with high incomes and solid credit. These same Latina/o borrowers were then disproportionately negatively affected when the nation's housing market began its downslide in 2006, as they found themselves with skyrocketing home payments and declining home values.

Race is not only done *to* homebuyers. In the process of choosing where they want to live, homebuyers can also do race to others. For example, a study designed to measure the effect of race on people's judgment of neighborhood quality found that white people rate neighborhoods with black

or mixed-race residents more negatively than they do neighborhoods that have exclusively white residents (Krysan, Farley, and Couper 2008). Researchers conducted the random sample study by having each respondent privately view a brief video of several different neighborhoods, each of which showed several "residents" (actually actors) doing normal everyday things (getting the mail, talking to a neighbor, walking down the street). The interviewers instructed each respondent to rate the quality of the neighborhoods according to a range of factors including cost of housing, property upkeep, safety, future property value, and quality of schools. What researchers found was that whites consistently rated neighborhoods with black residents more negatively than those with white residents—quite apart from the actual characteristics of the homes located in the neighborhood and the number of amenities the neighborhood contained. The study showed that many whites hold a bias, of which many may be unaware, against neighborhoods with black residents, and so they are likely to make home-buying choices that contribute to ongoing racial segregation. Whether or not buying a home in a primarily white neighborhood might be justified as a wise economic decision because of the greater resale value of the house later on, it is still an example of how people do race in ways that maintain a segregated society.

Schooling

Public schools are the main vehicle for equal opportunity in America. Nearly all students and their parents believe education is linked to achievement and upward mobility in American society. Despite these widely shared beliefs in the transforming effects of education, and the good intentions of many people throughout the educational system, American schools are more racially segregated than ever before. Nationwide, only half of Latina/o, African American, and American Indian students graduate from high school, let alone begin college (Orfield 2004). Segregation in schools is linked, of course, to segregation in housing, but racial disparities in educational attainment can be traced to a variety of practices and strategies through which educators inadvertently do race even if they are committed to equality.

The ideas and practices that systematically divide students based on race and ethnicity are so woven into everyday practices that they are difficult to see. Take, for example, teachers' expectations and assessments. A recent study shows that teachers give higher grades to children of their own race (Ouazad 2008). In particular, white teachers give significantly

lower assessments to black and Latina/o children. While this is unlikely to be a malicious bias, its consequences are enormous given the fact that more than 70 percent of teachers in American classrooms are white, middle class, and female (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education 1999). The link between similarity to oneself and expectations of success serves as a pervasive and subtle mechanism of doing race.

Another example of doing race that does not require explicit awareness can be found in the explanations that are commonly given for student underachievement. Public and private conversations about the performance gap in schools are now part of daily life. When students do poorly in school, the typical question policy makers ask is whether students lack the capacity to do well, or whether they are unwilling to work. Given the pervasive notions of minority group intellectual inferiority that are still very prevalent in America, these seem to many people to be the right questions to ask (Tormala and Deaux 2006; Perry 2003). Yet the most obvious and empirically well-supported explanation for the performance gap is not a “capacity gap” or a “motivational gap,” but rather an “opportunity gap” (Krysan and Lewis 2005). Study after study show that underperforming students are taught by teachers who have not received the highest quality training and who do not have access to the best curricular materials. Furthermore, the schools they attend are underfunded and in poor repair (Darling-Hammond, this volume). Given the demonstrated link between underperformance and lack of opportunity, the policy maker who asks the “capacity” question (Are these students less able, lazy, or uncaring?) without asking the “opportunity” question (Do these students have the resources they need?) is ignoring the root of the problem and doing race. The story about a grandmother from the rural South who is perplexed by the school’s discussion of why students were underperforming helps illustrate this way of doing race. The grandmother noted that in her experience from years of farming, when the corn did not grow, no one asked what was the matter with the corn. Instead, they concerned themselves with the quality of the soil and the amount of rain (Ladson-Billings 1994)—the agricultural ecology.

Differences in the educational ecology—in how school environments are set up and resourced—are not always immediately obvious. For example, the proportion of black, Latina/o, and Native American high school graduates who go on to college is less than the proportion of white students. Why? What is the source of this inequality in educational attainment? Are black, Latina/o, and Native American students less motivated or interested in college? A recent California report reveals

nonobvious differences in opportunity and in the educational environment. Students who take Advanced Placement (AP) or college-prep courses have the opportunity to be intellectually challenged, are better prepared for college-level courses, can earn college credits while in high school, and are looked on more favorably by college admissions officers. The problem is that schools with a higher percentage of students of color offer fewer college preparatory or AP courses than schools with mainly white students (Tomás Rivera Policy Institute 2004). Consequently, students who attend schools that have a majority of students from racial minority groups have less opportunity to take college-prep classes. This suggests a powerful but overlooked answer to why some students may not gain admission to colleges of their choice or may perform less well when they do enroll.

Another institutional mechanism that creates a different educational ecology for some students is the common practice of “tracking,” a practice that creates unequal educational ecologies even in well-resourced schools. Throughout much of the country, students are tracked according to their level of achievement from their kindergarten days; almost everywhere, a clear racial divide is evident. Even in schools that do offer AP courses, students of color often do not have the opportunity to take them. This is because, given the current correlation between race and ethnicity and the likelihood of going on to college, teachers often rely on race and ethnicity to make decisions about course assignments. Students in the high-performing groups—the students called “smart” and “motivated”—are likely to be white or Asian, and/or to have parents who went to college. Students in low-performing groups—the students “who don’t care about school or about their futures”—are more likely to be working-class black, Latina/o, or Native American students. In fact, researchers find that black and Latino students who have similar grades and test scores as white students are less likely to be tracked into the AP courses (Oakes and Guiton 1995). In this way, tracking creates and reinforces the link between minority status and underachievement. It is an effective and highly institutionalized mechanism of doing race.

If there were no barriers to upward mobility linked to race and ethnicity, then students from all races and ethnicities would be represented proportionally in all categories of achievement from lowest to highest. The practice of tracking continues, however, and is commonly justified as necessary for motivating students, even though studies indicate that de-tracking does not harm students who are doing well and helps those who are doing less well (Darling-Hammond 2004; Gorski and

EdChange 1995–2008; Oakes 1990). As noted by one educational researcher, it takes amazing denial not to see that “the skin color and language background of the student is closely correlated with the chances of being among those who do cross the stage [to graduate]” (Olsen 1997, 187). Educators, parents, students, and other community members who are not surprised by this correlation and who do nothing to combat it are doing race—passively, if not actively. The assumption that race is a biological thing within individual students underpins the idea that group differences in capacity or effort or values are the reason for the variable rates of graduation. This idea fuels the practice of tracking, which then fosters the observed differences in the educational performance of various ethnic groups.

Medicine

Yet another domain in which racial disparities are evident is health care. One of the biggest selling points for the project of mapping the human genome has been the argument that better knowledge of the genome would lead to better health care. The media has trumpeted the idea that knowledge of the human genome would lead to “gene therapy” and “personalized medicine.” In fact, one major pharmaceutical company has already begun production of a heart drug they claim is especially effective for African Americans. The promises of gene therapy have yet to be realized, however, and at least some scientists are beginning to doubt that genes have much to tell researchers about diseases at all (Wade 2008). Emphasizing the relationship between genes and disease obscures the way health care outcomes are closely related to available resources (food, water, medicine), properly trained medical personnel, and everyday ideas and practices—in health care facilities as well as in patients’ homes and communities. Indeed, over the past decade, public health researchers have documented a powerful association between good health and social status (Marmot 2004). Because racial minorities in the United States have, on average, lower social status and less wealth, they also have less access to resources such as health care, home ownership, sick leave, vacation, clean air and water, and fresh and abundant food. This translates into greater stress, shorter life spans, and higher rates of disease for racial minorities as compared to whites.

Even when people have access to health care, the race with which they are associated affects the quality of health care they get. In one study, researchers asked emergency room and internal medicine residents

(trainee doctors) at four medical centers in Atlanta and Boston to complete an Internet-based survey (Green et al. 2007). The doctors were asked to evaluate the symptoms of, and recommend treatment for, a hypothetical patient who had come into the emergency room complaining of chest pain. All the patients were identical with respect to age and symptoms, but they were either black males or white males. After deciding whether and how to treat the patient, the doctors responded to a questionnaire, called the Implicit Awareness Test (IAT) designed to measure their unconscious (implicit) racial biases. Although none of the doctors admitted to holding negative attitudes about blacks, their answers revealed that most of them had an unconscious *preference for whites*. Those who showed the unconscious preference for whites were *twice* as likely to recommend life-saving medical treatment such as clot-busting drugs for the white patients as for the black patients. Given the importance of aggressive early treatment for heart attacks, the willingness of the doctors to recommend life-saving treatment for whites twice as often as for blacks is hugely significant. Put plainly, the study suggests that blacks who go to the emergency room with symptoms of a heart attack are twice as likely as whites to die as a result of their doctor’s failure to treat them adequately. This is a perfect example of how even well-meaning people who explicitly reject racist attitudes can still be involved in doing race.

Justice

Large differences among racial and ethnic groups on any important societal outcome raise the possibility that race is being done (Guinier and Torres 2002). Nowhere are racial disparities greater than in the criminal justice system. Because of the kinds of stereotypes and implicit associations most of us hold, people associated with nondominant racial and ethnic groups are much more likely to be under suspicion for breaking the law. As a result, they are more likely to be stopped, interrogated for possible violations, arrested, prosecuted, and given harsh sentences, including the death penalty. In the United States, racial disparities in surveillance and punishment have become particularly evident in recent decades. For example, the number of people in prison has increased fivefold since 1980, and most of those incarcerated are black and Latino men.

Combining data from a variety of sources, Pettit and Western (2004) estimate that among men born between 1965 and 1969, 3 percent of

whites and 20 percent of blacks had spent time in prison by their early thirties. Those without formal education are particularly likely to be incarcerated. Among black men born during this period, 30 percent of those without a college education and almost 60 percent of those who had not finished high school were in prison by 1999. These facts are so stark and the racial disparities so great and so clearly associated with poverty and the lack of education and access to opportunity that come with it that they have drawn the attention of researchers and policy workers in many fields (see Bobo, this volume).

Why are those associated with minority racial groups overrepresented among the prison population? The answer is a consequence of doing race at many levels and across time. It involves a powerful confluence of factors, including persistent poverty and its legacy, a persistent and society-wide anti-black bias, intensified policing and enforcement in minority communities (e.g., the three-strikes law in California), and the fact that there is money to be made from building prisons. Some states such as California now spend more money on prisons than on schools. Between 1985 and 2000, the increase in state spending on corrections was nearly double the increase for higher education (\$20 billion versus \$10.7 billion), and the total increase in spending on higher education by states was 24 percent compared with 166 percent for corrections (Schiraldi and Ziedenberg 2002).

The steep increase in minority involvement with the criminal justice system that characterizes the United States today coincided with the war on drugs that began in the 1970s. At this time, police were trained and authorized to look at all aspects of a target's behavior and to stop those who met the profile of a potential criminal. The goal of the program was to stop drug trafficking and transport, but the immediate consequence was a campaign of racial profiling that had an impact on all racial and ethnic minorities; it was not confined to those with relatively little education. Many observers of this intensification in surveillance and enforcement believe that race was unfairly emphasized in these profiling efforts and that police and security were targeting people based on their belief that certain ethnic groups were more likely to commit certain crimes (Webb 1999).

Traffic stops of minority men became especially common and led to the expressions "Driving while black" or "Driving while brown." One study of this effort in California found that since 1991, 80 to 90 percent of the arrests involved minorities and 66 percent of those stopped were Latina/os. A similar study of a ten-year period showed that 70 percent of

the people pulled over on New Jersey's highways were black or Latina/o drivers (Harris 1999). Black and Latina/o students on college campuses frequently report being the target of such stops on campus roads or in campus bars. Accurate data on the extent of racial profiling is difficult to collect, but firsthand accounts from people who have endured the humiliating ritual of being singled out and searched are abundant. Since the protest over racial profiling began, more than twenty states have made the practice illegal. Notably, racial profiling is not confined to blacks or Latina/os. Since the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington on September 11, 2001, people who look like they are of Middle Eastern descent have also been the target of racial profiling; they are more likely to be stopped and thoroughly searched at airports than are people of European descent.

Sports

Sports was one of the first domains of American life to become racially and ethnically integrated. Fans, players, and scholars generally agree that in most sports there is a lot of respect for athletes' training and talent, and relatively little overt or old-school racism. They also agree that bad calls are part of the game. They sometimes disagree, however, about whether race is a factor in the likelihood that some players are more often the target of bad calls than others. A recent study of the National Basketball Association by business researchers revealed a consistent racial bias in calling fouls (Price and Wolfers 2007). The study analyzed more than 600,000 foul calls made in regular season games for the thirteen seasons between 1991 and 2004. The researchers concluded that a basketball referee is more likely to blow the whistle and call a foul against a player of a different race than one of his own race. White referees called fouls against black players more frequently than they did against white players, and black officials called fouls on white players more frequently than they did against black players—although the disparity was less marked. Upon hearing the report, several black basketball players, including Kobe Bryant and LeBron James, sharply rejected its findings. Lakers star Bryant, for example, retorted that he had gotten "more techs from black than white refs." Disturbed by the report, the NBA carried out its own study of 148,000 calls made during three seasons and also found support for this racial bias in refereeing. The initial report suggests that, as in many other domains of society, the racial preference in foul-calling is a result of unconscious or implicit bias and is not a matter

of the referees disliking certain players or trying to undermine their performance. In the split second the referee has to call a block or a charge, the negative association that is often attached to blacks in American society can influence how white referees see a particular pattern of activity on the court.

Something similar happens on the baseball diamond. Carrying out a study of 2.1 million calls, an economist found that 1 percent of the calls was affected by race (Parsons et al. 2007). He found that umpires are more likely to call strikes when the pitcher is of their own race. Asian pitchers in the major leagues are especially likely to be affected by this bias because there are no Asian umpires in the major leagues—in fact, 71 percent of pitchers and 87 percent of umpires are white. Although the racial bias is relatively small—in the course of a particular game, two calls are likely to be influenced by race—it is consistent. Some suggest this bias would be larger except that eleven of the thirty major league ballparks use a series of cameras and a computer network to review calls, a practice that enhances umpire accuracy.

Media

The examples given above show that real estate agents, bank officers, doctors, referees, and teachers—sometimes unknowingly and without hostile intent—all draw on associations and stereotypes about various racial groups. It seems that no one, no matter the person's education level or goodness of heart, is immune. So where do these stereotypes come from, and how might we track their influence? Clearly, one powerful source of racial stereotypes is the media.

Recent studies suggest that as we go about our daily business—reading the newspaper, shopping online, going to the movies, watching television, riding the bus, amusing ourselves with YouTube, updating our Facebook pages, or scanning the kiosks at work—we are exposed to as many as 3,000 images each day (Kukutani 1997, 32). These images are not a representative set of all that can be found in our various worlds. Instead, they present images and ideas that reflect what viewers are already likely to believe. Advertisers or movie directors eager to convey a particular message or feeling typically draw on the common stock of images and associations with which people are comfortable to quickly and effectively transmit a message. They typically avoid images and ideas that are unfamiliar, that might make a viewer uncomfortable, or that might disrupt a sales pitch.

Take, for example, Hollywood movies. A recent documentary asked why most U.S. Americans held negative and prejudicial attitudes about Arabs even before the tragic events of 9/11 (*Reel Bad Arabs* 2006; Shaheen 2001). A survey of more than 900 films with Arab characters or images, from the earliest silent films to more recent more box office hits, reveals that Hollywood portrays only a very narrow range of ways to be Arab—they can be bandits, submissive women, ruthless sheikhs, or evil, gun-toting terrorists. They are almost universally portrayed as outsiders and as different and threatening. Across all the 900 portrayals of Arab characters, only twelve depictions were positive and fifty were balanced; the rest were negative. Among the most notable for their narrow and negative views of Arabs are the movies *Back to the Future* (1985), *Bonfire of the Vanities* (1990), and *Rules of Engagement* (2000).

Cartoons and films targeted at children are often particularly rife with negative sentiments. For example, in the original version of the Disney film *Aladdin*, an Arab character introduced himself with a catchy tune and with the following lyrics: “I come from a land . . . where they cut off your ears if they don't like your face. It's barbaric, but hey, it's home.” Although protests convinced the filmmakers to modify these particular lyrics, older Disney films with equally negative images of other ethnic and racial groups remain part of the standard “safe” fare in many children's media diet. One of the earliest Disney movies, *Dumbo*, shows a number of black men (whose faces are obscured) working and singing in unison as they set up the circus tents. As they swing their mallets, they sing the following lyrics: “We work all day, we work all night / We never learned to read or write / We work all night, we work all day / Can't wait to spend our pay away.” Other groups fare no better in other classic movies. For example, *Lady and the Tramp* includes Siamese cats that have features and attributes that are often used to stereotype Asians. Aside from being the villains, the cats are depicted as being cunning and as having slanted eyes, buckteeth, and heavy accents. What the impact of Disney's new black princess might be on ideas about race remains to be seen.

The advertising industry is also centrally involved in doing race. Gone are the most overtly stereotypic images: Aunt Jemima of pancake fame is no longer a Mammy figure but instead a modern black woman. For his part, Uncle Ben of rice fame has moved from the kitchen to the boardroom—no longer the cook, he is now portrayed as the CEO of the company. But like movie directors, advertisers still often perpetuate stereotypes in the service of selling their products. Although advertisers

are using more nonwhite models in their ads, people of color are shown in only a limited number of roles—as entertainers and as models—and not as lawyers, doctors, or other business professionals (Wilson, Gutiérrez, and Chao 2003).

If we all lived in racially diverse environments, the images and stereotypes presented by movies, cartoons, and advertisers would not be consequential. But because many of us live in racially and ethnically homogenous contexts where we do not encounter people and behavior that disavow these stereotypes, the media can do race and be a powerful force in perpetuating racial inequality.

The foregoing examples give just a hint of how varied the processes are that are involved in doing race. Of course, the specifics vary widely by culture, context, and historical period. In fact, the social processes involved in arranging the world and living life *as if* people associated with some racial or ethnic groups were inherently more valuable than others appear across history, and not just in the United States but throughout the world. Moreover, as we have seen, these processes sometimes operate quite independently of the term “race” in other parts of the world. These processes are not always easy to see or to analyze, probably because doing so disturbs many of our taken-for-granted assumptions about our worlds and ourselves. Yet thinking about race and ethnicity as doings—as sets of ideas and practices developed and perpetuated by many people over time—is an important step toward more knowledgeable, enlightened, and trusting conversations.

Changing the Conversations

The tendency to create distinctions and organize societies based on assumed commonalities in history, language, region, religion, customs, physical appearance, and ancestry group appears to be a human universal. For this reason, framing new and better conversations about race and ethnicity will be central to any attempt to change their meanings in our society. An important first step is reviewing the eight conversations we identified in Section I in light of what we have learned so far. This will allow us to steer the conversations and the actions they guide in more productive and accurate directions. Informed and useful conversations will have to confront the best ways to recognize, include, and incorporate our differences without using them to do race—that is, using them as a basis for unequally distributing opportunity and life chances.

The *Race is in our DNA* conversation is one of the oldest and, not surprisingly, the most resistant to change. The concept of race has assumed from the beginning that a person’s race can be found in his or her body. The contemporary form of this conversation focuses on the human genome, but it borrows its logic from many old, troublesome, and hard-to-shake discourses and schemas. For example, in Spain the label *sangre pura* (“pure blood”) was used to distinguish those born into the Catholic religion from the Jewish and Muslim *conversos*, and in Spanish American countries like Mexico to distinguish the *criollo* (a person born in Spanish America of Spanish parents) from the *mestizo* (a person born in Spanish America who has one Indian parent and one Spanish parent). One of the reasons for the lasting appeal of the idea of race as biological is that it promises clear and simple answers to deep-seated questions we all have about who are we and where our place in the world might be. The possibility that we might be able to look inside our bodies (to our DNA, in the current version) to discover precisely who we *really* are is very attractive to many people.

It is not surprising, then, that trying to discover one’s ancestral histories—finding one’s “roots in a test tube”—is an increasingly popular activity (Gates 2007). And this may be an especially popular activity for people whose histories and identities have been interrupted and denied. Yet the results of DNA tests need to be interpreted carefully. People with a wide variety of racial and ethnic associations can be shown through current DNA testing to have ancestors who came from the continent of Africa, for example. Yet not all of them would identify, nor would others identify them, as black or African American. Speaking practically, finding out the geographic origins of some of your direct forebears may have little effect on where you might be placed in terms of today’s racial categories—white, African American, Native American, Asian American, or Latina/o. DNA testing, even as it becomes more comprehensive and complex, cannot tell us “who one really is.” This is because while humans are biological beings, *being a person* is simultaneously a human social achievement (Bruner 1990). A person’s identity is more than his or her geographical origin; it is an ongoing synthesis of personal, political, historical, and social factors.

The version of the *Race is in our DNA* conversation that says, “It’s their culture, it can’t be helped,” is also deeply flawed. First, culture is not something located *inside* people as one of their internal attributes. Instead culture is located *outside* the person in the ideas, practices, and institutions that people use to make sense of their lives and to guide their

actions (Adams and Markus 2004). Culture conveys what is and is not good, valuable, and worth doing. Second, culture is dynamic. Cultural ideas and practices are attached to all the important social distinctions in our lives—race and ethnicity, but also social class, gender, religion, birth cohort, region of the country, and so on. These cultural ideas and practices shape behavior, but they are constantly changing—and as they do, so will people and their actions. Ideas and practices about race (who is valued and who is not) are important elements of culture, and changing them will change behavior.

In the end, the problem with the *Race is in our DNA* conversation, in both its biological and cultural versions, is that it is wrong. Race is not in our DNA; in fact, it is not a thing located inside people at all. Rather, race is a doing; it is a dynamic system of historically derived ideas and practices involving the whole of society and every individual in it. We do race every day in every domain of our lives, sometimes knowingly and intentionally, and sometimes not. A large body of multidisciplinary research on race and ethnicity (much of which is either discussed or referenced in this essay and in this volume) provides compelling evidence that race and ethnicity are central to how people in the United States and throughout the world think and behave. And although the election of an American president who is black is a powerful event that has begun to change some understandings and practices of race in the twenty-first century, it will not by itself dismantle the historically rooted and pervasive system of interactions and institutions that have produced and still maintain racial inequalities.

For this reason, however optimistic and well-meaning the *We're beyond race* conversation may be, it is also wrong. It is wrong not because we cannot approach the post-race ideal, but because we are not there yet. At best, this conversation reflects a lack of experience and exposure; at worst, it shows an effort—most often by those whose race accords them the advantaged position in the racial hierarchy—to deny racial disparities (Crenshaw et al. 1996). Fueled by a very American desire for change and self-improvement, and by re-committing to the ideal of individual equality, this conversation could be made more productive. We can do this by changing it from a declarative into a question: “What remains to be done to move beyond race?”

Another unproductive and inaccurate, but common, conversation is the one that says *That's just identity politics*. This is the conversation that allows students to sidestep courses on race and ethnicity and encourages employees to use their time more effectively by avoiding

seminars on diversity and inclusion. Because virtually all of our societal institutions are structured by the ideas and practices of race, we must remember that none of us can escape its reach. Anyone who goes to school, gets a loan, applies for a job, watches television news, engages in sports, or visits the doctor (just to name a few mundane activities) is participating actively in a society that has been organized according to race. It is inescapable, then, that we will be affected either positively or negatively by the meanings and representations associated with our own and others' racial groups. People associated with a stigmatized racial group, not surprisingly, are likely to be negatively affected by those meanings. They may have a hard time getting into a college preparatory class in high school or finding a good job—even if they have good grades and a promising résumé—because of the stereotypes about intelligence and work ethic that are associated with their group (Steele 2010).

People associated with the dominant racial group, on the other hand, are likely to be positively affected or privileged by the meanings and representations associated with their group (Johnson 2005). Middle-class whites, at least, are more likely to be tracked into college preparatory classes, hired for highly sought-after positions in favor of other equally or more-qualified applicants, given more aggressive treatment for common medical conditions, passed over during racial profiling for criminal or terrorist activity, and untroubled by the ever-present prospect of being seen through the lens of a stereotype. Anyone who says that race is not a factor in his or her life is either dishonest or clueless. Like many of the conversations, this one talks about race without acknowledging that in a society and in a world organized by race, everyone is necessarily associated with a racial group. Whether or not they claim the race as relevant to them, many others, particularly those who do not share it, will perceive them as having a race and will respond to them accordingly. Moreover, this conversation does not take account of the many research findings that clearly reveal that those with the most power and authority in the racial hierarchy with are the ones mostly likely to claim they are unaffected by race (Plaut 2002).

Several of the other conversations are not wholly wrong as much as they are incomplete. *The Racial diversity is killing us* conversation is a case in point. Rather than being wholly wrong, it is credible in at least one important way. Because the doing of race over centuries has created great enmity between people associated with different ethnic groups, the consequences of interethnic conflict are often deadly. The Armenian genocide in Turkey, the Jewish Holocaust in Germany, and the ongoing

warfare against tribal peoples by the Janjaweed in Darfur are all painful examples discussed in essays in this volume that underscore how inter-ethnic conflict can indeed kill individuals and societies (Naimark, this volume; Rodrigue, this volume). The problem with the *Racial diversity is killing us* conversation is that it locates both the blame and the solution in the wrong place. It sees the problem in the difference itself rather than in why and how we create, maintain, and respond to socially created differences. In other words, this conversation conceives of race as a thing—a thing that resides inside “other” people and makes them evil, unfit, or problematic. The logical end point of this conversation is to get rid of the people whose values, beliefs, and practices are different from one’s own through assimilation, exclusion, or genocide.

If the *Racial diversity is killing us* conversation were to change in a direction that understood race as a systematic social process, it might serve as the beginning of a discussion about how to meaningfully take account of difference—especially the way difference is used to devalue and construct others as inferior or less than human. So, yes, racial diversity *is* killing us and it will continue to do so until we (1) stop doing race and (2) come to terms with the often difficult notion that within the one world, there are multiple viable understandings of what is good, true, beautiful, and efficient (Moya 2002; Shweder 2003). Our global society is not “just a small world after all.” It is true that we all have hopes and fears, but the hopes and fears one person has are often quite different from, or even at odds with, those that another person has. We live in a vast, unruly, and complicated matrix of a world, replete with conflict and disagreement.

The *Everyone’s a little bit racist* conversation is related to the *Racial diversity is killing us* conversation, although it incorporates the important realization that doing race is a common process and that no one is exempt. We are born into a racist world, so the conversation goes, and are greatly influenced by the images, values, and narratives in our environments, the majority of which are racially biased to the core. Beyond this understanding, however, the conversation does not take the discussion very far and in fact allows people to let themselves off the hook. Acknowledging the fact that *Everyone’s a little bit racist* is a revelation appropriate to the beginning of a conversation focused on how to raise awareness of individual and societal biases and how to transform the practices that perpetuate racial inequality. This conversation might include asking *why* we are a little bit racist, what the effect of that racism

might be, and what we might be able to do about it. The song discussed in Section I that gives this conversation its name suggests that people just “relax” and not get upset about how others view difference. Whether people can relax, however, depends on what is at stake and what consequences follow from the observation of racial and ethnic differences. Unless this conversation is expanded beyond its first observation, it is a cop-out that ignores how social, economic, and political power, along with the privilege and peace of mind such power confers, work to advantage some people unfairly at the expense of others.

Another partially correct conversation that might be productively expanded is *It’s a black thing—you wouldn’t understand*. People of color do have different experiences—experiences that give them a different perspective on the world. One of these experiences, for example, includes spending a lot of time and effort explaining to people associated with the dominant group why race matters. It is often really difficult for people who do not share one’s racialized minority identity to understand this (Moya and Hames-García 2000). But it is probably defensiveness or hubris (not to mention an interethnic conversation killer) to say that someone who is not black can never understand. It may not be easy, and it may not be total, but humans *are* able to communicate across difference. It is, moreover, our only hope. Instead of turning off potential allies, we might try to make the point that simply listening to music, wearing clothes, and reading books by writers with an ethnicity other than one’s own does not necessarily lead to understanding. We might also try to convey the truth that understanding others takes a lot of interaction, study, empathy, and a well-developed capacity to listen, appreciate, and accept others unlike oneself.

The *I’m _____ and I’m proud* conversation can be similarly positive or negative depending on who is participating in it and what they mean to imply by it. If the participants in this conversation are countering centuries of stigmatization, marginalization, and downward constitution by the larger society by revealing why the ideas and practices associated with their particular ethnic group are valuable, then this conversation can foster group solidarity and pride. To the extent that this conversation appreciates difference without doing race—without denigrating or isolating others—it can be a useful opening out to other people.

Finally, the *Variety is the spice of life* conversation is also partially right and has considerable positive potential. However, in its present form, it resembles the *Everyone’s a little bit racist* conversation by ignoring the

role of power in structuring how different groups of people interact with each other. Just as the word “spice” conveys a sense of something that is added to or overlaid on the basic ingredients, this conversation often skirts the fact that the differences associated with our various ethnic and racial identities can be quite substantial. They are usually much more than just spice to the main dish or a minor variation in flavor or style; instead, they are consequential for the kinds of lives that people are able to lead. Beyond differences in regions of origin, languages, and food, our various ethnic and racial associations can indicate very different histories and very different ideas of the right way to be.

Take, for example, the very basic question “Who am I?” Recall from Section II that in mainstream America, the most popular cultural model for a self says that people should be *independent*—that is, unique, separate from others, and *in control* of their environments. In other contexts, by contrast, a popular model for the self among people with East Asian, South Asian, or Latino heritage says that people should be *interdependent*—that is, similar to others, connected to others, and adjusting to others (Markus 2008). Yet American classrooms are set up for people with an independent model of the self. Being a good student according to this model means asserting oneself, questioning authority, thinking for oneself, and communicating one’s own attitudes and beliefs. Being a good student from an interdependent perspective means respecting one’s place in the hierarchy and honoring the teacher, who likely knows more than the students. Reflecting an interdependent model of self, students often will not answer a question with information that they assume the professor must already know or will wait for a more senior student to ask an important question (Kim 2002; Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, and Turnbull 1999). A teacher with an independent mindset who is unaware that there are different models for how to be a good student is likely to think less well of those students who are not raising their hands and making their own ideas known. Moreover, even a teacher who is aware of these differences cannot know which model a student is likely to hold without getting to know their students and their individual histories.

Clearly, there is more than one good way to be a student or employee or person. When only one way of being a good student, employee, or person is valued and accommodated within a given society, though, people who have other ways of being can end up at a substantial disadvantage. They might be unfairly judged as being unintelligent, unmotivated, undeserving, and without merit. Creating a diverse democratic society that recognizes and legitimizes different ways of being resulting from

different life opportunities and experiences will require imagination, and flexibility, as well as changes in policies, practices, and institutions.

SIX SUGGESTIONS FOR DOING DIFFERENCE DIFFERENTLY

The disparities among racial groups that can be found in every domain of life are a sign that, as a society, we have not yet lived up to our country’s founders’ vision of a free society that included the ideal of human equality. As discussed above, however, this vision was severely limited by their ideas and practices regarding race. As twenty-first-century U.S. Americans, we must now accept responsibility for the future of our country. Can we build on the best part of the founders’ vision to create a better society—one that rejects their mistaken assumptions about the nature of the individual and the individual’s relationship to race? Answering this question will involve serious thinking about the kind of society we want. Building a freer and more equal society will not be easy. Change will not happen by appealing to ideals alone; it will require the effortful participation of all people to create and maintain it.

By recognizing that race and ethnicity are human-made and reinforced processes, we are better situated to figure out what actions we can take both individually and institutionally to *undo* the most pernicious aspects of making sense of human difference. Moreover, we can begin to create practices and institutions that take advantage of the differences in perspective and understanding that our various racial and ethnic associations make possible. In Table i.4 we offer a few brief suggestions that may be useful for changing our behavior regarding race. What follows is an elaboration of each suggestion.

1. *Recognize that people are not just autonomous individuals; rather, their thoughts, feelings, language, and actions are always made up of (and also make up) the thoughts, feelings, language, and actions of others.* The idea of the self-determining individual is a powerful one that emerged in the West over the centuries and now structures everyday life. In the United States, we grow up wanting to be unique, self-sufficient, and responsible for ourselves. We work hard to become independent of other people’s influence and control. This view of the individual as autonomous and self-determining, however, is an incomplete way of describing human behavior. Moreover, it is increasingly at odds with the scientific understanding of how people and societies function. People *are* individuals; but they are *not only* individuals. As shown in Figure i.2, people live in a matrix of

TABLE 1.4 | SIX SUGGESTIONS FOR DOING DIFFERENCE DIFFERENTLY

1. Recognize that people are not autonomous individuals; rather, their thoughts, feelings, language, and actions are always made up of (and also make up) the thoughts, feelings, language, and actions of others.
2. Study history to understand the emergence and development, as well as the contemporary significance, of race and racism.
3. Learn the science to understand how the sociohistorical concept of race and the biogeographical concept of ancestry groups differ from each other.
4. Be aware that in a world organized according to race and ethnicity, the races or ethnicities with which people are associated will always matter for their life experiences and perspectives.
5. Change the usual way of explaining racial and ethnic inequalities by recognizing the role that power and the unequal distribution of resources have played in their creation and maintenance.
6. Help reform the ideas and practices—both as they are part of individuals, and as they have become institutionalized in the structures of society—that lead to unequal outcomes associated with race.

relationships with others; they make their lives as members of families, neighborhoods, schools, teams, clubs, workplaces, and places of worship. They experience the world through the images, ideas, and words of other people.

This is why understanding race and ethnicity requires us to acknowledge that being a person is a relational as well as an individual project. Although we have a lot of control over our actions, thoughts, and feelings, we are not the sole authors of our existence. Just as we are constrained by and interdependent with our physical worlds, so are we constrained by and interdependent with our social worlds. Race and ethnicity are powerful examples of this fundamental interdependence. They are sets of human-made ideas and practices for grouping and ranking people that are created and held together by people and systems in interaction. Recognizing that race and ethnicity are not fixed attributes of people but instead emerge through social relations shifts our understanding of these two complex social processes. We come to understand that rather than trying to rid ourselves of race, as if it were an essential aspect of our beings, we must change the way we all collectively do race.

2. *Study history to understand the emergence and development, as well as the contemporary significance, of race and ethnicity.* As we have shown in this essay, the ideas and practices of race and ethnicity have powerfully shaped U.S. society and its people. U.S. history and society have, in turn, shaped our understanding of race and ethnicity. As a consequence, understanding history requires understanding race and ethnicity, and understanding race and ethnicity requires understanding history. (Adams et al. 2008c). Consider, for example, how race has typically affected (and continues to affect) a person's economic position and sense of well-being. Anybody who does not own a home, some land, or a business will have a very hard time saving enough extra money to do more than just pay the bills. For the most part, simple wage earners do not have very much (if any) money to leave to their children. They will not, in other words, accumulate the kind of wealth that their children could build on to advance in the world. Consider that for much of our country's history, most people with non-European ancestry were able to approach the market only as slaves (blacks), as wards of the state (some indigenous peoples), or as very low-wage laborers (Latina/os, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and blacks after the abolition of slavery). In some cases, they were denied access to property ownership by law or custom; in other cases, they lacked the personal relationships or social status necessary to raise the money (either from a family member or a bank) to go to school or start a business. As a result, a large and persistent wealth gap has grown up between whites and nonwhites in the United States (Oliver and Shapiro 1997; Darrity 2005). These circumstances have conspired to create a link between monetary success and people with European ancestry. This link is strengthened by the enduring remnants of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century systems of racial classification and ranking, and although it is thoroughly man-made, it seems natural in the minds of many Americans.

The fact that Oprah Winfrey is now one of the richest women in the world is a clear and welcome sign that some people with non-European ancestry can fully participate in the American economic system. The success of people like Oprah Winfrey and Barack Obama will be important for helping to undo the link in the minds of many Americans between European ancestry and success. It will, however, take more than a few spectacular exceptions to the general rule to reverse the lasting effects of centuries of ideas and practices that systematically produced economic inequality. This is why understanding any contemporary racial disparity—as with the example of the wealth gap—will always require a historical

understanding of how and why social systems and practices that advantage some groups over others have been created and maintained.

3. *Learn the science to understand how the sociohistorical concept of race and the biogeographical concept of ancestry groups differ from each other.* One of the most powerful, persistent, and mistaken ideas about humankind is the idea that race is a biological thing. As we have emphasized repeatedly throughout this essay, the sociohistorical concept of race is not a thing at all. Rather, it is a multifaceted and relational process that has had important effects on our experiences and on how the social world is organized. This system, what we call doing race, refers to a set of ideas and practices that involve several, often simultaneous, actions: (1) noticing particular physical characteristics like skin color, hair color, or eye shape; (2) assuming that those characteristics tell us something general and important such as how intelligent, hard-working, moral, or conscientious a person is or has the capacity to be; (3) participating in the creation and maintenance of social and economic structures that preserve a hierarchy in which people associated with one race are assumed to be superior to people who are associated with another; and (4) justifying or rationalizing the inequalities that result. By contrast, the biogeographical concept of *ancestry groups* refers to identifiable, but nondiscrete and overlapping, biologically and geographically based clusters of people.

There is a clear and practical distinction between race and ancestry group that affects how each of the terms can be legitimately used. When historians and other social scientists refer to a “black” race, they are referring to a dynamic set of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices involving people with visible African ancestry. Population geneticists, by contrast, would not be able to find a corresponding “black” ancestry group. In fact, most people who identify themselves (or who would be identified by others) as black or African American actually belong to multiple ancestry groups. This is a result both of the rape and sexual coercion of black women by white men during slavery and Reconstruction, as well as of the (increasingly common) consensual relationships between men and women associated with different races throughout the course of U.S. history. Most people in the United States belong to many different biogeographical ancestry groups. In whatever way the mixing occurred, our forebears usually come from many different geographic locales.

Understanding the difference between race and ancestry groups makes it easier to use each concept in its proper context. It makes sense to talk

about race when talking about the way certain groups have been favored or disadvantaged by societal structures or about the lingering effects of disparate structures of opportunity on the current organization of U.S. society. By contrast, it makes sense to use the concept of biogeographical ancestry groups when talking about the genetic transmission of diseases. Race is not a useful proxy for biogeographical ancestry groups in this case and could actually result in the unnecessary or inadequate medical treatment of an individual. Understanding the difference between these two concepts can help us to use each in its proper context; it is also fundamental to our efforts to stop doing race.

4. *Be aware that in a world organized according to race and ethnicity, the races or ethnicities with which people are associated will always matter for their life experiences and perspectives.* Although race and ethnicity do not determine experience, they shape it in multiple ways. Those at the top of the racial hierarchy are likely to have more access to opportunities for wealth, status, and respect than those at the bottom. As a result, people associated with different races are likely to have divergent perspectives on a wide variety of issues. Working successfully across racial or ethnic groups requires recognizing these differences as significant and worth attending to. Remembering that there is no uniquely “natural” or “right” way of being in the world—that *all* people are products, as well as producers, of their environments—might help us to consider the validity of someone else’s perspectives even in those cases where they contradict our own. Taking difference seriously requires us to consider the possibility that people associated with other races and ethnicities may have a different, and possibly better, understanding of a given event or situation (Mohanty 1997; Moya 2002; Moya and Hames-García 2000).

Race matters for how one is treated by others. Because individuals are always part of numerous relationships and institutions, they can influence, but never create by themselves, the environments they live in. Even if a person chooses to ignore the concept of race, the very fact of being seen by others as associated with a particular racial group will matter—sometimes very much. As an extreme example, consider the situation of Jews living in early twentieth-century Germany. Some German Jews of the time felt little experiential connection to their ethnic associations. Many were nonobservant, secular individuals whose primary identification was as German citizens. However, because Hitler and his Nazi party insisted on viewing these people as racially Jewish, they were disenfranchised, stripped of their property, and eventually subjected

to genocide. These individuals' apparent disregard of their association with Jewishness mattered less to their lives, in this case, than the larger German society's belief in their racial otherness.

Finally, race matters for how one acts in the world. As demonstrated by the study of emergency room doctors described earlier, the racial biases of white doctors play a central role in the health care that they give to their white, as opposed to their black, patients. In that study, the racially disparate health outcomes that put whites at an advantage had nothing to do with blacks' genetic predisposition to heart disease but everything to do with the doctors' ideas and practices involving race. The doctors were *unaware* of their preference for whites—they thought they were treating all patients equally. The doctors in the study are not unusual. Like everyone else, they live in a society organized by race—one in which whiteness is consistently associated with privilege and represented by positive images while blackness is associated with disadvantage and represented by negative images. This has predictable and consistent consequences: white is seen as good and virtuous while black is seen as less good and less virtuous. These racial associations shape behavior regardless of what someone might intend. Race is a pernicious aspect of our contemporary society, especially when it is dismissed too quickly as a thing of the past. Just because our environments shape us, however, does not mean that we have no power over what values we finally hold or practices we engage in. According to the psychologist who helped design the test used to discover the doctors' unconscious biases, the “great advantage of being human, of having the privilege of awareness, of being able to recognize the stuff that is hidden, is that we can beat the bias” (Smith 2007). So, while an awareness of our unconscious biases cannot solve all the problems related to racially disparate outcomes, it can help us to rethink our opinions in a way that might lead us to make more informed judgments and act in less prejudicial ways.

5. *Change the usual way of explaining racial and ethnic inequalities by recognizing the role that power and the unequal distribution of resources have played in their creation and maintenance.* To the extent that we want a fair and democratic society that does not distribute opportunity according to race and ethnicity, we need to understand how our society became what it is and what keeps it that way. Such an understanding requires noting racial and ethnic disparities wherever they occur and critically examining the answers justifying them. When, for example, we see white students doing well while Latina/o or Filipina/o students are not, we should ask why. The usual answer is that those who are doing well

have more ability, intelligence, motivation, and merit than those who are doing poorly. This familiar way of explaining disparate outcomes among racial and ethnic groups thus locates the problem *inside* the students. Yet because individual behavior is always interdependent with others' behavior and with their situations, locating the problem inside the student will provide at best an incomplete answer and many times a flawed one. Assuming that the problem lies inside the student hides the fact that race is not a thing but a dynamic set of ideas and practices. What might appear as a single situation for everyone (i.e., a classroom) can in fact be very different depending on a student's race. For example, teachers have different expectations, give different levels of encouragement, and reward different students differently—often without awareness of their biases. In other words, white students typically have the advantage of being expected to do well. Unlike black, Latina/o, or Native American students, they do not have to deal with a whole set of cues, associations, and daily reminders that people in their racial group are rarely academically successful (Steele 2010).

Another explanation that needs to be examined is the one that says minority students do not perform well in school because of negative peer pressure. According to this explanation, doing well in school is associated with being white. To avoid “acting white,” so the story goes, minority students underperform in school. This explanation locates the source of the problem inside the underachieving racial group and is at best only part of the story. Careful analyses of school settings reveal another possibility—many principals, teachers, and parents have never associated being black or Latina/o or American Indian with being a good student (Carter 2005). This negative association held by the adults in power sets up a cascade of subtle but powerful effects. For example, because they do not expect racial minority students to do well, they do not count them among the good or successful students even when the students do perform well. Consequently, they do not offer to minority students the same opportunities they offer to the majority students and are not surprised or perturbed when minority students underperform. Because the outcomes match their expectations, some educators do not feel responsible for the result and fail to take any action that might change the situation.

Some situations and social systems offer people many more resources, opportunities, and supportive relationships than do others. People's environments shape what they can do as well as what they and others believe is important and possible to do. The representations, social practices, and institutional policies that make up our social worlds are not in addition

to, or separate from, an individual's ability, effort, motivation, or interest. Instead, they constitute these qualities. They create, stimulate, scaffold, and foster an individual's ability, effort, motivation, and interest.

Ending the way we do race will require a move away from individual, simple, and scientifically inaccurate explanations of behavior (e.g., she did well because she is smart) and toward more informed, scientifically accurate, and comprehensive understandings and explanations of socially motivated behavior (e.g., she did well because she was expected to do so by scores of family members, neighbors, and friends, and because she attended well-funded, well-resourced schools with well-prepared teachers who understood ability not as fixed but as growing and changing, who countered negative and marginalizing representations while creating positive selves, and who helped her develop an identity as a successful student).

6. *Help reform the ideas and practices—both as they are part of individuals, and as they have become institutionalized in the structures of society—that lead to unequal outcomes correlated with race and ethnicity.* Changing the usual explanations for racial and ethnic disparities is an important step toward doing difference differently. Completing the journey requires that we also change the ideas and practices that promote and maintain these disparities. As we have noted throughout this essay, there are many obvious candidates for reform, and one does not have to travel far to find them. Consider, for example, the images in the local school or in most workplaces—on bulletin boards, kiosks, Web sites, and official materials. If the racial identities of the people in power—the teachers and the supervisors—are not diverse, then not all students and employees will have an equal opportunity to see people who are associated with their ethnic or racial groups in positions of power and influence. This will affect their opportunities to find role models and to imagine a wide range of possibilities for themselves (see Steele, this volume; Fryberg and Watts, this volume). Another way that people typically move into positions of power and influence is by participating in a range of activities, both official and unofficial, where they make the personal connections that will create later opportunities for success and advancement. Noticing and working to change the structure of schools and workplaces so that all students and workers can participate equally in those kinds of activities can be a significant action.

Other candidates for reform are less obvious because they masquerade as neutral or unbiased instruments for sorting people into apparently non-racial achievement or ability groups. Consider, for example,

the SAT, the test widely used to select and sort students into colleges and universities in the United States. Research shows that the test is very modestly related to how students will do in their freshman year of college and hardly related at all to how students will do by the time they are seniors (Zwick and Sklar 2005). The test is, however, strongly related to a student's parental socioeconomic status. In what is dubbed the "Volvo effect," some researchers argue that the best predictor of students' scores on the SAT is the car their parents' drive. If it is an expensive new Volvo, for example, the students are likely to do well on the test; if it is an old Ford, the students are likely to do less well (Croizet 2008). Of course, it is not the car itself that matters. Rather, the Volvo effect captures the fact that students in richer communities have access to the best schools and the most prepared teachers, as well as to an array of other educational opportunities and resources that are common in these communities. Because of the correlation between income and race and ethnicity in the United States, reliance on the SAT to select students for college admissions systematically fosters and maintains racial and ethnic inequality. Doing difference differently will require asking why we are using this test to distribute educational opportunity. And indeed, some colleges and universities are now asking themselves this very question.

Our point here is not that we have to stop making decisions about whom to select for different positions or opportunities. Rather, we need to find selection practices that are relatively more fair and do not systematically advantage people from some ethnic and racial groups over others. Doing difference differently will require asking who designed the criteria, what racially biased assumptions about intelligence and ability might be built into them, and whether different criteria might produce a less racially biased result. Consider that management positions in the American corporate sector are highly correlated with race and ethnicity; even though the number of Asian American employees has been growing steadily, there are still relatively few Asian American managers in the corporate sector. The criteria for becoming a manager in American organizations include being extroverted, highly verbal, and able to present oneself and one's ideas positively and enthusiastically. Yet studies of Asian Americans reveal that being able to positively promote oneself and one's ideas is not the most important signature of talent (Kim 2002; Xin 2004; Tsai 2007). Instead, calmness, balance, and an ability to focus on a task are more highly valued ways of being. The selection criteria, then, are not neutral, and they do not provide for equal opportunity. Rather, the criteria are committed to a particular set of ideas about what

is a good or desirable way to be that systematically advantages some ethnic and racial groups over others.

Finally, one of the most important ways we can transform the system is by striving to change our behaviors that support the racial hierarchy. Ending the doing of race by doing difference differently will require recognizing that our social worlds are human constructions, and they contain and foster particular assumptions about different kinds of people. Doing difference differently requires each of us to recognize and remedy our personal contributions to maintaining an unjust racial hierarchy. They have been and could be otherwise. We can begin building a more equal world by recognizing the ways in which we each may have done race in the past and may be doing it currently. This is not an exercise in inducing guilt; instead, it is the beginning of thinking differently about race. We might want to ask ourselves these questions: In what ways have I failed to question or just accepted—in school, in my workplace, on the basketball court—the superiority of people in one racial group over another? How have I explained this difference? In what ways are the organizations or institutions I participate in set up to create advantages for people in some groups relative to others? What role have I played in maintaining those unequal situations? What can I do to change them?

We return to our opening claim: we do race, all of us, every day. The challenge we face now is to learn how to stop doing race.

Our goal has been to show that race is a system of ideas and practices involving the whole of society and everyone in it. Race is not a quality of people—it does not inhere in individuals or in groups. Rather, it is a product of the interactions all of us have with the people and institutions that make up the worlds in which we live. Race, then, is a system of marking and dealing with ethnically associated human differences; it identifies various racial groups (e.g., whites, blacks, Latina/os), ranks them by according more value and worth to some and less to others and finally, justifies and maintains the resulting inequalities. As with most highly significant activities, doing race takes a village—in fact, a world of villages. This is why we cannot ignore race any more than we can do (or undo) race as individuals.

The racial system in the United States, for example, has developed over hundreds of years and has explained and organized our social world for so long that we often take it for granted; we often see race as part of the natural world, as something that just *is*. Marking differences arising from history, language, region, religion, customs, physical appearance, or

ancestry group will likely always be part of our world. Certainly ethnicity will always be with us. The point is that marking difference need not lead to creating and maintaining some groups as less equal than others. Our claim that as a society we can and must live without doing race is not to deny or underestimate the huge challenge of engaging an already vast and growing array of significant ethnic differences. It is to say that we can find a more productive way of approaching those differences, one that does not involve creating racial groups, ranking them, and justifying the resulting racial inequalities. We humans created and maintain the racial system; working together, we have the power to dismantle and undo it. We can, as the saying goes, be the change we would like to see in the world.

We can reshape the conversations through which we make sense of events highlighting race and ethnicity. We can also reform the ideas and practices—both as they are part of individuals and as they have become institutionalized in the structures of society—that lead to racial disparities. Finally, we can re-commit to our nation's founding ideal—the equality of individuals—even as we appreciate the fact that ensuring equality of opportunity for individuals (even independent, self-sufficient individuals) is necessarily a group project. We are, after all, in it together.

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PART ONE

Inventing Race and Ethnicity