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by Philip Q. Yang
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CHAPTER 3

THEORIES OF ETHNICITY

What is the nature of ethnicity? What forces create and sustain ethnicity? These are the basic questions that theories of ethnicity must answer. This chapter organizes the existing theoretical perspectives on the nature and basis of ethnicity into three schools of thought: the primordialist school, the constructionist school, and the instrumentalist school. It introduces and analyzes the basic ideas and specific variants of each school. Furthermore, the chapter presents a synthetic approach that attempts to integrate the competing theories of ethnicity.

CONCEPT OF ETHNICITY

Before we discuss the theories of ethnicity, it is essential to clarify the meaning of "ethnicity." At first glance, ethnicity is seemingly a straightforward concept, but in fact it is subject to different interpretations. Some understand it as ancestry, and others perceive it as physical attributes. The following familiar situation should help clarify the meaning of this concept.

You have been filling out forms all your life. They are required every time you apply for schools, jobs, scholarships, grants, and a myriad of other occasions. These forms often ask the question: "What is your ethnicity?" You are given categories to check, either broad categories such as

white, black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American, or specific categories such as Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and so on.

What does the question *literally* mean in this context? The question can be rephrased as follows: What is your ethnic group membership? Which ethnic group are you affiliated with? Which ethnic group do you identify yourself with? If you agree with the interpretation of this question, then *ethnicity* may be defined as an affiliation or identification with an ethnic group. Other synonyms of ethnicity include *ethnic group membership*, *ethnic affiliation*, and *ethnic identity*. On the one hand, ethnicity is subjective since it is the product of the human mind and human sentiments. It is a matter of identification or a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group (Yetman 1991, 2). On the other hand, ethnicity is objective because it must be based on some objective characteristics and is constructed by social forces and power relations. It is to a large extent independent of individuals' desires. On balance, ethnicity is the outcome of subjective perceptions based on some objective characteristics such as physical attributes, presumed ancestry, culture, or national origin. As mentioned in chapter 1, this book uses the broad definition of ethnic group, which includes both culturally defined ethnic groups and racial groups. Hence, affiliation or identification with a racial group is part of ethnicity.

The terms *ethnicity* and *ethnic group* are often used interchangeably. In actuality, although the two terms are closely related, there is a nuance dividing them. While ethnic group is a social group based on ancestry, culture, or national origin, ethnicity refers to affiliation or identification with an ethnic group.¹ This book treats them as two interrelated but separate concepts rather than as synonyms.

NATURE AND BASIS OF ETHNICITY: BASIC QUESTIONS

Theorists of both Marxism and modernism have predicted that as a society becomes industrialized and modernized, ethnicity will fade and eventually die out. Likewise, assimilationists and advocates of the "melting

1. In some contexts, interchanging the two terms will not make much difference in meaning, as in the questions, "What is your ethnicity?" and "What is your ethnic group?" In other contexts, however, the meanings of the two terms vary. For example, in the questions, "What determines ethnicity?" and "What determines ethnic group?" "ethnicity" and "ethnic group" are obviously not synonyms.

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pot" paradigm have envisaged a withering of ethnic identification as a result of ethnic assimilation and amalgamation. However, none of these presages has materialized. On the contrary, not only has ethnicity remained a vital and important part of contemporary life, but its significance has been on the ascendance at certain times and in certain places.

In America, for instance, the vitality of ethnicity is undeniable. Ethnicity affects the opportunities of members of different ethnic groups in schools, jobs, income, housing, poverty, crime, and politics. Throughout the world, there is no sign that ethnicity is vanishing. In reality, the importance of ethnicity is even on the rise. As we have seen in the past ten years or so, the broad "Soviet" identity failed to override ethnic divisions in the former Soviet Union; ethnic division has torn Yugoslavia apart and led to the ongoing war in Bosnia; ethnic strife and separation have continued in Northern Ireland, Quebec, and other European countries; Israeli-Palestinian conflict has lingered on despite the peace-making process; ethnic collision between majority Hindus and minority Muslims and Sikhs in India has intensified; ethnic fighting between ruling Sinhalese and minority Tamils has killed eight thousand and forced more than 200,000 Tamils into refugee camps; in South Africa, racial tension remains despite the abolition of apartheid; and in Rwanda, ethnic warfare between the majority Hutu and the minority Tutsi erupted in 1994. Not only has conflict along the ethnic lines remained a constant global theme, but it has intensified in many parts of the world. Almost five million people lost their lives and more than fifty million were displaced in the maelstrom of intergroup conflict between 1990 and 1996. Ethnic memberships often demarcate the lines of intergroup conflicts. Throughout history people have often used ethnic distinctions to rank members of a society. The tenacity of ethnic identities verifies the centrality of ethnicity in modern human societies.

To understand the emergence and persistence of ethnicity, we need to answer the following two interrelated questions:

1. What is the nature of ethnicity? Is ethnicity something that is inherited or something that is constructed?
2. What determines ethnic affiliation or identification? In other words, what is the basis of ethnicity?

Theories of ethnicity attempt to answer these fundamental questions in ethnic studies. Over the years, scholars have developed many theories

of ethnicity, which may be grouped into three schools of thought: (1) primordialism, (2) constructionism, and (3) instrumentalism. The remainder of this chapter first presents the central ideas of these three paradigms and some specific versions of arguments within each school and then focuses on the formulation of an integrated approach. It should be noted before proceeding that the three schools of thought are ideal types. Often a specific theory may not be pigeonholed under a single category. Nevertheless, most theories have a tendency to lean toward a particular school. It is the presence of an intrinsic underlying view that is used to classify a theory under a particular heading.

THE PRIMORDIALIST SCHOOL

How does the primordialist school answer the two questions posed above? Three arguments are at the heart of this school of thought. First, ethnicity is an *ascribed* identity or assigned status, something inherited from one's ancestors. For example, if your ancestors are Chinese, then you are also Chinese because you inherit physical and cultural characteristics from your forebears. Ethnicity is a very deeply rooted, primal bond to one's ancestral bloodline.

Second, as an important corollary of ascribed identity, ethnic boundaries, which demarcate who is a member of an ethnic group and who is not, are fixed or immutable. Ethnicity is static. If you were born Chinese, you will be forever Chinese, and you can't change your membership to another group.

Finally, common ancestry determines ethnicity. In other words, people belong to an ethnic group because members of that group all share common biological and cultural origins. "Primordialist" is used to characterize this school of thought because it stresses the role of primordial factors, such as lineage and cultural ties, in determining ethnicity. To primordialists, it is the primordial bonds that give rise to and sustain ethnicity (Geertz 1973; Isaacs 1975; van den Berghe 1981).

Within the primordialist framework, there are at least two variant views. The *sociobiological* perspective represented by Pierre van den Berghe emphasizes the importance of a sociobiological factor—kinship—in determining ethnicity. Van den Berghe (1981) argued that ethnicity is an extension of kinship. Ethnic affiliation originates from membership in a nuclear family, then an extended family, and finally the ethnic group.

Ethnic identity develops and persists due to the common ancestral bonds of group members. An implication of this view is that ethnicity will never perish because kinship always exists.

A second current of primordialism is the *culturalist* perspective, which underscores the importance of a common culture in the determination of ethnic group membership. According to this view, a common culture (e.g., a common language, a common religion) determines the genesis and tenacity of ethnic identity even in the absence of common ancestors. For instance, Hispanic identity is determined by a shared language, Spanish, rather than by people's shared ancestry. Different racial groups of people originating from the same country can form an ethnic group and develop a common ethnic identity even though they have no common biological bonds.

Grasping the sentimental or psychological origins of ethnicity, the primordialist school provides a plausible explanation for the rise and tenacity of ethnic attachment. However, primordialism contains several drawbacks. First, this perspective cannot explain why ethnic memberships or identities of individuals and groups change. Second, it cannot fully account for why new ethnic identities, such as Asian American, emerge among biologically and culturally diverse groups, and why ethnic identities wane and disappear. Third, it tends to overlook the larger historical and structural conditions that construct/deconstruct and reinforce/undermine ethnic loyalties. Finally, it neglects the economic and political interests closely associated with ethnic sentiment and practice (Glazer and Moynihan 1963; Greenberg 1980).

It is undeniable that ethnicity requires some common origins, such as common ancestry or common culture; but how important are common origins in determining ethnic affiliation, and is ethnicity completely ascribed? Primordialists tend to offer affirmative answers to these questions. Constructionists and instrumentalists, however, dissent.

THE CONSTRUCTIONIST SCHOOL

The primordialist school was the dominant way of thinking until the 1970s, and many people are still accustomed to this way of thinking today. Starting in the 1970s, the constructionist school began to ascend. The answers of the constructionist school to the two questions stand in sharp contrast to those of the primordialist school. Constructionists have ad-

vanced three major arguments: First, ethnicity is a socially *constructed* identity, something that is created. The emphasis of this school on the social construction of ethnicity breeds the label of "constructionist" school. Second, as an extension of constructed identity, ethnic boundaries are flexible or changeable. Ethnicity is dynamic. Lastly, ethnic affiliation or identification is determined or constructed by society. Ethnicity is a reaction to changing social environment.

The constructionist school also encompasses several different perspectives which emphasize different components. William Yancey et al. (1976) proposed an "emergent ethnicity" perspective. They downplayed the effect of cultural heritage and viewed ethnicity as an "emergent phenomenon" created by structural conditions. Focusing on the experience of Italian, Jewish, and Polish immigrants in America around the turn of this century, Yancey and his associates maintained that the formation, crystallization, and development of ethnic communities, cultures, and identities were shaped by structural conditions closely associated with the industrialization process in the host society and the positions of ethnic groups within it. Specifically, the industrialization process led to the creation or expansions of certain industries (e.g., the garment industry, steel industry, construction industry) and occupations associated with these industries; immigrant groups with different occupational skills moved into different industries and occupations at different times, leading to occupational concentrations of ethnic groups with similar life styles, class interests, work relationships; because of the transportation conditions at that time, immigrants working in the same industry and occupation tended to live in the same area, resulting in residential concentration; common occupations and residence led to the use of the same institutions and services, such as churches, schools, and financial institutions. All of these structural conditions resulted in the formation and development of Italian, Jewish, and Polish ethnic communities, ethnic cultures, and ethnic identities by reinforcing the maintenance of kinship and friendship networks (Yancey et al. 1976, 392). According to this view, ethnicity emerges as a response to structural changes in society. Yancey et al.'s work was among the pioneering attempts to explore the sources of ethnicity derived from the structural forces of society.

Jonathan Sarna, a historian, developed a so-called "theory of ethnicization," which somewhat differs from the emergent ethnicity perspective formulated by sociologists such as Yancey et al. Sarna (1978) maintained that ethnicity is created by two conditions: ascription and ad-

versity. Ascription refers to the assignment of individuals to particular ethnic groups by outsiders such as governments, churches, schools, media, natives, and other immigrants. Adversity includes prejudice, discrimination, hostility, and hardship. Sarna contended that adversity forces members of the same group to unite and helps create group identity and solidarity. Sarna's theory probably understates the active role of ethnic groups in shaping their identities while inflating the effects of outside forces. However, the merit of Sarna's theory lies in its call to locate the creation of ethnic identity in relation to the larger society.

Other scholars focus on the resurgence of old ethnic identities and boundaries that previously existed. In other words, ethnic identity is constructed around formerly recognized historical boundaries. They found that "resurgent ethnicity" is particularly evident among white ethnic groups. For instance, quite a few studies (e.g., Alba 1990; Bakalian 1993; Kivisto 1989; Waters 1990) show that although ethnic boundaries among the white population are weakening due to intermarriage, language loss, religious conversion, or declining participation, white Americans increasingly identify with their group of origin. Some argue that social changes since the 1960s and shifting societal emphasis from assimilation into the Anglo culture to ethnic distinctiveness have resulted in resurgent ethnicity among whites. On the other hand, Gans (1979) contended that ethnic revival among whites is nothing more than "symbolic ethnicity," or symbolic allegiance to, love for and pride in the culture and tradition of the immigrant generation and the country of origin, without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior. Simply put, symbolic ethnicity is "feeling ethnic" rather than being ethnic.

The more recent *social constructionist* perspective explicitly emphasizes the social construction of ethnicity and race and the dynamic process of ethnic/racial formation. For example, Werner Sollars (1989) suggested the notion of "the invention of ethnicity." Challenging the primordialist assumption that ethnicity is an irrational form of cultural attachment, Sollars argued that ethnic identity is embedded in tradition, which is created, sustained, and refashioned by people. Joane Nagel (1994, 1996) contended that ethnicity is socially constructed and reconstructed by internal forces (i.e., actions taken by ethnic groups themselves such as negotiation, redefinition, and reconstruction of ethnic boundaries) and external forces (i.e., social, economic, and political processes and outsiders), and that ethnicity is a dynamic, constantly changing property of individual identity and group organization. Focusing on the centrality of race,

Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) demonstrated how the meanings and categories of race both shape and are shaped by the political process.

The constructionist school pinpoints the centrality of social construction in ethnic formation and retention; it highlights historical and structural forces that create and sustain ethnicity; and it better explains the volatility of ethnicity. Nevertheless, the constructionist school tends to ignore the ancestral basis of ethnicity and deemphasize the limitations of social construction. Like the primordialist school, it also pays insufficient attention to the role of political and economic interest in the construction of ethnicity.

THE INSTRUMENTALIST SCHOOL

Unlike the primordialist school and the constructionist school, the instrumentalist school views ethnicity as an instrument or strategic tool for gaining resources. Hence, the "instrumentalist" tag is affixed to this school. According to this theoretical framework, people become ethnic and remain ethnic when their ethnicity yields significant returns to them. In other words, ethnicity exists and persists because it is useful. The functional advantages of ethnicity range from "the moral and material support provided by ethnic networks to political gains made through ethnic bloc voting" (Portes and Bach 1985, 24). To Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan (1975), who are among the pioneers of this school, ethnicity is not simply a mix of affective sentiments, but like class and nationality it is also a means of political mobilization for advancing group interests. Ethnic groups are also interest groups.

The most extreme version of instrumentalism attributes the acquisition and retention of ethnic membership or identity solely to the motivation of wanting to obtain comparative advantage. For example, Orlando Patterson (1975, 348) asserted that "The strength, scope, viability, and bases of ethnic identity are determined by, and are used to serve, the economic and general class interests of individuals." Hence, interests are the sole determinant of ethnic identity, and ethnic affiliation tends to be transient and situational as the benefits of ethnicity shift. A more moderate variant of instrumentalism combines advantages of ethnicity with affective ties. For instance, Daniel Bell (1975, 169) stated that "Ethnicity has become more salient because it can combine an interest with an affective

tie." Cohen (1969) suggested that cultural homogeneity of people facilitates their effective organization as an interest group and boosts ethnic solidarity and identity.

Another recent formulation of instrumentalism is *rational choice theory* (Banton 1983; Hechter 1986, 1987; Hechter et al. 1982). As a social theory, rational choice theory assumes that people act to promote their socioeconomic positions by minimizing the costs of, and maximizing the potential benefits of, their actions. As an application to ethnic identity, rational choice theory maintains that ethnic affiliation is based on the rational calculation of the costs and benefits of ethnic association. For the advocates of rational choice theory, ethnicity is an option. People choose one ethnicity over another or avoid association with an ethnic group because of the utility or cost of such affiliation. Some people favor an ethnic affiliation because it is beneficial, while other people hide or deny an ethnic identity because it will bring disadvantages.

Rational choice theory can help us understand the change of ethnic identity, but it has limitations as well. First, ethnic choice is limited. Since ethnic choice is subject to ancestral constraints defined by a society, not everyone can freely choose ethnic identity. As Joane Nagel (1996, 26) stated, "We do not always choose to be who we are; we simply are who we are as a result of a set of social definitions, categorization schemes, and external ascriptions that reside in the taken-for-granted realm of social life." Alternative ethnic options become possible only when an ethnic status quo is challenged and superseded. Second, not all ethnic choices are rational and materialistic. Some people choose an ethnic affiliation not for material gains, rewards, or access to resources and services but for psychological satisfaction, which includes emotional fulfillment, social attachment, or recreational pleasure. The notion of symbolic ethnicity suggested by Herbert Gans (1979) comes closest to this function of ethnicity. This type of ethnic option is symbolic, nonrational, nonmaterial-driven.

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

The foregoing review of the three schools of thought on the nature and basis of ethnicity reveals the varying degrees of validity of their arguments as well as their limitations. We do not have to rely on the either/or logic of thinking; rather, an integration of valuable ideas is possible and worthwhile. The balance of this section formulates an integrated ap-

proach of my own that builds upon some useful insights of these theories and incorporates strands from all three paradigms.

I argue that ethnicity (including race) is socially constructed partly on the basis of ancestry or presumed ancestry and more importantly by society, that the interests of ethnic groups also partly determine ethnic affiliation, and that ethnic boundaries are relatively stable but undergo changes from time to time. This argument contains four specific propositions.

Proposition 1. Ethnicity is partly ascribed because it is partly based on ancestry or presumed ancestry that normally carries certain physical or cultural characteristics and national or territorial origins.

Few people would deny the relevance of ancestry to ethnicity. "Perception of common ancestry, both real and mythical, has been important to outsiders' definitions and to ethnic groups' self-definitions" (Feagin and Feagin 1993, 9). For Max Weber (1961, 1:306), one of the founding fathers of sociology, ethnic groups are "human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent—because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization or migration—in such a way that this belief is important for the continuation of the nonkinship communal relationships." Hence, ancestry must be an imperative condition for ethnic affiliation or identification.

The social construction of ethnicity or race cannot be undertaken without some reference to common ancestry or presumed common ancestry. Each individual is assigned by society to a particular ethnic group or identifies himself/herself with a particular ethnic group in part because of that person's ancestry or presumed ancestry. For instance, a person is categorized as Japanese American or identifies himself/herself as Japanese American, partly because his/her ancestors originated in Japan. Similarly, roots in Africa partly define people originating from that continent as "African Americans." The same rule applies to a person from Britain, Italy, Mexico, or any other country. "Hispanic American" is defined partly because of the shared language of various groups.

Ethnic choice also partly depends on ancestral ties. It is true that ethnic options have become increasingly open in America over time. Take the U.S. population census—a premier means of categorizing people's ethnicity and race—as an example. Before the 1960s, census takers checked the race/ethnicity category of the census form for individuals based on their observations of the physical characteristics of respondents.

Since the 1960s, individuals have been given the responsibility to check their racial/ethnic categories for themselves. People have had a certain degree of freedom to choose their ethnic affiliations or identities, but the freedom to choose is not absolute. If you are to select a category for a form, you cannot choose whatever you want. You make your choice at least partly based on your knowledge of your ancestry. Your choice has to be recognized by other people who make their judgment following a set of rules for ethnic categorization established by society. If a person of pure Chinese descent declared himself white, black, Latino, or Indian, most people would think he had made a mistake, or he was a liar or, even worse, insane.

The majority of people do not get to choose their ethnicity; they are born into it according to a set of rules defined by society. There are limitations to the learning of ethnicity. Listening to black music, learning Ebonics, and hanging around with black students won't make a nonblack person black. Similarly, enjoying Mexican food and learning to speak Spanish won't make one Mexican. The basic rule accepted by American society is ancestry in terms of the family tree.

Proposition 2. Ethnicity is largely constructed by society.

There are at least four mechanisms through which society constructs ethnicity. The first mechanism is that society largely determines people's ethnic group memberships through written or unwritten rules for assigning its members to different ethnic categories. Ethnic definitions and categories are social constructs and arbitrary decisions that reflect intergroup power relations. Individuals are often born into an ethnic or racial category defined by society, and they normally have little control over their ethnic group memberships. The story of Susie Guillory Phipps helps illustrate this point (*San Francisco Chronicle* 1982, 1983).

Susie Phipps, the wife of a wealthy seafood importer in Louisiana, looked white and always considered herself white, but on her birth certificate she was designated "colored" because her great-great-great-great grandmother was the black mistress of an Alabama plantation owner back in 1760.² According to a 1970 Louisiana law, any person with one thirty-second of "Negro blood" should be designated as colored regardless of

2. Phipps was exactly three thirty-seconds black. "Colored" and "black" are sometimes used interchangeably, such as in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—a prominent African American organization.

that person's skin color. In order to change her race from "colored" to "white," she sued the Louisiana Bureau of Vital Records in 1982-1983. Her attorney argued that designating a race-category on a person's birth certificate was unconstitutional and that in any case the one thirty-second criterion was inaccurate. However, she lost the case and the court upheld Louisiana's law quantifying "racial identity" and affirmed the legal principle of assigning persons to specific "racial" groups. Susie Phipps was made black because of the law decided by society.³ Ironically, one drop of black blood made her black, but the bulk of white blood could not make her white.

Ethnic/racial categorization rules vary from one society to another, and therefore the same person could be categorized into different ethnic or racial groups in different societies. For instance, in the United States, ancestry, rather than physical appearance, plays a crucial role in determining one's ethnicity or race. In Brazil, however, a person's total physical appearance (e.g., skin color, hair texture, facial features) is the primary determinant of his/her racial classification. Hence, many lighter-skinned blacks in America would be defined as whites in Brazil. In addition to physical appearance, Brazil also uses other factors as ethnic or racial determinants. One of the important factors is social class. People with a higher social class status are more likely to be classified as white than those with a lower social status. The Brazilian saying, "a rich Negro is white, and a poor white is a Negro," vividly reflects this "money whitens" rule.

Sometimes, race/ethnicity-assigning rules, normally based on physical appearance or ancestry, may not be written in books but are widely acknowledged and practiced in society. In the United States, for instance, although the "one drop" rule was rejected, its influence has still lingered today. When members of white ethnic groups intermarried, the race of their descendants remained white. However, up to now the descendants of a white person and a black person are viewed as blacks in the eyes of the American public. Many immigrants with mixed ancestries of black and white from the West Indies often have a turning-black experience. For example, in Jamaica, an island nation in the West Indies, the mixed ancestry of black and white is a norm, and the mixed-blood Jamaicans are not defined as blacks in their society. However, when Jamaicans come to the United States, they and their descendants "become" black, even though many Jamaicans do not like to be so categorized. Although there

3. Susie Phipps's failed suit later prompted a legislative reform, which led to the abolition of the law in 1983 (*San Francisco Chronicle* 1983).

is no written rule governing the blood quantum of mixed-blood West Indians, apparently government officials who decided the race categories acted on the assumption that West Indians with any amount of African ancestry are black because of the influence of the "one-drop" rule.

The second mechanism of social construction of ethnicity is that social conditions can create new ethnic groups and identities. Among the many good examples is the formation of an ethnic group called Vietnamese Americans and their identity. Before 1975, there was no such group or identity as "Vietnamese American," because only a small number of Vietnamese resided in the United States at that time. The collapse of South Vietnam in 1975 generated a huge influx of Vietnamese refugees into this country. As a result, Vietnamese Americans and their identity were forged by the conclusion of the Vietnam War and its ensuing refugee arrivals. In general, immigration creates new ethnic groups because today's immigrant groups become tomorrow's ethnic groups.

Another example is the creation of "Asian American" identity. Prior to the 1960s, there was no such concept as "Asian American." There were, however, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Koreans. Each group identified itself with its national origin or even with its subnational/subethnic group (Cheng and Yang 1996). "Asian American" was a new ethnic identity created during the 1960s as Asian Americans deemphasized their separate group identities. Scholars label this new ethnic identity "Asian American panethnicity" (Espiritu 1992), which is the panethnic identity of all Asian American subgroups, including Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans, Asian Indians, Vietnamese, and other Asian groups.

At least three important factors contributed to the construction of Asian American panethnicity. One was the racial lumping of diverse Asian groups into an umbrella category by government bureaucracies and the larger society (Espiritu 1992; Lopez and Espiritu, 1990). In some sense, Asian American panethnicity is an imposed identity (Espiritu 1992). Another important factor was the common economic and political interests of Asian groups. The political and social struggles of Asian Americans during the 1960s led them to realize that forming a coalition could better advance their economic and political interests and that the pan-Asian identity could be used as a strategic instrument to mobilize culturally diverse Asian groups for that purpose. Finally, it was the Asian American movement that gave rise to this pan-Asian identity as the young, native-born Asian Americans searched and coined the term "Asian American" for their political organizations (Espiritu 1992).

Similar examples include the construction of Hispanic American panethnicity by grouping "Mexican," "Cuban," "Puerto Rican," and other Hispanic groups together, and the creation of Native American panethnicity by lumping Eskimo, Aleut, Cherokee, Sioux, Pueblo, and several hundred other Indian nations into the broad American Indian category. In general, *panethnicity* refers to a panethnic identity and solidarity among subethnic groups that are considered homogeneous by outsiders. "Asian American," "Hispanic American," and "Native American" are all new ethnic identities constructed in the past several decades.

The third mechanism through which social environment determines ethnicity is that social conditions can change the ethnic membership or identity of individuals and groups. As mentioned in chapter 1, Asian Indians were defined by the government as white prior to the 1970s. The group organized to demand a reclassification to "Asian" during the 1970s. After a series of negotiation with the government and public hearings, they were finally pigeonholed as Asian Americans.

Ethnic switching to American Indians provides another illuminative case. The population census statistics show that between 1960 and 1990, the number of American Indians increased from 523,591 in 1960, to 792,730 in 1970, 1,364,033 in 1980, and 1,878,285 in 1990. The phenomenal growth cannot be explained by Indians' high fertility, decreased mortality, immigration, or change in the Indian definition. Nagel (1996) found that the major reason lay in the "ethnic switching" of people with some Indian lineage (primarily whites) to Indians. Before the 1960s, people with mixed ancestries of Indians and whites were unwilling to claim their Indian heritage due to stigma and disadvantages associated with Indians, and in the past several decades people with some Indian descent have reclaimed their Indian identity. Thus, ethnic group membership or identity is fluid.

Several social conditions were accountable for this ethnic switching phenomenon. First, the Civil Rights movement and the "Red Power" Indian political movements increased Indians' ethnic consciousness and ethnic pride, so that people were willing to switch back to being Indians.⁴ Second, federal Indian urban and social policies (e.g., assimilation pro-

4. Some well-known events involving the Red Power movements included the nineteen-month occupation of Alcatraz Island beginning in 1969; the 1972 Trail of Broken Teaties; which culminated in a week-long occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C.; the seventy-one day siege at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1973; and the 1975 shootout on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

grams beginning in the nineteenth century and urbanization programs after World War II) created an urbane, educated, English-speaking Indian community and led to the growing acceptance of Indians by the larger society. Finally, benefits given to Indians through some social programs such as affirmative action and settlement of land claims also stimulated ethnic switching to Indian, a point which will be emphasized in Proposition 3.

The fourth mechanism is that social structural conditions can heighten ethnic awareness and identities. Many structural conditions function as catalysts or stimuli of ethnic consciousness and identity. Government recognition or designation can lead to a group's self-consciousness and organization and can also increase identification and mobilization among groups not officially recognized. For example, the categorization of Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians by the U.S. government in the census makes official their ethnic status and heightens their identities. On the other hand, the government recognition of Indochinese prompts other Asian groups such as Thai and Pakistanis to demand similar recognition, which helps increase the attachment of members to their own groups.

Government policies and practices can promote ethnic awareness and identities. For instance, the incarceration of Japanese Americans on the U.S. mainland during World War II heightened the ethnic boundaries and identities of Japanese Americans. This modern example substantiates the effect of adversity on ethnic identity suggested by Sarna (1978). During the Iran hostage crisis in 1980, the Carter administration required Iranians in America to report to the government for photos and fingerprints, and this practice promoted Iranians' self-awareness and identity. It should be noted that international context (U.S. Embassy staff in Iran were taken hostage during the Iranian revolution in 1980) was largely responsible for this government practice and the ensuing effect on Iranians' ethnic consciousness. Affirmative action policy in the United States increases the self-awareness of whites. Interestingly, affirmative action in India, which constitutionally guarantees parliamentary representation and government posts for Untouchables (outcast), has encouraged the collective identity and political mobilization of Untouchables and led to the formation of an Untouchable political party—the Republican Party (Nayar 1966; Rudolph and Rudolph 1967).

Ethnic identity can be enhanced by competition for economic and political resources. For instance, Min (1996) showed that economic com-

petition and conflict between Korean Americans and African Americans in New York and Los Angeles heightened ethnic solidarity, awareness, and identity among Korean Americans, and the heightening effect was most evident among the young generations of U.S.-born Koreans. Competition for political access or control can promote ethnic identification. For example, the successful pursuit of political offices by ethnic candidates can increase group members' pride and willingness for identification. Ethnic mobilization or countermobilization during a political race can also heighten ethnic consciousness.

Proposition 3. Costs and benefits associated with ethnic group memberships partly determine ethnic affiliation or identification.

When ethnic choice becomes available, the costs and benefits of ethnicity play a pivotal role in determining the ethnic options of individuals and groups. These costs and benefits do not always exert their impact on ethnic options alone; often they function together with other social factors. People choose or avoid an association with an ethnic group in order to maximize their gains and minimize their losses. Self-interest in part determines ethnic options. For example, as mentioned earlier Asian Americans created the pan-Asian identity partly because this panethnic identity had the utility of uniting Asian groups and promoting their common interests. Asian Indians' campaign of reclassifying their racial category from white to Asian was in part motivated by benefits entitled to minorities, especially programs that provided contracts for minority-owned businesses. In the same vein, the ethnic switching of people with partial Indian ancestry to Indians in the latter half of this century can be partly accounted for by the changing social costs and rewards associated with American Indian identity (Nagel 1996). In addition, affirmative action benefits for college admissions, employment, and government contracting encourage ethnic identification with groups eligible for the rewards.

There are many other international examples that bolster the role of costs and benefits of ethnicity in determining ethnic choice. For instance, during apartheid in South Africa, many people applied to change their official ethnic affiliation in order to gain benefits available to whites and Coloureds and to avoid restrictions associated with black or African identity (Lelyveld 1985). In Sudan, members of the Fur group who mainly depended on agriculture for a living, switched to Baggara ethnicity, a group that engaged in the more lucrative animal husbandry (Haaland 1969).

Religious conversion—a form of ethnic switching—is also influenced by self-interest. In India, outcast Hindus switched to Islam, which allowed them to avoid untouchability. Some did the same conversion for employment purposes in colonial India (Nayar 1966). The British preference for Sikh military recruits led many Hindus to switch to Sikhism (Nayar 1966).

In general, beneficial ethnic membership encourages affiliation while socially costly ethnic membership stimulates avoidance and dissociation. Ethnic choice can be rational or nonrational (Nagel 1996). There are two kinds of utility or cost associated with ethnicity. One is material benefits or costs associated with ethnic group membership. Ethnic options based on these material considerations may be termed rational choice. The second type of utility or cost of ethnicity is psychological satisfaction or dissatisfaction associated with ethnic group membership. Ethnic choice based on this function of ethnicity may be called nonrational or symbolic choice.

Proposition 4. Ethnic boundaries are relatively stable, but they can change from time to time, especially when existing ethnic categories are challenged.

Even though ethnic boundaries are not immutable, we must recognize their relative stability. Since ethnic boundaries are crystallized and partly defined by ancestry that is socially recognized, they do not change quickly. Furthermore, although ethnic categories do shift, they seldom reshuffle completely in a short period of time. It is only when existing ethnic categories become problematic, often as a result of political challenges to the existent ethnic order, that ethnic boundaries begin to transform.

Their stability notwithstanding, ethnic boundaries are not fixed, but shift from time to time. There are several specific forms of boundary metamorphosis. First, ethnic boundaries can expand to include groups previously excluded. An example is the widening boundaries of whites in the United States. In 1795, Benjamin Franklin grumbled at German "aliens" whose presence intruded in the dominance of "purely white people" (Jordan 1968, 102, 143, 254). Early Irish immigrants were considered a separate race. Similarly, Italians, Jews, Greeks, Slavs, etc. were historically excluded from the white racial stock. However, these groups gradually became part of the white category.

Second, ethnic boundaries can upgrade from a lower level to a higher level. The creation of Asian American panethnicity and the ensuing

Table 3.1 Summary of Four Approaches to the Nature and Basis of Ethnicity

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Primordialism</i>	<i>Constructionism</i>	<i>Instrumentalism</i>	<i>Integration</i>
Nature	Ascribed identity; inherent ancestral traits	Socially constructed identity	Social instrument	Identity constructed by ancestry and society
Ethnic boundaries	Fixed	Flexible	Flexible	Relatively stable but changeable
Basis	Ancestry	Society	Costs/benefits	Ancestry, society, costs/benefits

panethnic boundaries engulfing Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans, Asian Indians, Vietnamese, and other Asians are one case in point. While the specific Asian group boundaries still remain, new boundaries are constructed at a higher level.

Third, ethnic boundaries can shrink or split. For instance, the Clinton administration decided that for the 2000 census, the existing Asian and Pacific Islander American category of the race variable will be split into two categories: Asian American, and native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander.

Finally, ethnic boundaries can disappear along with ethnic categories. For example, in the 1870 to 1890 U.S. censuses, there existed a total of eight racial categories: white, black, mulatto, quadroon, octoroon, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian. In the 1900 census, the three racial categories—mulatto, quadroon, and octoroon—were removed and have never been used since then.

In sum, ethnic identity and boundaries are constructed and reconstructed by individuals, ethnic groups themselves, other groups, and society as a whole. Ancestry, self-interests, and the larger economic, political and social structures all underlie the social construction of ethnicity. Ethnic choice is available to some individuals and groups at certain times and places; and the choice could be materialistically motivated (rational) and/or emotionally induced (nonrational). The main ideas of the integrated approach and the similarities and differences between this approach and the other three paradigms are summarized in Table 3.1.

IDENTITY OF MIXED-RACE PEOPLE

The issue of multiracial people has recently attracted increasing attention because mixed races have become more and more common among Americans as a result of interracial breeding. We do not have accurate data on how many people in America belong to the category of "mixed race." However, indirect evidence from the 1990 census puts that number in 1990 at about five million.⁵

What is the racial identity of people with mixed racial backgrounds? How do we determine the race of mixed-race people? These issues often confront societies with mixed-blood people. Undoubtedly, the identity of mixed-race people is also largely determined by society. Society makes written or unwritten rules to assign mixed-race people to a particular category. There are several commonly used categorization rules. One rule often used in the history of America is to use the race of one parent (usually mother) or the parent who is nonwhite to determine the race of a mixed-race child. For example, in the colony of Virginia in 1662 the race of a child whose father was white and whose mother was black was designated black. The guidelines of the 1920 census stated that "any mixture of White and some other race was to be reported according to the race of the person who was not white" (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1979). Another rule is the use of blood quantum, for which different societies use different quantitative criteria. For instance, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has long used one-fourth of blood quantum as a minimum requirement to define who is an American Indian for entitlement to certain government services (e.g., medical services). A large number of Indian tribal governments use blood criteria ranging from one-sixteenth to one-half to determine tribal membership. A third rule is the use of physical appearance. This is most common in daily life. People normally assume the race of mixed-race people based on how they look. A fourth rule is to designate a special category for mixed-race people. In Brazil, for example, "mulatto" is the category for people with mixed races of black and white. South Africa uses "colored" to designate people with black and white ancestries.

In the United States, there is no such category. In the past several

5. In the 1990 census, there was a category called "other race" for the variable "race." Normally, mixed-race people or those who did not wish to check white, black, Asian, or Indian chose that category. In 1990, the number of people who checked that category was 9,804,847, among whom a significant proportion were Mexicans.

years, certain groups representing mixed-race Americans demanded the addition of a new category, "mixed race" or "multiracial," to the race variable for the 2000 census. They argued that without the separate category, it will be difficult to chart their numbers and provide them with adequate protection from some forms of discrimination. However, this demand is not simply an issue of adding a category. It will have impact on the distribution of resources and power. A separate category could cause underrepresentation of minority groups, affect the number and location of minority voting districts that are based on the numbers of people in different racial categories, and reduce government and private financing of minority programs that are tied to census figures.

After four years of study, in July 1997 a thirty-agency Clinton administration task force rejected the proposal to add the "multiracial" category to the 2000 census but recommended allowing mixed-race people to check off more than one racial category. The task force's recommendations were effectively adopted by the federal government. In October 1997, the Clinton administration announced that the "multiracial" category will not be used for the 2000 census, but it will allow mixed-race Americans for the first time to select more than one racial category for themselves. All federal agencies will be expected to conform to the new standards as soon as possible, but no later than January 1, 2003.

Currently, the multiracial category does not exist on most forms, and multiracial people can choose whatever category best serves their interest, but their choice has to be able to stand verification. Some people with multiple ancestries use ethnicity as a strategy to achieve their goals. For example, an ethnic studies instructor with mixed ancestries of Japanese and white at UC Berkeley checked the "Asian" category to increase her chance of admission when she applied for colleges in the early 1980s. Yet, five years later when her brother applied for graduate schools, he chose the "white" category because there were attempts to restrict the admissions of Asian students.

The environment one grows up with can have decisive effects on the identity of mixed-race people. For instance, a student of black and white descent at UC Berkeley was perceived as black because she looked black and sometimes she felt black. But she now considers herself white because her parents split when she was two and a half years old and she grew up with the white side of the family. Tiger Woods, the Masters golf champion of 1997, did not consider himself black or Asian, despite the initial black label given to him by the media. He stated that growing up, he

learned his racial identity is "Cablinasian" because he is one-eighth Caucasian, one-fourth black, one-eighth Indian, one-fourth Thai, and one-fourth Chinese. His mother is partly Thai and partly Chinese, and his father is partly black, partly white, and partly Cherokee. His environment imparts a multiracial identity to him.

The identities of mixed-race people are especially fluid over time. The experience of Lisa Graham, who has a Filipino mother and a Caucasian father, provides a good example. The following excerpt of her narrative shows how her identity changed from American-white to Filipino and to half-Filipino and half-white.

When I was younger, I used to say, "I am American, I am American. I am white." It was just because everybody seemed to be either black or white, a full race. . . . Starting in junior high, it became important for me to say that I was Filipino because of my mom. . . . I realize that the first thing I usually say now is, "I am Filipino," . . . But whenever I have said that, people usually responded with, "You are not full Filipino." So then I had to say that "I am half-white." But then I don't look white either. When I think of "white," I see light, light brown hair or blonde hair, and I don't look like that. . . . But now my whole attitude is changing. Now I say that I am half-Filipino and half-white. (Espiritu 1995, 202-203)

Multiple ancestries sometimes could cause discrepancies between self-identity and identity assigned by others. Professor Mary Waters of Harvard University told an interesting story about the difficulties a student of hers had in choosing her identity. The student had learned from her mother that she was an American Indian, with some heritage of black, Irish, and Scottish. When applying to colleges, she checked all the boxes on the applications that applied to her. After arriving at Harvard, she began to receive mail from the Black Student Association, and she was pressured by other black students to hang around with them. Apparently, Harvard had designated her to be black. She was not alone at Harvard. Her identical twin sister had also been admitted to Harvard University, and had checked the same boxes that she had when applying to colleges. However, the twin sister was receiving mail from the Native American Student Association and was being lobbied to attend their meetings on campus. Two genetically identical twins attending the same university were perceived as members of different ethnic groups. The story also confirms that ethnicity is socially constructed in complex ways by ancestry, social environment, and self-interest.

SUMMARY

Theories of ethnicity address what the nature of ethnicity is and why ethnicity emerges and endures. Primordialism, constructionism, and instrumentalism are the three existing paradigms formulated to answer these questions. Primordialism emphasizes the ascription of ethnicity, fixed ethnic boundaries, and the importance of biological and/or cultural inheritance. In contrast, constructionism accentuates the social construction of ethnicity, flexible ethnic boundaries, and the salience of social environment. Instrumentalism treats ethnicity as a tool for advancing self-interest and as a rational choice to minimize social costs and maximize socioeconomic rewards. An alternative theorization and synthesis of the three paradigms builds upon the cornerstone of the social construction of ethnicity and views social structure, ancestry, and the utility and cost of ethnic affiliation as ingredients contributing to the construction of ethnicity. It also attempts to balance the stability and dynamics of ethnic boundaries.

Social construction and determination also apply to the identity of mixed-race people as society assigns mixed-blood people to a particular category using such rules as the race of mother or a nonwhite parent, blood quantum, physical appearance, or a special mixed-race category. For mixed-race people, as opposed to those with single ancestry, an "ethnic option" seems more open to them, and their ethnicity is more dynamic, more complicated, and at times more afflicting.