CHAPTER 5

Identity: Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality

Field Note Building Walls

Traveling on the Indonesian island of Bali, I saw a brick-making facility and stopped to visit. Boys and women were building bricks by hand, in the hot sun. I watched young boys scoop wet mud from a quarry by a creek into their wheelbarrows. They poured the mud into wooden forms. Once the bricks began to dry and harden in the sun, someone had to turn the bricks repeatedly to prevent them from cracking.

The woman in Fig. 5.1 worked ten hours a day, six days a week, turning, stacking, and restacking bricks to prevent them from cracking. For her work, she earned about 45 cents (U.S.) per hour.

More than a century ago, bricks were made this way in the United States. Today, the brick-making industry in the United States makes use of a great deal of technology and robotics to manufacture bricks. Instead of using the sun to bake the bricks, brick-making factories in the United States employ enormous tunnel-shaped kilns. The *Mississippi Business Journal* described how bricks are made in one factory: "Clay and water go in one end of the new 590 foot tunnel kiln and brick pallets will roll out the other end as robots and employees work side by side."

What hit me harder than the difference in technology between the two countries is the difference in labor. In Bali, women and boys make bricks. In the United States, the vast majority of brick-makers are men, who are aided by machines (one company estimated that 98 percent of its operations' employees in

Figure 5.1

Bedugul, Indonesia. This woman working at a brick-making facility in the village of Bedugul on the Indonesian island of Bali makes about 45 cents (U.S.) per hour and works 10 hours a day, 6 days a week. © H. J. de Blij.

the factory are men). What makes brick-making a job for women and boys in Bali and a job for men and robots in the United States? *Does being a brick-maker mean different things in each of these places?*

Throughout the world, different cultures and societies have different ideas about what jobs are appropriate for men and what jobs are appropriate for women. Geographers, especially those who study gender, realize people have created divisions of labor that are *gendered*. Geographers Mona Domosh and Joni Seager define **gender** as "a culture's assumptions about the differences between men and women: their 'characters,' the roles they play in society, what they represent." Divisions of labor are one of the clearest ways in which societies are gendered.

In Bali, brick-making is still done by hand by boys and women. The industry is not technologically sophisticated, and bricks are made one by one. Even beyond brick-making facilities, most of the factory jobs in Indonesia and in poorer countries of the world, go to women instead of men. Factory managers in these areas often hire women over men because they see women as an expendable labor pool. Researcher Peter Hancock studied gender relations and women's work in factories in Indonesia and reported, "Research in different global contexts suggests that factory managers employ young women because they are more easily exploited, less likely to strike or form membership organizations, are comparatively free from family responsibilities, and more adept at doing repetitive and delicate tasks associated with assembly line work."

In many societies in poorer countries, families see young women as financial supporters of their families. Thus, many women migrate from rural areas and travel to cities or central industrial locales (such as export production zones—EPZs) to produce and earn a wage that is then sent home to support the schooling of their brothers and younger sisters (until these girls are also old enough to leave home and work). In Indonesia and in neighboring Malaysia and the Philippines, many women temporarily migrate to the Middle East to work as domestics (cooking, cleaning, and providing childcare) in order to send money home to support the family. In the United States, rarely does an oldest daughter migrate to the city (while her family stays behind in a rural region) to labor in a factory so she can pay for her younger brothers' schooling.

Although public education in the United States is free and open to boys and girls, American society still has gendered divisions of labor. The few women who work in brick-manufacturing facilities in the United States are typically assigned to tasks that require little lifting—such as gluing pieces of the various types of brick the company produces to boards so that salespeople can use them as samples. The dominant assumption in American society is that work that requires heavy lifting needs to be completed by men and that the good-paying, unionized jobs need to go to the "head of the household." In the United States, the dominant assumption is that the head of household is a man.

Society creates boxes in which we put people and expect them to live. These boxes are in a sense stereotypes embodying assumptions we make about what is expected *from* or *assumed about* women, men, members of certain races or ethnic groups, and people with various sexual preferences. In the creation of these boxes, society can place entire professions or certain tasks into the "woman" box, thereby gendering the division of labor. Places—notably the kitchen of a home or a store in the mall—can also be gendered. At any point in time, people negotiate their personal identities, find their ways through all the expectations placed on them by the boxes society puts around them, and

they modify and reinforce the social relations that create the places in which they work and live.

Rarely do the social relations that create gendered divisions of labor focus only on gender. The social relations in a place also create boxes for other identities. In this chapter, we focus on gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. We examine how people and society construct identities, how place factors into identity, and how geography reflects and shapes power relationships among different groups of people.

Key Questions For Chapter 5

1. What is identity, and how are identities constructed?
2. How do places affect identity, and how can we see identities in places?
3. How does geography reflect and shape power relationships among groups?

WHAT IS IDENTITY, AND HOW ARE IDENTITIES CONSTRUCTED?

A man gets off the airplane, walks to the baggage carousel to find his suitcase, and is greeted by dozens of black suitcases. He walks to the parking garage to find his car and sees a sea of black cars that all look the same. The narrator intones," Maintain your identity. Drive a Saab."

Identities are marketed through cars, clothing, memberships, jewelry, and houses. Advertisers tell us we can purchase our identity. Yet, identity is much more personal than what we drive, wear, belong to, or where we live. Geographer Gillian Rose defines **identity** as "how we make sense of ourselves." How do each of us define ourselves? We *construct* our own identities through experiences, emotions, connections, and rejections. We work through derivations and delinations to find an identity that meshes with who and where we are at any given point in time. An identity is a snapshot—an image of who we are at that moment. Identities are fluid, constantly changing, shifting, becoming. Place and space are integral to our identities because our experiences in places and perceptions of places help us make sense of who we are.

In addition to defining ourselves, we define others and others define us. One of the most powerful ways to construct an identity is by **identifying against**. To identify against, we first define the "other," and then we define ourselves as "not the other." Edward Said wrote thoughtfully about how Europeans, over time, constructed an identity for the region that is now more commonly called the Middle East and Asia, and how Europeans defined the region as the "Orient," as a mystical place through paintings and writings. Geographer James Blaut wrote eloquently about how Europeans defined Africans and Americans as "savage" and also as "mystical." Through these definitions of the "other" during European exploration and colonialism, Europeans defined themselves as "not mystical" or "not savages" and therefore as "civilized." These ideas of identities still influence our vernacular speech today, through phrases such as "the civilized world" or "before civilization." Phrases such as these invariably mean someone is defining the "other" and in the process is defining himself or herself as superior.

One of the most powerful foci of identity in the modern world is the state. State nationalism has been such a powerful force that in many contexts people think of themselves first and foremost as French, Japanese, or American. Nationalist identities are a product of the modern state system, so we defer consideration of this form of identity to the chapter focused on the rise of the state system (Chapter 8). But nationalist identities coexist with all sorts of other identities that divide humanity—identities that can trump state nationalism in certain contexts and certain scales of interaction. Language and religion can function as foci of identity, and we will turn to these in the next two chapters. This chapter takes up several other important axes of identity: race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. We look at issues of identity construction, place and scale through an analysis of race. We examine ethnicity and sexuality as identities that are shaped by and that shape place. Our concluding discussion in this chapter looks at power relationships through the lenses of gender and ethnicity.

Race

Race is a constructed identity and is a perfect example of how identities are built geographically. Biologically, all people are part of the same race, the human race. The various "races" to which people refer are not biologically

based. Yet, countless times during our lives, we fill out census forms, product warranty information, surveys, medical forms, and application forms that ask us to "check" the box next to our "race" (Fig. 5.2).

Where did society get the idea that humans fall into different categories of race? Throughout history, societies in different parts of the world have drawn distinctions among peoples based on their physical characteristics, but many of societies' modern assumptions about race grew out of the period of European exploration and colonialism. Benedict Anderson argues that differences in socioeconomic classes fueled the concept of superiority attached to race, **racism**. Anderson notes that even before exploration and colonialism, wealthy Europeans defined themselves as superior to those living elsewhere. During exploration and colonialism, the nonwealthy in colonizing countries defined themselves as superior to the people in the colonies. Anderson explains:

> *Colonial racism was a major element in that conception of "Empire" which attempted to weld dynastic legitimacy and national community. It did so by generalizing a principle of innate, inherited superiority on which its own domestic position was (however shakily) based to the vastness of the overseas possessions, covertly (or not so covertly) conveying the idea that if, say, English lords were naturally superior to other Englishmen, no matter: these other Englishmen were no less superior to the subjected natives.*

The stories the commoners heard about the "mystical" and "savage" "others" fostered feelings of superiority. One of the easiest ways to define the "other" is through skin color because it is visible. In building our own identities, an easy way to determine who we are identifying against is by the color of skin.

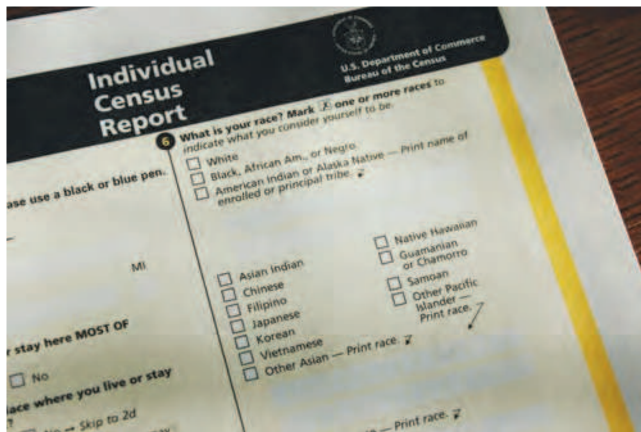


Figure 5.2
United States. Although biologically there is only one human race, we are constantly asked to choose race "boxes" for ourselves. This page of the 2000 United States Census asks the individual, "What is your race?" and directs the individual to "Mark one or more races to indicate what you consider yourself to be." © Marilyn Angel Wynn/Nativestock Pictures.

What society typically calls a "race" is in fact a combination of physical attributes in a population. Differences in skin color, eye color, and hair color are variations within the human race. The differences likely result from a long history of adaptation to different environments. Sunlight stimulates the production of *melanin*, which protects skin from damaging ultraviolet rays; the more melanin that is present, the darker the skin will be. Many believe that this helps to explain why, over the millennia, humans living in low latitudes—from tropical Africa through southern India to Australia—had darker skins. Another (not incompatible) theory holds that the production of vitamin D (a vitamin necessary to live a healthy life) is stimulated by the penetration of ultraviolet rays. Over the millennia, natural selection in areas with shorter days in winter and more indirect sun angles (the higher latitudes) favored those with the least amount of pigmentation, those who most easily absorb ultraviolet rays and in turn produce vitamin D.

Whatever may be said about the link between environment and the development of particular physical characteristics, it is important to recognize that skin color is *not* a reliable indicator of genetic closeness. The indigenous peoples of southern India, New Guinea, and Australia, for example, are about as dark-skinned as native Africans, but native Africans, southern Indians, and Aboriginal Australians are not closely related genetically (Fig. 5.3). No biological basis for dividing the human species into four or five groups based on skin color exists. Instead, racial categories are the product of how particular cultures have *viewed* skin color.

The racial distinctions used in a place today are drawn from categories of skin color that are rooted in the cultural history, power relationships, and politics of a place over the past few centuries. Geographer Benjamin Forest gives us a global overview of racial distinctions:

> *In Britain, the term "black" refers not only to Afro-Caribbeans and Africans, but also to individuals from the Indian subcontinent. In Russia, the term "black" is used to describe "Caucasians," that is, people such as Chechens from the Caucasus region. In many parts of Latin America, particularly Brazil, "racial" classification is really a kind of class placement, in which members of the wealthy upper class are generally considered as "white," members of the middle class as mixed race or Mestizo, and members of the lower class as "black." Indeed, because racial classifications are based on class standing and physical appearance rather than ancestry, "the designation of one's racial identity need not be the same as that of the parents, and siblings are often classified differently than one another."*

Field Note

"We were traveling in Darwin, Australia in 1994 and decided to walk away from the modern downtown for a few hours. Darwin is a multicultural city in the midst of a region of Australia that is largely populated by Aboriginals. At the bus stops on the outskirts of the city, Aboriginals reached Darwin to work in the city or to obtain social services only offered in the city. With a language barrier between us, we used hand gestures to ask the man in the white shirt and his son if we could take their picture. Gesturing back to us, they agreed to the picture. Our continued attempts at sign language soon led to much laughter among the people waiting for the next bus."

Figure 5.3
Darwin, Australia. © H. J. de Blij

In each of these cases, and in countless others, people have constructed racial categories to justify power, economic exploitation, and cultural oppression.

Racism in the United States

Unlike a local culture or ethnicity to which we may *choose* to belong, race is an identity that is more often *assigned*. Benjamin Forest explains, "In many respects, racial identity is not a self-consciously constructed collection of characteristics, but a condition which is imposed by a set of external social and historical constraints." In the United States, racial categories are imposed on people through residential segregation, racialized divisions of labor, and the categories of races recorded by the United States Census Bureau (and other government and nongovernmental agencies).

Definitions of races in the United States have historically focused on dividing the country into "white" and "nonwhite." Congress and the public have defined and redefined different groups of migrants as either "white" or "nonwhite" depending on the winds of political and economic change at the time. For example, when immigration to the United States shifted from northern and western Europe to southern and eastern Europe, the United States government and the public at large had to redefine what is "white" to allow people with olive-colored skin from the Mediterranean to count as "white."

Through migration and through differences in fertility rates among peoples in the United States, the country is becoming increasingly "nonwhite." How Americans define the "races" in the United States is increasingly being contested. In 2000, the United States Census categorized "Hispanic" as an ethnicity rather than a race. In the boxes provided by the United States Census Bureau, a person can now be "White, non-Hispanic," "White, Hispanic," "Black, non-Hispanic," "Black, Hispanic," and so forth (Table 5.1). Note that even with the new set of boxes, the American population can still be separated into "White, non-Hispanic" and "everyone else." According to the data projections provided in Table 5.2, the population of "everyone else" will surpass (in numbers) the "White, non-Hispanic" population around 2050.

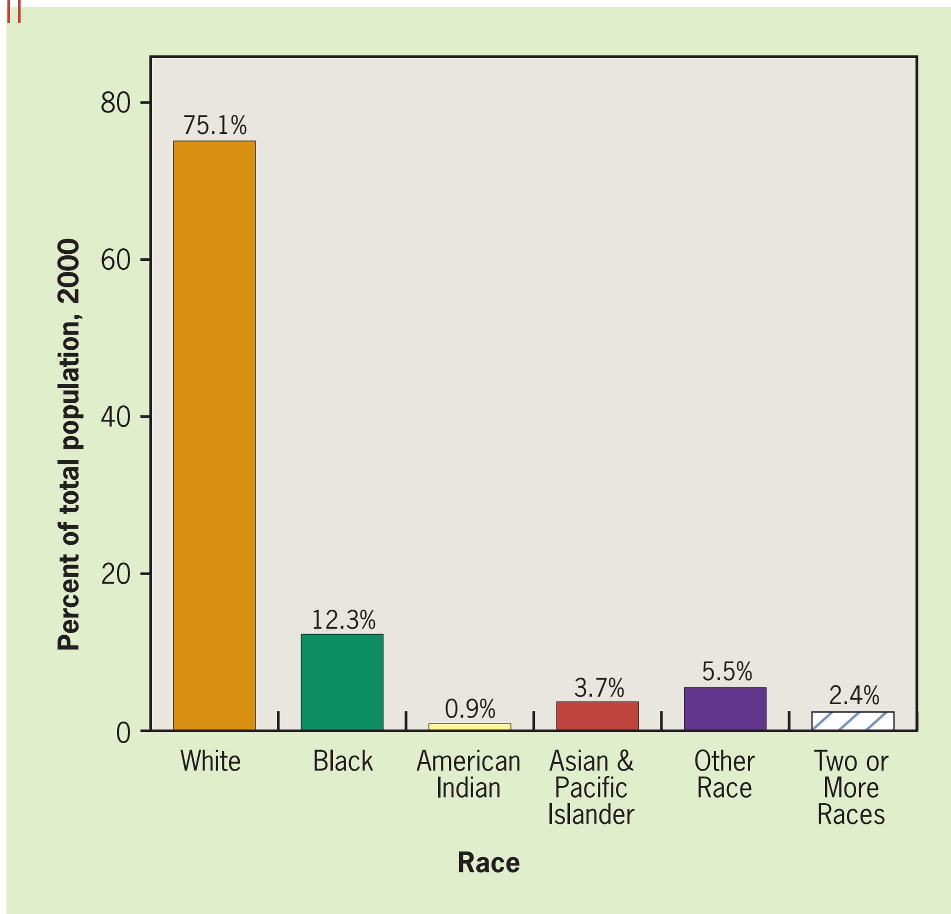
Residential Segregation

Racism has affected the distribution of African Americans, American Indians, and others throughout the history of the United States. During the past century, some of the most dramatic geographic impacts of racism are found at the neighborhood scale. Historically, states, cities, and towns passed laws outlining residential segregation, disallowing the migration of certain racial groups into neighborhoods. Laws passed during and after the civil rights movement of the 1960s in the United States made it illegal to legislate residential segregation. Despite these changes, many cities in the United States remain extremely segregated residentially.

Geographers Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton defined **residential segregation** as the "degree to which two or more groups live separately from one another, in different parts of the urban environment." Massey and

TABLE 5.1

Population of the United States by Race, 2000. In 2000, the United States Census Bureau allowed Americans to categorize themselves as one race or more than one race.



Courtesy of: United States Census Bureau, 2001.

Denton defined different kinds of residential segregation in a 1988 article, explaining that residential segregation is complex because:

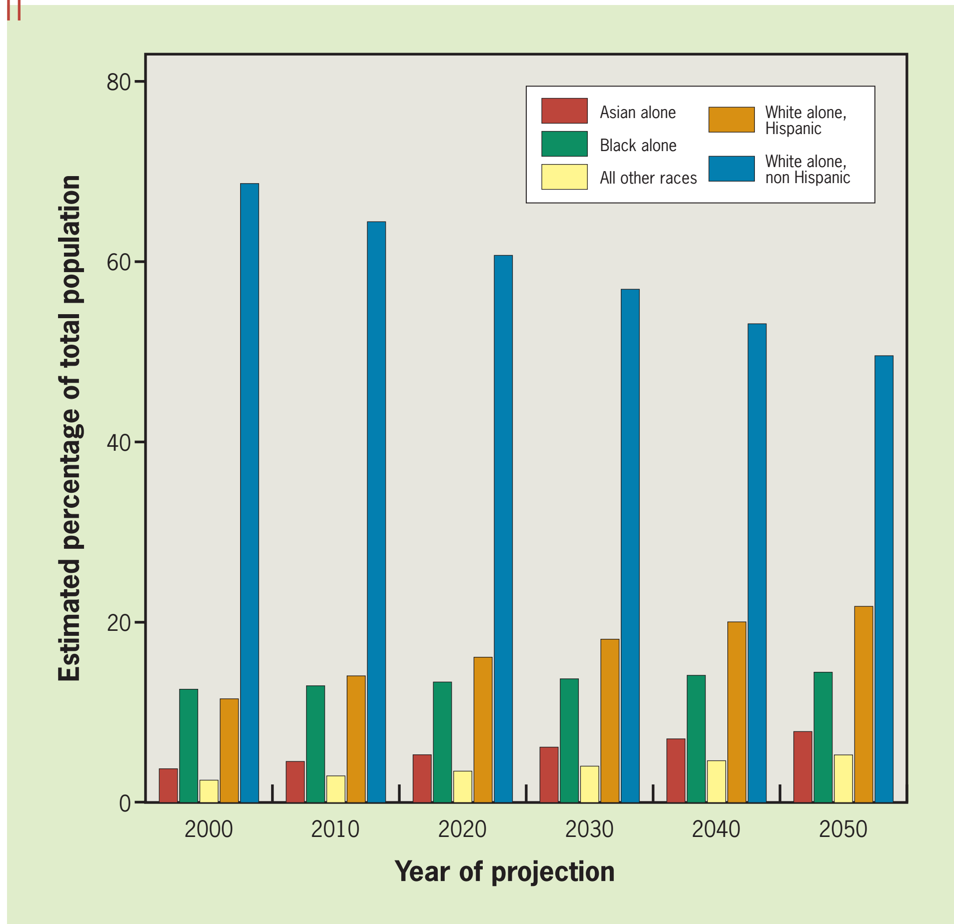
> *groups may live apart from one another and be "segregated" in a variety of ways. Minority members may be distributed so that they are overrepresented in some areas and underrepresented in others, varying on the characteristic of* evenness. *They may be distributed so that their* exposure *to majority members is limited by virtue of rarely sharing a neighborhood with them. They may be spatially* concentrated *within a very small area, occupying less physical space than majority members. They may be spatially* centralized, *congregating around the urban core, and occupying a more central location than the majority. Finally, areas of minority settlement may be tightly* clustered *to form one large contiguous enclave, or be scattered widely around the urban area.*

A special report issued by the United States Census Bureau in 2002 statistically analyzed, charted, and mapped residential segregation in metropolitan areas of the country, using the following five statistical measurements of segregation: evenness, exposure, concentrated, centralized, and clustered. These five measurements directly correspond to the five types of segregation outlined by Massey and Denton.

In the 2002 Census Bureau report, the authors reported on the levels of residential segregation in metropolitan areas of the United States between 1980 and 2000. They found that overall residential segregation by race/ethnicity is on the decline. For each of the four identities they researched—Amerian Indians and Alaska

TABLE 5.2

Estimated Percentage of United States Population by Race and Ethnicity until 2050. In 2000, the United States Census Bureau calculated race and Hispanic origin separately, allowing people to place themselves in one or more race categories plus one of two Hispanic origin categories (Hispanic or Non-Hispanic). According to the race categories provided in these Census estimates, starting in 2050, the "White, non-Hispanic" population will no longer be the majority population in the United States.



Data from: United States Census Bureau, 2001.

Natives; Asians, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders; Black/African Americans; and Hispanics/Latinos—they calculated five statististical measures of residential segregation.[1]

[1]We chose to use the term *Hispanic* in this chapter, recognizing that the term is as inaccurate a descriptor as "Latino" for people from Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. Whenever possible, we use the place from which people come, for example, Mexicans or Puerto Ricans, rather than the broad term *Hispanic* (you can read more of an argument for using this method in Daniel D. Arreola, ed., *Hispanic Spaces, Latino Places* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004). Similarly, we use the term *American Indian* rather than *Native American*, whenever possible using a tribal name, for example, Lakota Tribe or Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe rather than the broad term *American Indian*.

The researchers reported that all five measures of residential segregation showed a decrease in residential segregation for African Americans between 1980 and 1990 and another such decrease between 1990 and 2000. Residential segregation did increase in some of the 220 metropolitan areas that have at least 3 percent of the population who self-identify as African American. The most residentially segregated large metropolitan area for African Americans is Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Fig. 5.4), and close behind is Detroit, Michigan. For African Americans, the least residentially segregated large metropolitan area is Orange County, California, followed by San Jose, California.

When using an average of all five measures of segregation, the most residentially segregated metropolitan

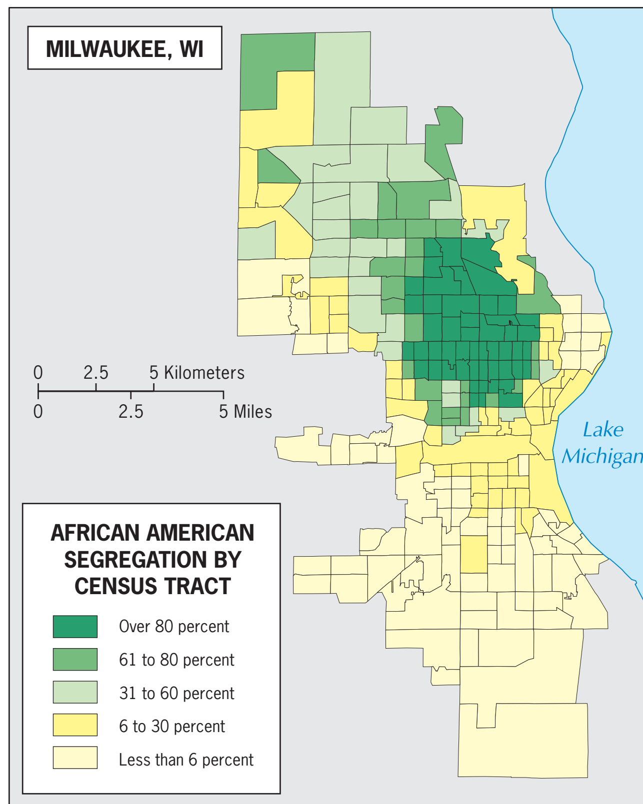


Figure 5.4
Residential Segregation of African Americans in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Percent African American by census tract. *Data from*: United States Census Bureau, 2000.

area for American Indians and Alaska Natives is Phoenix-Mesa, Arizona, and the least residentially segregated is Oklahoma City. In fact, the four least residentially segregated metropolitan areas (with at least 3 percent of the population American Indian) were all in Oklahoma.

Grouping Asians, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders, the researchers reported 30 metropolitan areas with at least 3 percent of the population fitting one of these identities. Based on calculations for all five statistics of residential segregation, the most residentially segregated metropolitan area for Asians/Pacific Islanders is San Francisco, followed by New York and Los Angeles. The least residentially segregated cities for Asians/Pacific Islanders are Naussau-Suffolk (New York) and Baltimore, Maryland (Fig. 5.5).

In addition, Baltimore is the least residentially segregated city for Hispanics/Latinos. The researchers found that the cities with the highest number of Hispanic residents experienced the greatest amount of residential segregation. They focused their analysis on the 36 large metropolitan areas with an Hispanic population accounting for at least 3 percent of the total urban population. The city with the greatest amount of residential segregation for Hispanics was New York.

The numbers and maps produced by the Census Bureau show the outcomes of a variety of stories, but they do not tell us the stories. Why does residential segregation persist in some places and not in others? In some of the most segregated cities, people know where the "other" lives and will purposefully choose to live in neighborhoods with people like them instead of the "other." Real estate agents and community leaders may consciously or subconsciously direct people to their "own" neighborhoods (blockbusting and redlining are discussed in Chapter 9). In some cities, race is related to class, making it difficult to afford a higher class neighborhood that is also populated by another race. In other cities, people may choose to live in a blighted neighborhood because it is their neighborhood, one they have helped create and that reflects their culture.

Identities across Scales

The way we make sense of ourselves in this globalized world is complex. We have different identities at different scales: individual, local, regional, national, and global. At the individual scale, we may see ourselves as a son, a brother, a golfer, or a student. At the local scale, we may see ourselves as members of a community, leaders of a campus organization, or residents of a neighborhood. At the regional scale, we may see ourselves as Southerners, as north Georgians, as Atlantans, as Yankees living in the South, or as migrants from another region of the world. At the national scale, we may see ourselves as American, as college students, or as members of a national political party (Fig. 5.6). At the global scale, we may see ourselves as Western, as educated, as relatively wealthy, or as free.

A common way geographers have envisioned an individual's various identities is to describe the identities as nested, one inside of the other; the appropriate identity is revealed at the appropriate scale. In this vein, each larger territorial extent of geographic space has its own corresponding set of identities. Today, more geographers see identities as fluid and intertwined rather than as neatly nested. Identities affect each other in and across scales, and the ways places and peoples interact across scales simultaneously affect identities within and across scales.

The Scale of New York City

One way scale affects identity is by helping shape what is seen—what identity is apparent to others and to ourselves at different scales. To demonstrate this idea, we can shift our focus from residential segregation in all large metropolitan areas in North America to one enormous metropolitan area, New York City. New York has a greater number and diversity of immigrants than any other city in the United States. At the scale of New York, we can see how identities change so that we are no longer

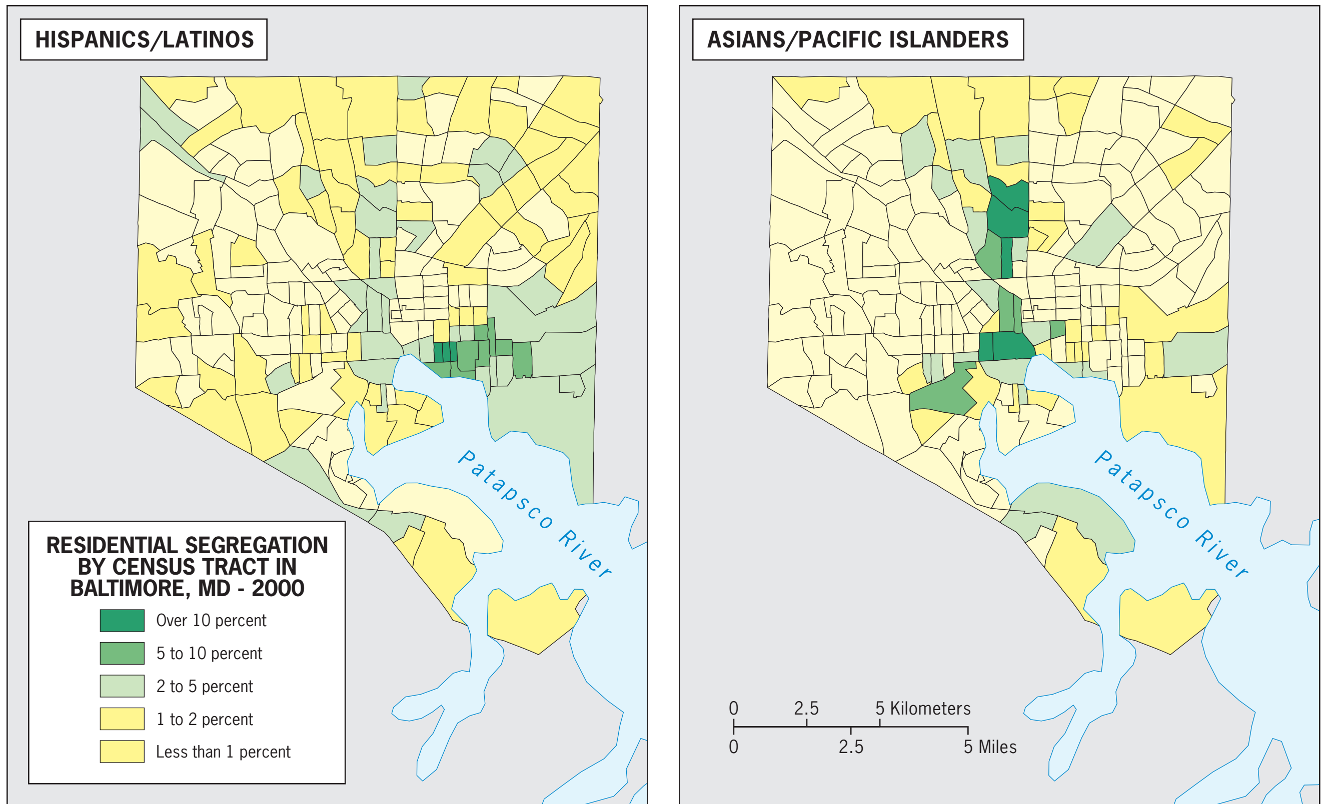


Figure 5.5

Residential Segregation of Hispanics/Latinos and Asians/Pacific Islanders in Baltimore, Maryland. Percent of Hispanics/Latinos and Asian/Pacific Islanders by census tract. *Data from*: United States Census Bureau, 2000.

Figure 5.6

Cedarburg, Wisconsin. A supporter of Barack Obama (who holds plans for Hillary Clinton on her sign) stands among supporters of John McCain at a McCain campaign event. © Robyn Beck/AFP/Getty Images.

Guest Field Note

Washington Heights, New York

Figure 5.7

It is a warm humid September morning, and the shops along Juan Pablo Duarte Boulevard are already bustling with customers. The Dominican flag waves proudly from each corner's traffic signal. Calypso and salsa music ring through the air, as do the voices of Dominican grandmothers negotiating for the best prices on fresh mangos and papayas. The scents of fresh *empanadas de yuca* and *pastelitos de pollo* waft from street vendor carts. The signage, the music, the language of the street are all in Spanish and call out to this Dominican community. I am not in Santo Domingo but in Washington Heights in upper Manhattan in New York City.

Whenever I exit the "A" train at 181st Street and walk toward St. Nicholas Avenue, renamed here Juan Pablo Duarte Boulevard for the founding father of the Dominican Republic, it is as if I have boarded a plane to the island. Although there are Dominicans living in most neighborhoods of New York's five boroughs, Washington Heights serves as the heart and soul of the community. Dominicans began settling in Washington Heights in 1965, replacing previous Jewish, African American, and Cuban residents through processes of invasion and succession. Over the past 40 years they have established a vibrant social and economic enclave that is replenished daily by transnational connections to their homeland. These transnational links are pervasive on the landscape, and include travel agencies advertising daily flights to Santo Domingo and Puerto Plata and stores handling *cargas, envios*, and *remesas* (material and financial remittances) found on every block, as well as *farmacias* (pharmacies) selling traditional medicines and *botanicas* selling candles, statues, and other elements needed by practitioners of Santería, a syncretistic blending of Catholicism and Yoruba beliefs practiced among many in the Spanish Caribbean.

Credit: Ines Miyares, Hunter College of the City University of New York

simply Hispanic (as the Census enumerates us); we are Puerto Rican or Mexican or Dominican from a certain neighborhood.

The people in New York who are defined by Census as Hispanic are much more diverse than this one box would indicate. In a chapter called "Changing Latinization of New York City," geographer Inés Miyares describes the importance of Caribbean culture in the Hispanic population of New York. The majority of New York's 2.2 million Hispanics are Puerto Ricans and Dominicans (together accounting for over 65 percent of Hispanics in the city). Historically, the Caribbean culture has made the greatest Hispanic imprint on New York's cultural landscape.

New immigrants to a city often move to areas occupied by older immigrant groups, in a process called **succession**. In New York, Puerto Ricans moved into the immigrant Jewish neighborhood of East Harlem in the early twentieth century, successively assuming a dominant presence in the neighborhood. With the influx of Puerto Ricans, new names for the neighborhood developed, and today it is frequently called Spanish Harlem or El Barrio (meaning "neighborhood" in Spanish). As the Puerto Rican population grew, new storefronts appeared, catering to the Puerto Rican population, such as travel agencies (specializing in flights to Puerto Rico), specialty grocery stores, and dance and music studios.

Like the immigrant flow from Puerto Rico, the large-scale immigrant flow from the Dominican Republic that began in 1965 resulted in a distinct neighborhood and cultural landscape. Dominican immigrants landed in the Washington Heights/Inwood neighorhood of upper Manhattan, a neighborhood previously occupied by immigrant Jews,

African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. Miyares reports that although a Jewish cultural landscape persists, including a Jewish university, synagogues, and Jewish delicatessens, the cultural landscape of Washington Heights is clearly Dominican—from store signs in Spanish to the presence of the colors of the Dominican flag (Fig. 5.7).

New York is unique because of the shear number and diversity of its immigrant population. The city's cultural landscape reflects its unique population. Miyares explains:

> *Since the overwhelming majority of New York City's population lives in apartments as opposed to houses, it is often difficult to discern the presence of an ethnic group by looking at residential housescapes. However every neighborhood has a principal commercial street, and this is often converted into an ethnic main street. It is commonly through business signs that immigrants make their presence known. Names of businesses reflect place names from the home country or key cultural artifacts. Colors of the national flag are common in store awnings, and the flags themselves and national crests abound in store décor. Key religious symbols are also common. Immigrants are so prevalent and diverse that coethnic proprietors use many kinds of visual clues to attract potential customers.*

Throughout the process, new immigrants need not change the facades of apartment buildings to reflect their culture. New immigrants focus their attention on the streetscapes, creating businesses to serve their new community and reflect their culture.

Popular belief in parts of New York holds that the Caribbean presence in the city is so strong that new Hispanic migrants to New York City simply acculturate into the Caribbean culture. Miyares cautions, however, that not all Hispanics in the city are categorically assimilated into the Caribbean culture. Rather, the local identities of the Hispanic populations in New York vary by "borough, by neighborhood, by era, and by source country and entry experience." In the last 10 to 15 years, the greatest growth in the Hispanic population of New York has been Mexican. Mexican migrants have settled in a variety of ethnic neighborhoods, with new Chinese immigrants in Brooklyn and with Puerto Ricans in East Harlem. The process of succession continues in New York, with Mexican immigrants moving into and succeeding other Hispanic neighborhoods, sometimes creating contention between and among the local cultures.

Taking a step back to the United States as a whole, we find that the Census Bureau defines over 2 million New Yorkers as Hispanic. In New York and in specific neighborhoods such as East Harlem, the word *Hispanic* does little to explain the diversity of the city. At these scales, different identities are claimed and assigned, identities that reflect local cultures and neighborhoods.

Recall the last time you were asked to check a box for your race. Does that box factor into how you make sense of yourself individually, locally, regionally, nationally, and globally?

HOW DO PLACES AFFECT IDENTITY, AND HOW CAN WE SEE IDENTITIES IN PLACES?

The processes of constructing identities and identifying against, just like any other social or cultural process, are rooted in places. When we construct identities, part of what we do is infuse place with meaning by attaching memories and experiences to the place. This process of infusing a place "with meaning and feeling" is what geographer Gillian Rose and countless other geographers refer to as developing a sense of place. We develop a **sense of place**, and like identities, our sense of place is fluid; it changes as the place changes and as we change.

What is of particular interest to geographers is how people define themselves through places. Our sense of place becomes part of our identity, and our identity affects the ways we define and experience place. Rose explains:

> *One way in which identity is connected to a particular place is by a feeling that you belong to that place. It's a place in which you feel comfortable, or at home, because part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place. The geographer Relph, for example, has even gone so far as to claim that "to be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have to know your place."*

The uniqueness of a place can become a part of who we are.

Ethnicity and Place

Ethnicity offers a good example of how identities affect places and how places affect identities. The idea of **ethnicity** as an identity stems from the notion that people are closely bounded, even related, in a certain place over time. The word *ethnic* comes from the ancient Greek word *ethnos*, meaning "people" or "nation." Geographer Stuart Hall explains, "Where people share not only a culture but an *ethnos*, their belongingness or binding into group and place, and their sense of cultural identity, are very strongly defined." Hall explains that ethnic identity is "historically constructed like all cultural identities" and is often considered natural because it implies ancient relations among a people over time.

This definition may sound simple, but the concept of ethnicity is not. In the United States, for example, a group of people may define their ethnicity as Swiss American. Switzerland is a state in Europe. The people in Switzerland speak four major languages and other minor ones. The strongest identities in Switzerland are most often at the *canton* level—a small geographically defined area that distinguishes cultural groups within the state. So, which Swiss are Swiss Americans? The way Swiss Americans see Switzerland as part of who they are *may not exist in Switzerland proper* (Fig. 5.8). Ethnicity sways and shifts across scales, across places, and across time. A map showing all recognizable ethnic areas would look like a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle with thousands of often-overlapping pieces—some no larger than a neighborhood, others as large as entire countries.

Ethnic identity is greatly affected by scale and place. Several years ago, the *Washington Post* published an article about the thriving South Asian community in Fairfax County, Virginia, a suburb of Washington, D.C. In South Asia, the countries of Pakistan and India have a history of animosity, and they identify themselves by region within a country and, more powerfully, by country within the region. However, in Fairfax County, Virginia, a world apart from India and Pakistan, many South Asians identify with each other. A South Asian video rental store rents both Pakistani and Indian movies. South Asian grocery stores carry foods from both countries and regions throughout them. The geographical context affeced the South Asian identity.

Figure 5.8
New Glarus, Wisconsin. The town of New Glarus was established by immigrants from Switzerland in 1845. The Swiss American town takes pride in its history and culture, as the artwork on this sign welcoming visitors reveals. © New Glarus Chamber of Commerce.

Cultural groups often invoke ethnicity when race cannot explain differences and antagonism between groups. Just as "racial conflicts" are rooted in perceptions of distinctiveness based on differences in economics, power, language, religion, lifestyle, or historical experience, so too are "ethnic conflicts." A conflict is often called ethnic when a racial distinction cannot easily be made. For example, using physical appearance and skin color, an observer cannot distinguish the ethnic groups in many of the conflicts around the world. The adversaries in recent conflicts in Northern Ireland, Spain, the former Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka, Ivory Coast, or Rwanda cannot be identified racially; so, the parties in the conflicts use "ethnicity" to identify themselves and others.

Ethnicity is also invoked when a distinct cultural group is clustered in one area. Thus, the term *ethnicity* is often reserved for a small, cohesive, culturally linked group of people who stand apart from the surrounding culture (often as a result of migration). Like other aspects of culture, ethnicity is a dynamic phenomenon that must be understood in terms of the geographic context and scales in which it is situated.

Chinatown in Mexicali

The border region between the United States and Mexico is generally seen as a cultural meeting point between Mexicans and Anglo Americans. The ethnic composition of people in the border region is more varied than Mexican and Anglo. Through migration, people from Germany, Russia, India, China, Japan, and countless other places also live in the cities and rural areas of the United States–Mexico border region. Some of the migrants to this region have blended into the larger community over time, and others have created distinct patterns of settlement and ethnically imprinted cultural landscapes.

The town of Mexicali is the capital of the State of Baja California (located in Mexico, just south of the State of California in the United States). Not far from the central business district of Mexicali lies one of the largest Chinatowns in Mexico. A 1995 study of the Mexicali Chinatown by geographer James R. Curtis showed that it has been the crucible of Chinese ethnicity in the Mexicali Valley throughout much of the twentieth century. Chinese began arriving in 1902, and by 1919 more than 11,000 Chinese were either permanent or temporary residents of the valley. They established a thriving Chinatown in the

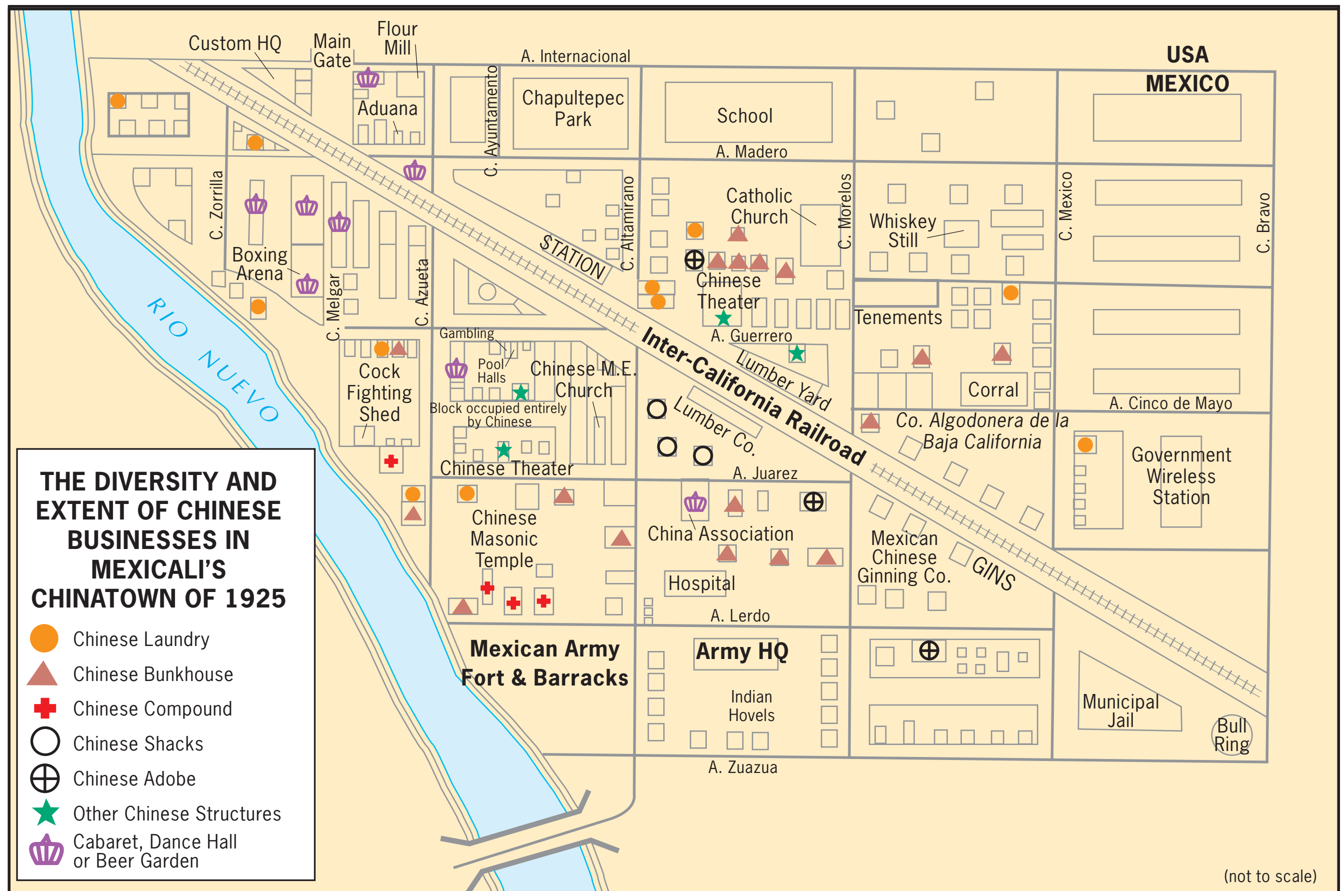


Figure 5.9

Chinatown in Mexicali, Mexico. The diversity and extent of Chinese businesses in Mexicali's Chinatown of 1925 is shown in this map. *Adapted with permission from*: J. R. Curtis, "Mexicali's Chinatown," *The Geographical Review*, 85 (1995), p. 344.

heart of Mexicali that served as the uncontested center of Chinese life in the region for decades (Fig. 5.9).

The Chinese of Mexicali were prominent players in the social and economic life of the city during the twentieth century. They owned and operated restaurants, retail trade establishments, commercial land developments, currency exchanges, and more. By 1989 they owned nearly 500 commercial or service properties. In an effort to sustain their cultural traditions and add to the cultural life of the city, they established the China Association, which plays an active role in Mexicali's social and civic life.

Mexicali's Chinatown is experiencing a transformation, as Chinese residents have dispersed to the edges of the city and beyond (many because they can afford to move out of town now). Relatively few Chinese continue to live in the city's Chinatown; some have even moved across the border to Calexico (a city of 27,000 on the California side of the border), while retaining business interests in Mexicali. Yet Mexicali's Chinatown continues to play an important symbolic and functional role for individuals of Chinese ancestry in the area, who are still shaping the region's social and economic geography. Even in regions where an ethnic population is small in number, if they have a group identity and consciousness, they can have a lasting effect on the cultural landscape.

Identity and Space

Another way of thinking about place is to consider it as a cross section of space. Doreen Massey and Pat Jess define **space** as "social relations stretched out" and **place** as "particular articulations of those social relations as they have come together, over time, in that particular location." Part of the social relations of a place are the embedded assumptions about ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, about what certain groups "should" and "should not" do socially, economically, politically, even domestically. Geographers who study identities, such as gender, ethnicity, race, and sexuality, realize that when people make places, they do so in the context of surrounding social relationships. We can, for example, create places that are **gendered**—places designed for women or for men. A building can be constructed with the goal of creating gendered spaces within, or a building can become gendered by the way people use it and interact within it.

Sexuality and Space

Sexuality is part of humanity. Just as gender roles are culturally constructed, so too do cultures decide what is "normal" sexually. In their installment on "Sexuality and Space" in *Geography in America at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, geographers Glen Elder, Lawrence Knopp, and Heidi Nast argue that most social science (across disciplines) is written in a heteronormative way. This means that the default subject in the minds of the academics who write studies is heterosexual, white, and male. These geographers and many others are working to find out how the contexts of local cultures and the flow of global culture and politics affect the sexual identities of people—beyond the heteronormative.

Geographers' initial forays into the study of sexuality focused largely on the same kinds of questions posed by those who first took up the study of race, gender, and ethnicity: where people with shared identity cluster, what they do to create a space for themselves, and what kinds of problems they have. For example, early studies examined gay neighborhoods in San Francisco and London, focusing on how gay men created the spaces as their own and what the space means to their identities. Specific studies have also focused on the role of gay pride parades in creating communities and the political struggle for access to other parades (such as St. Patrick's Day parades in some cities). Other studies in urban geography examine the role gays and lesbians play in the gentrification of neighborhoods in city centers (a topic we revisit in Chapter 9).

More recent studies on gay and lesbian neighborhoods question the purpose and goal of the neighborhoods. Previous studies all assumed that gay and lesbian neighborhoods are built in opposition to the dominant culture. According to geographer Natalie Oswin, newer studies see gay and lesbian neighborhoods as "extending the norm, not transgressing or challenging it." In a 2006 study, geographer Catherine Jean Nash studied Toronto's gay village and the debate over the meaning of homosexual identity and how that played out in the Toronto neighborhood.

Today, geographers studying sexuality are focusing not only on the distributions and experiences of people in places but also on the theories behind the experiences—the theories that explain and inform our understanding of sexuality and space. Many of the geographers who study sexuality today are employing queer theory in their studies. By calling the theory **queer theory**, Elder, Knopp, and Nast explain that social scientists (in geography and other disciplines) are appropriating a commonly used negative word in society and turning it to describe a theory that "highlights the contextual nature" of opposition to the heteronormative and focuses on the "political engagement" of "queers" with the heteronormative. Geographers are also concentrating on extending fieldwork on sexuality and space beyond the Western world of North America and Europe to the rest of the world, exploring and explaining the local contexts of political engagement.

In 2000, the United States Census Bureau counted the number of same-sex households in the United States. These

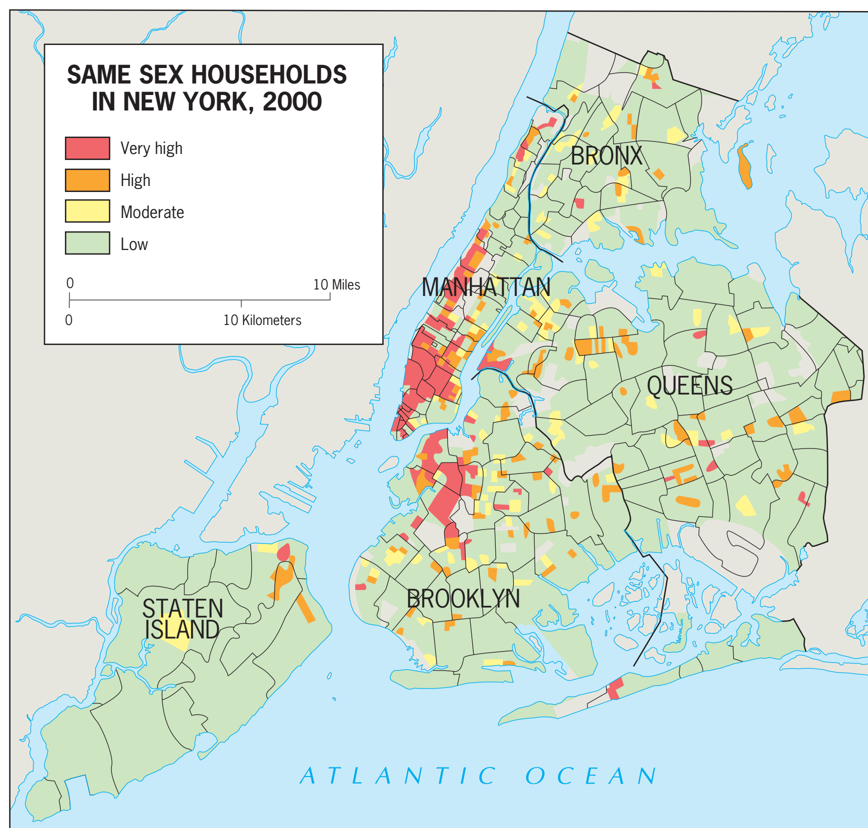


Figure 5.10
Same Sex Households in New York, 2000. The map shows the concentrations of same-sex households in New York, by census tract. *Data from*: United States Census Bureau, 2000.

data, by census tract (a small area in cities and larger area in rural America) made it possible for Gary Gates and Jason Ost to publish *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas*. Their detailed maps of major cities in the United States show concentrations of same-sex households in certain neighborhoods of cities, such as Adams-Morgan and DuPont Circle in Washington, D.C., and the West Village and Chelsea in Manhattan (Fig. 5.10). Taking the Census data by county, we can see a pattern of same-sex households in the United States, with concentrations in cities with well-established gay and lesbian neighborhoods. And we can also see the presence of same-sex households throughout the country, throughout states where same-sex unions are illegal.

In the 2000 Census, the government tallied the number of *households* where a same-sex couple (with or without children) lived. Study the map of same-sex households by census tract in Figure 5.10. What gay men and lesbian women are not being counted on this map? How would the map change if sexuality were one of the "boxes" *every* person filled out on the census?

HOW DOES GEOGRAPHY REFLECT AND SHAPE POWER RELATIONSHIPS AMONG GROUPS OF PEOPLE?

Power relationships (assumptions and structures about who is in control and who has power over others) affect identities directly and the nature of those affects depends on the geographical context in which they are situated. Power relationships also affect cultural landscapes—determining what is seen and what is not. Massey and Jess explain that the cultural landscape, the visible human imprint on the landscape, reflects power relationships. "The identities of both places and cultures, then, have to be made. And they may be made in different, even conflicting ways. And in all this, power will be central: the power to win the contest over how the place should be seen, what meaning to give it; the power, in other words, to construct the dominant imaginative geography, the identities of place and culture."

Power relationships do much more than shape the cultural landscape. Power relationships can also subjugate entire groups of people, enabling society to enforce ideas about the ways people should behave or where people should be welcomed or turned away—thus altering the distribution of peoples. Policies created by governments can limit the access of certain peoples—for example, the Jim Crow laws in the United States that separated "black" spaces from "white" spaces, right down to public drinking fountains. Even without government support, *people create places where they limit the access of other peoples*. For example, in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants have defined certain neighborhoods as excluding the "other" through the painting of murals, the hanging of bunting, and the painting of curbs (Fig. 5.11). In major cities in the United States, local governments do not create or enforce laws defining certain spaces as belonging to members of a certain gang, but the people themselves create spaces, much like the people of Belfast do, through graffiti, murals, and building colors.

Just Who Counts?

The statistics governments collect and report reflect the power relationships involved in defining what is valued and what is not. Think back to the Constitution of the United

Figure 5.11

Belfast, Northern Ireland. Signs of the conflict in Northern Ireland mark the cultural landscape throughout Belfast. In the Ballymurphy area of Belfast, where Catholics are the majority population, a woman and her children walk past a mural in support of the Irish Republican Army. The mural features images of women who lost their lives in the conflict, including Maureen Meehan, who was shot by the British Army and Anne Parker, who died when the bomb she planned to detonate exploded prematurely. © AP/Wide World Photos.

States prior to the Fourteenth Amendment, when the government enumerated a black person as three-fifths of a white person. Until 1924, the U.S. government did not recognize the right of all American Indians to vote (even though the Fifteenth Amendment recognized the right to vote regardless of race in 1870). The U.S. government separated American Indians into those who were "civilized" enough to be citizens and those who were not ("Indians not taxed") until 1924 when it recognized the citizenship of all American Indians born in the United States. Not until 1920 did States ratify the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, recognizing the right of all Americans to vote, regardless of sex. Despite progress in counting people of all races, ethnicities, and sex, some charge that the United States Census Bureau continues to undercount minority populations (see Chapter 2), and throughout the world, the work of women is largely undervalued and uncounted.

When the United States and other *state* governments began to count the value of goods and services produced within state borders, they did so with the assumption that the work of the household is reserved for women and that this work does not contribute to the productivity of the state's economy. The most commonly used statistic on productivity, the gross national income (the monetary worth of what is produced within a country plus income received from investments outside the country), does not evaluate work in the home. The gross national income (GNI) includes neither the unpaid labor of women in the household nor, usually, the work done by rural women in less developed countries.

Scholars estimate that if women's productivity in the household alone were given a dollar value (for example, by calculating what it would cost to hire people to perform these tasks), the world's total annual GNI (that is, the gross national income for all countries combined) would grow by about one-third. In poorer countries, women produce more than half of all the food; they also build homes, dig wells, plant and harvest crops, make clothes, and do many other things that are not recorded in official statistics as being economically productive (Fig. 5.12).

Despite these conditions, the number of women in the "official" labor force is rising. In 1990, the United Nations estimated that there were 828 million women in the labor force. All but one geographic region showed increases between 1970 and 1990: in the wealthier countries of the world, from 35 to 39 percent of the labor force; in Middle and South America, from 24 to 29 percent. In East and Southeast Asia the figure rose very slightly, to 40 and 35 percent, respectively. In Subsaharan Africa, the percentage of women in the labor force actually declined from 39 percent in 1970 to 37 percent in the 1990s. These statistics reveal that, in stagnating or declining economies, women are often the first to suffer from job contraction.

Even though women are in the official labor force in greater proportions than ever before, they continue to be paid less and have less access to food and education than men in nearly all cultures and places around the world. A 2004 report from the United Nations stated that two-thirds of the 880 million illiterate adults in the world are women and that women account for 70 percent of the world's poorest citizens.

In most of Asia and virtually all of Africa, the great majority of wage-earning women still work in agriculture. In Subsaharan Africa, nearly 80 percent of wage-earning women work on plantations and farms; in Asia, the figure is over 50 percent. Although the number of women working in industries in these areas is comparatively small, it is rising. The increase has been slowed by the global economic downturn of the early 2000s, as well as by mechanization, which leads to job reductions and hence to layoffs of women workers. In the *maquiladoras* of northern Mexico (see Chapter 10), for example, many women workers lost their jobs when labor markets contracted between 2001 and 2002.

As the foregoing discussion has highlighted, many women engage in "informal" economic activity—that is, private, often

Figure 5.12
South Korea. The women in this photo sat near one of the ancient temples in southern Korea, selling the modest output from their own market gardens. This activity is one part of the informal economy, the "uncounted" economy in which women play a large role. © Alexander B. Murphy.

Guest Field Note

One of the leading causes of mortality and morbidity among children under the age of five in developing countries is waterborne disease. My research has focused on building an understanding of the factors that contribute to the vulnerability of young children to this significant public health problem. I have conducted my research in communities located in the relatively remote Karakoram Range of northern Pakistan. Of particular interest to me is the microenvironment of water-related disease risk, and in particular, the factors at the household scale that make the prevalence of childhood illness more or less severe. One of the primary methodological strategies that I employ in this research involves household microstudies, which entail in-depth interviews with family members (primarily mothers who are the principal child health providers), child health histories, and structured observations. One of the most important findings of this research in mountain communities, in my opinion, is that the education, social support, and empowerment of women is critical to breaking the cycle of disease impacts and to ensuring long-term child survival.

Figure 5.13

Credit: Sarah J. Halvorson, University of Montana

home-based activity such as tailoring, beer brewing, food preparation, and soap making. Women who seek to advance beyond subsistence but cannot enter the formal economic sector often turn to such work. In the migrant slums on the fringes of many cities, informal economic activity is the mainstay of the community. As with subsistence farming, however, it is difficult to assess the number of women involved, their productivity, or their contribution to the overall economy.

Statistics showing how much women produce and how little their work is valued are undoubtedly interesting. Yet, the work geographers who study gender have done goes far beyond the accumulation of such data. Over the last two decades, geographers have asked why society talks about women and their roles in certain ways and how these ideas, heard and represented throughout our lives, affect the things we say, the ways we frame questions, and the answers we derive. For example, Ann Oberhauser and her co-authors explained that people in the West tend to think that women are employed in the textile and jewelry-making fields in poorer countries because the women in these regions are "more docile, submissive, and tradition bound" than women in the core. A geographer studying gender asks where these ideas about women come from and how the ideas themselves bind women to certain jobs and certain positions in society—key elements in making places what they are.

Vulnerable Populations

Power relations can have a fundamental impact on which populations or areas are particularly vulnerable to disease, death, injury, or famine. Geographers use mapping and spatial analysis to predict and explain what populations or people will be impacted most by natural hazards, such as earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, and tsunamis or by environmental policies. Vulnerability theory tells us that not all people are affected in the same way by social, political, economic, or environmental change. Rather, the nature and spatial character of existing social structures influence which populations are the most vulnerable.

Fieldwork is the best way to understand how power structures in society create vulnerable groups and how those vulnerable groups are affected by change. Through fieldwork and interviews, geographers can see differences in vulnerability within groups of people.

Geographer Sarah Halvorson studied differences in the vulnerabilities of children in northern Pakistan. She examined vulnerability of children to diarrheal diseases by paying attention to "constructions of gender, household politics, and gendered relationships that perpetuate inherent inequalities and differences between men and women and within and between social groups."

Halvorson studied 30 families, 15 of whom had low frequency of diarrhea and dysentery and 15 of whom had high frequency of these diseases. Through her fieldwork, Halvorson came to understand that several tangible resources (such as income and housing) and several intangible resources (including social status and position within the family structure) all factored into the vulnerability of children to diarrheal diseases in northern Pakistan. Halvorson found that people with higher incomes generally had lower disease rates, but that income was not the only factor (Fig. 5.13). The least vulnerable children and women were those who had higher incomes and an established social network of support. In cases where income was low, if a woman had a strong social network, she could still help her children into the low disease group.

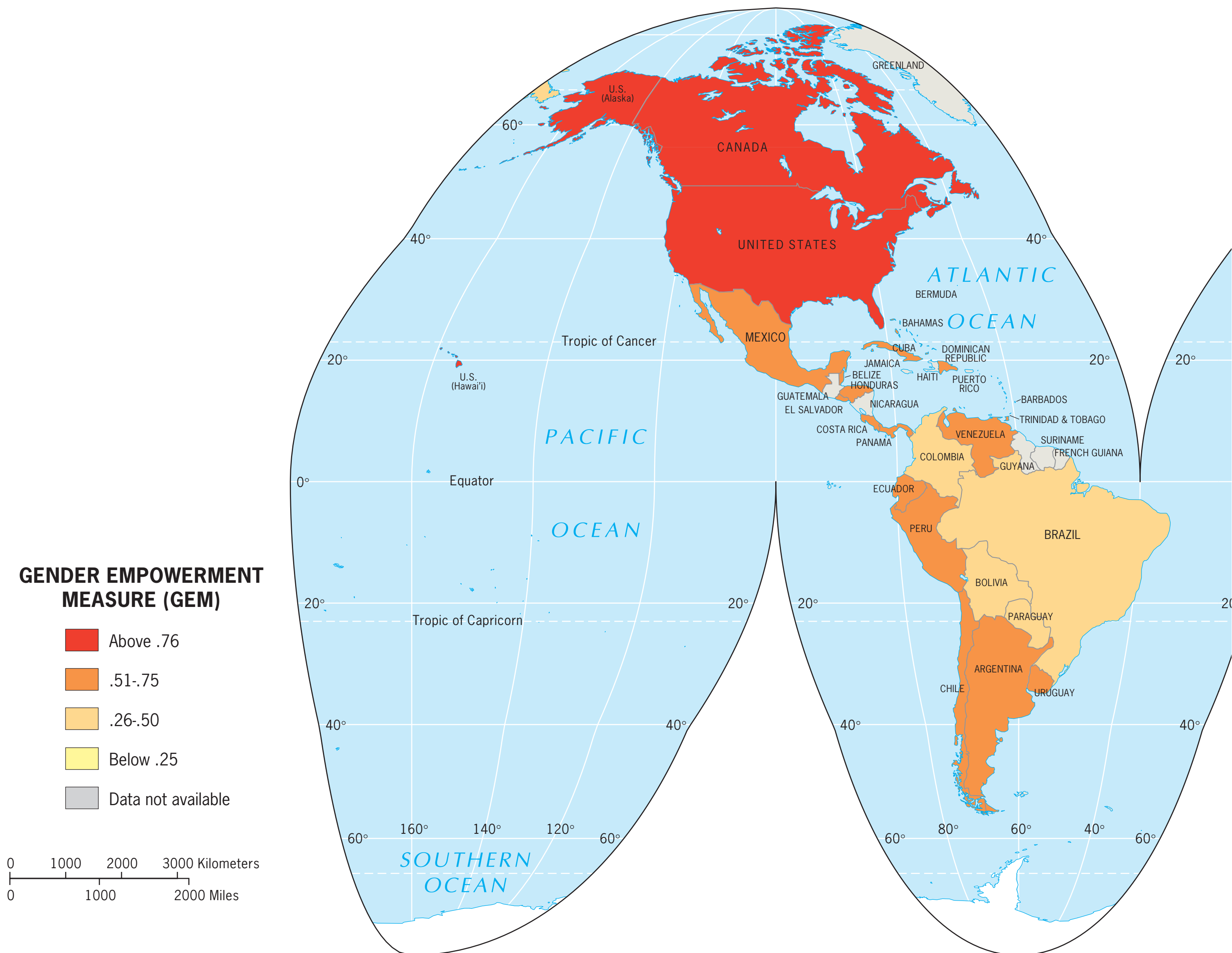


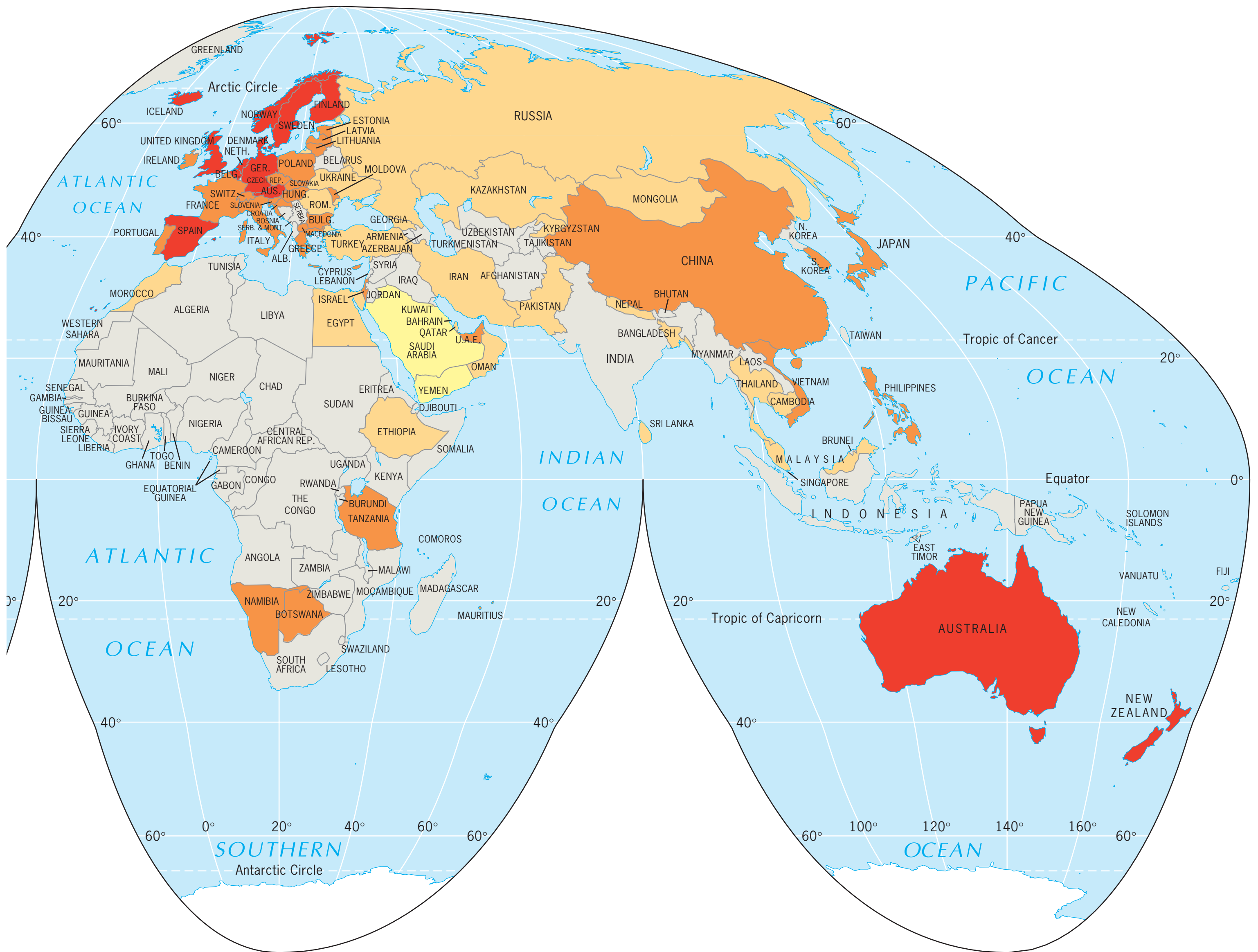
Figure 5.14

Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) by country. The GEM value is derived from a number of statistics measuring womens' access to political and economic decision making. Data from: United Nations Development Program, Human Development Report 2007–2008.

Geographer Joseph Oppong recognized that the spatial analysis of a disease can reveal what populations are most vulnerable in a country. In North America and Europe, HIV/AIDS is much more prevalent among homosexual and bisexual men than among heterosexual men and women. In Subsaharan Africa, women have much higher rates of HIV/AIDS than men. Oppong explains that "AIDS as a global problem has unique local expressions that reflect the spatial distribution and social networks of vulnerable social groups."

According to Oppong, in most of Subsaharan Africa, HIV/AIDS rates are highest for women in urban areas, and for women who work as sex workers. In Ghana, HIV/AIDS rates were lower for women in the urban area of Accra. Oppong postulates that women in Accra have lower HIV/AIDS rates because they have greater access to health care than women in rural areas. Women in rural areas who were not treated for malaria had higher incidences of HIV/AIDS, according to his research. Oppong also found that women in polygamous relationships in the Muslim part of northern Ghana had lower HIV/AIDS rates. Oppong offers two theories as to why women Muslims in polygamous relationships had lower HIV/AIDS rates: first, Muslims have a cultural practice of avoiding sexual promiscuity, and second, Muslims in Ghana practice circumcision, which helps lower the rate of HIV/AIDS transmission in that part of the country.

Fieldwork helps geographers apply vulnerability theory to understand how existing spatial structures, power relationships and social networks affect the impacts of disease and hazards around the world.



Women in Subsaharan Africa

Migration flows, birth rates, and child mortality rates affect the gender composition of cities, states, and regions. Some regions of the world have become male-dominated, whereas other regions of the world have become female-dominated—at least in number.

Much of Subsaharan Africa, especially rural areas, is dominated numerically by women. In this region of the world, most rural to urban migrants are men. Domosh and Seager explain that men leave rural areas to work in heavy industry and mines in the cities, "while women are left behind to tend the farms and manage the household economy. Indeed parts of rural South Africa and Zimbabwe have become feminized zones virtually depopulated of men." Although women populate much of rural Subsaharan Africa, society and governments work in conjunction to subjugate the women. Women in Subsaharan Africa have heavy responsibilities, few rights, and little say (Fig. 5.14). They produce an estimated 70 percent of the realm's food, almost all of it without the aid of modern technology. Their backbreaking hand-cultivation of corn and other staples is an endless task. As water supplies decrease, the exhausting walk to the nearest pump gets longer (Fig. 5.15). Firewood is being cut at ever-greater distances from the village, and the task of hauling it home becomes more difficult every year. As the men leave for the towns, sometimes to marry other wives and have other children, the women left in the villages struggle for survival.

Field Note

"A woman and her daughter came walking along the path to a village near Kanye, Botswana, carrying huge, burlap-wrapped bundles on their heads. Earlier in the day, I had seen the women fetching water and working in the field to weed the maize (corn). Later in the day, I saw them with batches of firewood that must have weighed 60 pounds or more. In the evening, they would cook the meal. From the village, I could hear men arguing and laughing."

Figure 5.15
Kanye, Botswana. © H. J. de Blij

Even though a woman in this position becomes the head of a household, when she goes to the bank for a loan she is likely to be refused; banks throughout much of Africa do not lend money to rural women. Not having heard from her husband for years and having reared her children, she might wish to apply for title to the land she has occupied and farmed for decades, but land titles usually are not awarded to women. Only a small percentage of African women have the legal right to own property.

Young girls soon become trapped in the cycle of female poverty and overwork. Often there is little money for school fees; what is available first goes to pay for the boys. As soon as she can carry anything at all, the girl goes with her mother to weed the fields, bring back firewood, or fetch water. She will do so for an average of perhaps 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, during all the years she remains capable of working. In East Africa, cash crops such as tea are sometimes called "men's crops" because the men trade in what the women produce. When the government of Kenya tried to increase the productivity on the tea plantations in the 1970s and 1980s, the government handed out bonuses—not to the women who did all of the work but to the men who owned title to the land!

Dowry Deaths in India

On a 2004 *Oprah!* show, the talk show queen interviewed journalist Lisa Ling about her travels through India and her reports on dowry deaths in India. The Chicago audience looked stunned to discover that thousands of girls in India are still betrothed through arranged marriages and that in some extreme cases, disputes over the price to be paid by the bride's family to the groom's father (the dowry) have led to the death of the bride. The bride may be brutally punished (often burned) or killed for her father's failure to fulfill the marriage agreement. Only a small fraction of India's girls are involved in **dowry deaths**, but the practice is not declining. According to the Indian government, in 1985, the number was 999; in 1987, 1786 women died at the hands of vengeful husbands or in-laws; in 1989, 2436 perished; in 2001, more than 7000 women died; and in 2006, it was reported that 7618 women died from dowry deaths. These figures report only confirmed dowry deaths; many more are believed to occur but are reported as kitchen accidents or other fatal domestic incidents.

The power relationships that placed women below men in India cannot be legislated away. Government entities in India (federal as well as State) have set up legal aid offices to help women who fear dowry death and seek assistance. In 1984, the national legislature passed the Family Courts Act, creating a network of "family courts" to hear domestic cases, including dowry disputes. But the judges tend to be older males, and their chief objective, according to women's support groups, is to hold the family together—that is, to force the threatened or battered woman back into the household. Hindu culture attaches great importance to the family structure, and the family courts tend to operate on this principle.

Recognizing that movement away from arranged marriages and dowries among the Indian population is slow in coming, the journalist and talk show host took the issue of dowry deaths *to the global scale*—to generate activism in the West and create change at the local scale in India. Ling explained that the place of women in India has changed little. She described women as a financial burden on the bride's family, who must save for a sizable dowry to marry off the woman. Ling describes the dowry as a financial transaction, through marriage the burden of the woman moves from the bride's

family to her husband's family. As the American media typically does when talking about social ills, Winfrey and Ling interviewed a woman in India to show that global change can help make local change possible. Nisha Sharma was to marry in front of 1500 guests in a town just outside of the capital of New Delhi. On her wedding day, the groom's family demanded $25,000 in addition to the numerous luxury items they had already received as dowry (including washing machines, a flat screen TV, and a car) (Fig. 5.16). Nisha's father refused to pay, the man's family became violent, and Nisha called the police on her cell phone. She has become a local hero and is also an example in the West of how to beat the dowry deaths using global technology, in this case, a cell phone.

Unfortunately, not all women in India (or in many other places around the world) feel empowered enough to stand up to injustices committed against women, nor do they have education, paying jobs, and cell phones (Nisha Sharma had all three). Despite the laws against dowry deaths, women remain disempowered in much of Indian society. Some pregnant women undergo gender-determining tests (ultrasound and amniocentesis) and elect to have abortions when the fetus is a girl. Girls who make it to birth may suffer female infanticide as many parents fear the cost of dowries and extend little social value to girls. In all of these cases, moving issues to the global scale has the potential to draw attention to the social ills. Yet, for the social ills to be cured, power in social relationships must shift at the family, local, regional, and national scales.

Shifting Power Relationships among Ethnic Groups

In Chapter 4, we discussed local cultures that define themselves ethnically. The presence of local ethnic cultures can be seen in the cultural landscapes of places we discussed in Chapter 4—notably Little Sweden in Kansas or the Italian North End in Boston. In many places, more than one ethnic group lives in a place, creating unique cultural landscapes and revealing how power relationships factor into the ways ethnicities are constructed, revised, and solidified, where ethnic groups live, and who is subjugating whom.

Three urban geographers—John Frazier, Florence Margai, and Eugene Tettey-Fio—tracked the flow of people and shifts in power relationships among the multiple ethnicities that have lived in Alameda County, California, in their book *Race and Place: Equity Issues in Urban America*. The county borders San Francisco and includes the geographic areas of Berkeley and Oakland. The region was populated mainly by Hispanics prior to the Gold Rush. After 1850, migrants from China came to the county. The first Asian migrants to the county lived in a dispersed settlement pattern, but the first African Americans lived in a segregated area of the county.

A common story from areas with multiple ethnicities is an ebb and flow of acceptance. When the economy is booming, residents are generally more accepting of each other. When the economy takes a downturn, residents often begin to resent each other and can blame the "other" for their economic hardship (for example, "they" took all the jobs). In Alameda County, much of the population resented Chinese migrants when the economy took a downturn in the 1870s. The first Chinese Exclusion Act (prohibiting immigration of Chinese) was passed in 1882. Chinese exclusion efforts persisted for decades afterward in Alameda County and resulted in the city of Oakland moving Chinatown several times.

During the 1910s, the economy of the region grew again, but the city of Oakland limited the Chinese residents to Chinatown, using ethnic segregation to keep them apart from the rest of the population. Frazier, Margai, and

Figure 5.16
Noida, India. Nisha Sharma sits in front of the dowry her father planned to give her groom's family. Sharma made national and global headlines when she refused to marry her groom after his family demanded an even larger dowry. © AP/Wide World Photos.

Tettey-Fio described how Oakland's Chinatown was dictated by law and not elected by choice:

> *At a time when the Chinese were benefiting from a better economy, the "whites only" specifications of local zoning and neighborhood regulations forced separatism that segregated the Oakland Chinese into the city's Chinatown. What today is sometimes presented as an example of Chinese unity and choice was, in fact, place dictated by law.*

Until World War II, the Chinese lived segregated from the rest of Oakland's population. When the war began, residents of Alameda County, like much of the rest of the United States, focused on the Japanese population in the county, persecuting, segregating, and blaming them. After World War II, the ethnic population of Asians in Alameda County became much more complex. The Asian population alone doubled in the decade between 1980 and 1990 and diversified to include not only Chinese and Japanese but also Koreans, Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians. In Alameda County today, as in much of the rest of the United States, the first wave of immigrants from Asia (mainly from China, India, and Korea), who came to the region already educated, are not residentially segregated from the white population. However, the newer immigrants from Asia (mainly Southeast Asia—during and following the Vietnam War) are segregated from whites residentially, mixing much more with the African American population in the inner-city neighborhoods. Here, Asians experience a high rate of poverty, much like the Hispanic and African American populations in the same regions of the county do.

In California (and in much of the rest of the United States), the "Asian" box is drawn around a stereotype of what some call the "model minority." Frazier and his colleagues explain the myth of the model minority: the myth "paints Asians as good, hardworking people who, despite their suffering through discrimination, harassment, and exclusion, have found ways to prosper through peaceful means." Other researchers have debunked the myth by statistically demonstrating the different levels of economic success experienced by various Asian peoples, with most success going to the first wave of migrants and lower paying jobs going to newer migrants. Both groups are burdened with a myth that stereotypes them as the "model minority."

Power Relations in Los Angeles

Over the last four decades, the greatest migration flow into California and the southwestern United States has come from Latin America and the Caribbean, especially Mexico. In the 2000 Census, the city of Los Angeles had nearly 3.7 million people, over 46 percent of whom were Hispanic, over 11 percent black or African American, and 10 percent Asian (using Census categories for race and ethnicity). The Hispanic population in the city grew from 39.32 percent of the population in 1990 to 46 percent by 2000.

The area of southeastern Los Angeles County is today "home to one of the largest and highest concentrations of Latinos in Southern California," according to a study by geographer James Curtis. Four decades ago, this area of Los Angeles was populated by working-class whites who were segregated from the African American and Hispanic populations through discriminatory policies and practices. Until the 1960s, southeastern Los Angeles was home to corporations such as General Motors, Bethlehem Steel, and Weiser Lock. During the 1970s and 1980s, the corporations began to close as the process of deindustrialization (see Chapter 11) fundamentally changed where and how goods are produced. As plants closed and white laborers left the neighborhoods, a Hispanic population migrated into southeastern Los Angeles. A housing crunch followed by the 1980s, as more and more Hispanic migrants headed to southeastern Los Angeles. With a cheap labor supply now readily available in the region again, companies returned to southeastern Los Angeles, this time focusing on smaller-scale production of textiles, pharmaceuticals, furniture, and toys. In addition, the region attracted industrial-toxic waste disposal and petrochemical refining facilities.

In his study of the region, Curtis records the changes to the cultural landscape. He calls the change in neighborhoods whereby the Hispanic population jumped from 4 percent in 1960 to over 90 percent Hispanic in 2000 a process of **barrioization** (referring to *barrio*, the Spanish word for neighborhood). With the ethnic succession of the neighborhood from white to Hispanic, the cultural landscape changed to reflect the culture of the new population. The structure of the streets and the layout of the housing remained largely the same, giving the Hispanic population access to designated parks, schools, libraries, and community centers built by the previous residents and rarely found in other barrios in Southern California. However, the buildings, signage, and landscape changed as "traditional Hispanic housescape elements, including the placement of fences and yard shrines as well as the use of bright house colors" diffused through the barrios. Curtis explains that these elements were added to existing structures, houses, and buildings originally built by the white working class of southeastern Los Angeles.

The influx of new ethnic groups into a region, the replacement of one ethnic group by another within neighborhoods, changes to the cultural landscape, the persistence of myths such as the "model minority" myth of Asians, and an economic downturn can create a great deal of volatility in a city.

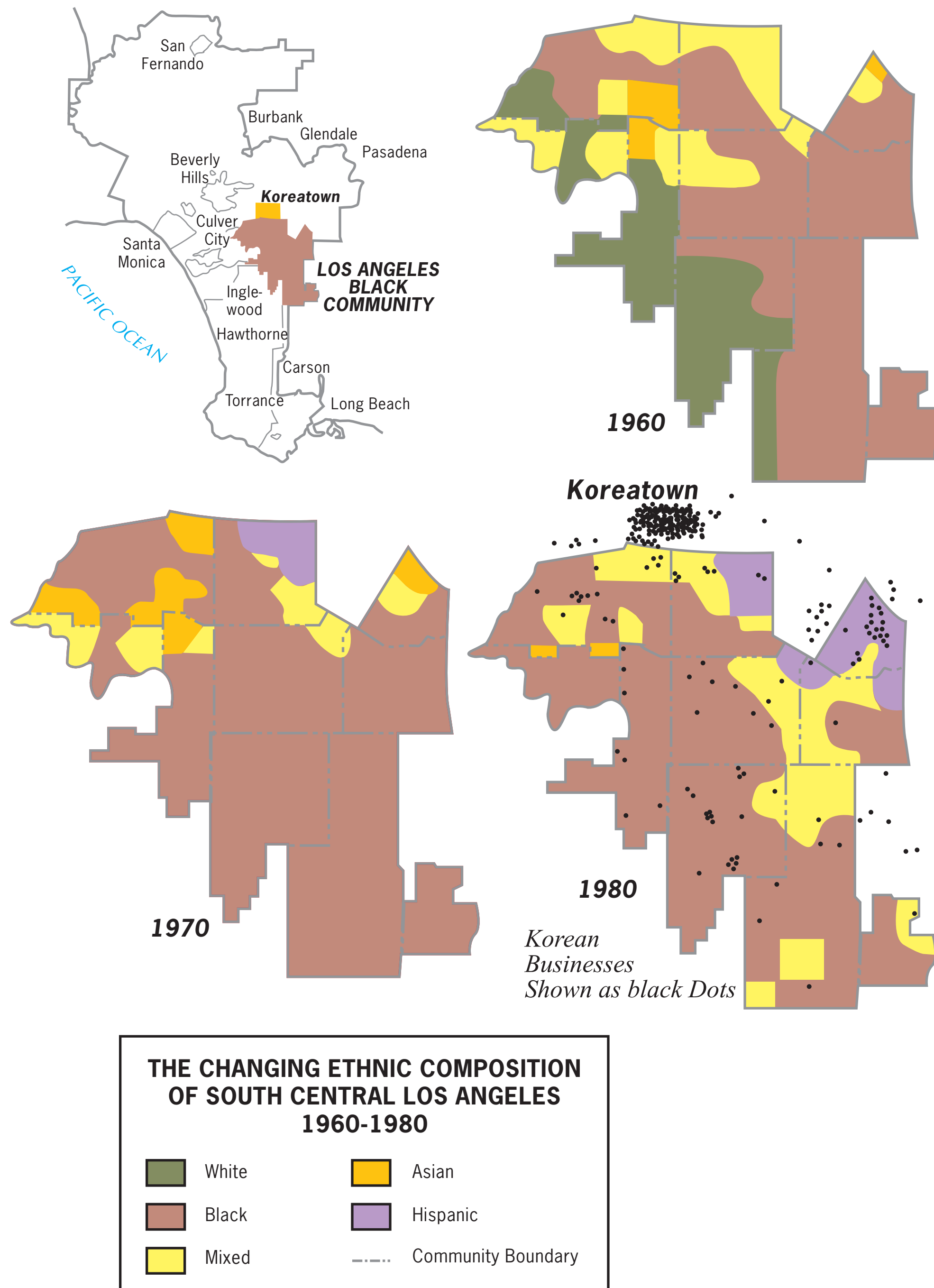
On April 29–30, 1992, the city of Los Angeles, California, became engulfed in one of the worst incidents of civil unrest in United States history. During the two days of rioting 43 people died, 2383 people were injured, and 16,291 people were arrested. Property damage was estimated at approximately $1 billion, and over 22,700 law enforcement personnel were deployed to quell the unrest. According to the media, the main catalyst for the mass upheaval was the announcement of a "not guilty" verdict in the trial of four white Los Angeles police officers accused of using excessive force in the videotaped arrest of Rodney King, a black motorist. To the general public, the Los

Angeles riots became yet another symbol for the sorry state of race relations between blacks and whites in the United States. Yet, a geographic perspective on the Los Angeles riots suggests they were more than a snap response to a single event; they were localized reactions not only to police brutality, but also to sweeping economic, political, and ethnic changes unfolding at regional and even global scales.

The riots took place in South Central Los Angeles. Like the region of southeast Los Angeles (described above), the South Central area was once a thriving industrial region with dependable, unionized jobs employing the resident population. In the 1960s, however, the population of South Central Los Angeles was working-class African American, and the population of southeastern Los Angeles was

Figure 5.17

The Changing Ethnic Composition of South-Central Los Angeles, 1960–1980. *Adapted with permission from*: J. H. Johnson, Jr., C. K. Jones, W. C. Farrell, Jr., and M. L. Oliver. "The Los Angeles Rebellion: A Retrospective in View," *Economic Development Quarterly*, 6, 4 (1992), pp. 356–372.



working-class white. After 1970, South Central Los Angeles experienced a substantial decrease in the availability of high-paying, unionized maufacturing jobs when plants closed and relocated outside of the city and even outside the country. The people of South Central Los Angeles lost over 70,000 manufacturing jobs between 1978 and 1982 alone!

Geographer James Johnson and his colleagues explored the impact of economic loss on the ethnic and social geography of South Central Los Angeles. They found that the population of the area was over 90 percent African American in 1970, and by 1990, the population was evenly split between African Americans and Hispanics. This change in population composition was accompanied by a steady influx of Korean residents and small-business owners who were trying to find a niche in the rapidly changing urban area (Fig. 5.17).

Johnson and his colleagues argued that the Los Angeles riots were more than a spontaneous reaction to a verdict. They were rooted in the growing despair and frustration of different ethnic groups competing for a decreasing number of jobs in an environment of declining housing conditions and scarce public resources. Their work shows the importance of looking beyond the immediate catalysts of particular news events to the local, national, and global geographical contexts in which they unfold.

Geographers who study race, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality are interested in the power relationships embedded in a place from which assumptions about "others" are formed or reinforced. Consider your own place, your campus, or locality. What power relationships are embedded in this place?

Summary

Identity is a powerful concept. The way we make sense of ourselves is a personal journey that is mediated and influenced by the political, social, and cultural contexts in which we live and work. Group identities such as gender, ethnicity, race, and sexuality are constructed, both by self-realization and by identifying against and across scales. When learning about new places and different people, humans are often tempted to put places and people into boxes, into myths or stereotypes that make them easily digestible.

The geographer, especially one who spends time in the field, recognizes that how people shape and create places varies across time and space and that time, space, and place shape people, both individually and in groups. James Curtis ably described the work of a geographer who studies places: "But like the popular images and stereotypical portrayals of all places—whether positive or negative, historical or contemporary—these mask a reality on the ground that is decidedly more complex and dynamic, from both the economic and social perspectives." What Curtis says about places is true about people as well. What we may *think* to be positive identities, such as the myths of "Orientalism" or of the "model minority," and what we know are negative social ills, such as racism and dowry deaths, are all decidedly more complex and dynamic than they first seem.

Geographic Concepts

gender
identity
identifying against
race
racism
residential segregation
succession
sense of place
ethnicity
space
place
gendered
queer theory
dowry deaths
barrioization