Types of Theories

In the United States, explanatory theories of racial and ethnic relations have been concerned with migration, adaptation, exploitation, stratification, and conflict. Most such theories can be roughly classified as either order theories or power-conflict theories, depending on their principal concerns. Order theories tend to accent patterns of inclusion - the orderly integration and assimilation of particular racial and ethnic groups to a dominant culture and society, as in the third and fourth outcomes just described. The central focus is on progressive adaptation to the dominant culture and on stability in intergroup relations. Power-conflict theories give more attention to the first and fifth outcomes - genocide and continuing hierarchy - and to the persisting inequality of the power and resource distribution associated with racial or ethnic subordination. In the United States, most assimilation theories are order theories. Internal colonialism theories and class-oriented neo-Marxist viewpoints are power-conflict theories. These broad categories encompass considerable variation, but they do provide a starting point for analysis.

ASSIMILATION AND OTHER ORDER PERSPECTIVES

In the United States, much social theorizing has emphasized assimilation, the more or less orderly adaptation of a migrating group to the ways and institutions of an established host group. Charles Hirschman has noted that the assimilation perspective, broadly defined, continues to be the primary theoretical framework for sociological research on racial and ethnic inequality. The reason for this dominance, he suggests, is the lack of convincing alternatives. The English word assimilate comes from the Latin assimilare, meaning to make similar.

Robert E. Park

Robert E. Park, a major sociological analyst, argued that European out-migration was a major catalyst for societal reorganization around the globe. In his view intergroup contacts regularly go through stages of a race relations cycle. Fundamental social forces, such as out-migration, lead to recurring cycles in intergroup history: “The race relations cycle which takes the form, to state it abstractly, of contacts, competition, accommodation and eventual assimilation, is apparently progressive and irreversible.” In the contact stage, migration and exploration bring peoples together, which in turn leads to economic competition and thus to new social organization. Competition and conflict flow from the contacts between host peoples and the migrating groups. Accommodation, a critical condition in the race relations cycle, often takes place rapidly. It involves a migrating group’s forced adjustment to a new social situation. Park seems to have viewed accommodation as involving a stabilization of relations, including the possibility of permanent caste systems. Sometimes he spoke of the race relations cycle as inevitably leading from contact to assimilation. At other times, however, he
recognized that the assimilation of a migrant group might involve major barriers and take a substantial period of time to complete.

Nonetheless, Park and most scholars working in this tradition have argued that there is a long-term trend toward assimilation of subordinated racial and ethnic groups in modern societies. Assimilation is a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life. Even racially subordinate groups are expected to assimilate.

**Stages of Assimilation: Milton Gordon**

Since Park's pioneering analysis in the 1920s, many U.S. racial and ethnic relations theorists and numerous textbook writers have adopted an assimilationist perspective, although most have departed from Park's framework in a number of important ways. Milton Gordon, author of the influential *Assimilation in American Life*, distinguishes a variety of initial encounters between racial and ethnic groups and an array of possible assimilation outcomes. While Gordon presents three competing images of assimilation—the melting pot, cultural pluralism, and Anglo-conformity—he focuses on Anglo-conformity as the descriptive reality. …In Gordon's view immigrant groups entering the United States have given up much of their cultural heritage and conformed substantially to an Anglo-Protestant core culture. For theorists like Gordon, cultural assimilation is a very important dimension of intergroup adaptation in the United States. This view of assimilation usually emphasizes the way in which new groups must conform to the preexisting Anglo-Protestant culture.

Gordon notes that Anglo-conformity has been substantially achieved for most immigrant groups in the United States, especially in regard to cultural assimilation. Most groups following the early English migration have adapted to the Anglo core culture. Gordon distinguishes seven dimensions of adaptation:

1. **Cultural Assimilation**: change of cultural patterns to those of the core society;
2. **Structural Assimilation**: penetration of cliques and associations of the core society at the primary-group level;
3. **Marital Assimilation**: significant intermarriage;
4. **Identification Assimilation**: development of a sense of identity linked to the core society;
5. **Attitude-Receptional Assimilation**: absence of prejudice and stereotyping;
6. **Behavior-Receptional Assimilation**: absence of intentional discrimination;
7. **Civic Assimilation**: absence of value and power conflict.

Whereas Park believed structural assimilation, including new primary-group ties such as intergroup friendships, flowed from cultural assimilation, Gordon stresses that these are separate stages of assimilation and may take place at different rates.

…
Focused on the millions of white European immigrants and their adjustments, Gordon's model emphasizes *generational* changes within immigrant groups over time. Substantial *acculturation* (cultural assimilation) to the Anglo-Protestant culture has often been completed by the second or third generation for more recent European immigrant groups. The partially acculturated first generation formed protective communities and associations, but the children of those immigrants were considerably more exposed to Anglo-conformity pressures in the mass media and in schools. …

Gordon recognizes that racial prejudice and discrimination have retarded structural assimilation, but he seems to suggest that non-European Americans, including African Americans, particularly those in the middle class, will eventually be absorbed into the dominant culture and society. In regard to blacks, he argues, optimistically, that the United States has "moved decisively down the road toward implementing the implications of the American creed [of equality and justice] for race relations"—as in employment and housing. The tremendous progress that he perceives black Americans have made has, in his view, created a policy dilemma for the government: Should it adopt a traditional political liberalism that ignores racial groups or a "corporate liberalism" that recognizes group rights along racial lines? Gordon includes under corporate liberalism government programs of affirmative action, which he rejects. The optimism of many assimilation analysts about the eventual implementation of the American creed of equality for black and certain other non-European Americans is problematical … .

Some assimilation analysts, notably Gordon and Alba, have argued that the once-prominent ethnic identities, especially of European American groups, are fading over time. Alba suggests that ethnic identity is still of consequence for non-Latino whites but declares that a new ethnic group "is forming—one based on a vague ancestry from anywhere on the European continent." In other words, such distinct ethnic identities as English American and Irish American are gradually giving way to a vague identification as "European American." …

**Ethnogenesis and Ethnic Pluralism**

Some theorists working in the assimilation tradition reject the argument that most European American groups have become substantially assimilated to a generic Anglo-Protestant or Euro-American identity and way of life. A few have explored models of adjustment that depart from Anglo-conformity in the direction of ethnic or cultural pluralism. It was a Jewish American of Polish and Latvian origin who early formulated a perspective called cultural pluralism. Horace Kallen (1882-1974) argued that membership in ethnic-cultural groups was not a membership one could readily abandon. Writing in *The Nation* in 1915, he argued that ethnic groups had a right to exist on their own terms; that is, democracy applied to ethnic groups. He argued against the ruthless Americanization advocated by many white Anglo-Protestant nativists at the time. By the 1920s he had given the name *cultural pluralism* to the view that each ethnic group has the democratic right to retain its own heritage. Kallen's pioneering analysis did not look in detail at the assimilation process, but it did set early precedents for the perspective now called *multiculturalism* … .
More recent analysts adopting a cultural pluralism perspective accept some Anglo-conformity adjustment as inevitable, if not desirable. In *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan agree that the original customs and home-country ways of European immigrants were mostly lost by the third generation. But this did not mean the decline of ethnicity. The European immigrant groups usually remained distinct in terms of name, identity, and, for the most part, primary-group ties.

Andrew Greeley has developed the interesting concept of *ethnogenesis* and applied it to those white immigrant groups set off by nationality and religion. Greeley is critical of the traditional assimilation perspective because it assumes “that the strain toward homogenization in a modern industrial society is so great as to be virtually irresistible.” Traditionally, the direction of this assimilation in the United States is assumed to be toward the dominant Anglo-Protestant culture. But, from the ethnogenesis perspective, adaptation has meant more than this one-way conformity. The traditional assimilation model does not explain the persistence of ethnicity in the United States—the emphasis among immigrants on ethnicity as a way of becoming American and, in recent decades, the self-conscious attempts to create ethnic identity and manipulate ethnic symbols.

... A number of research studies have documented the persistence of distinctive white ethnic groups such as Italian Americans and Jewish Americans in U.S. cities, not just in New York and Chicago but in San Francisco, New Orleans, and Tucson as well. William Yancey and his associates have suggested that ethnicity is an “emergent phenomenon”—that its importance varies in cities and that its character and strength depend on the specific historical conditions in which it emerges and grows.

**Some Problems with Assimilation Theories**

Most assimilation theorists take as their examples of ethnic adaptation white European groups migrating more or less voluntarily to the United States. But what of the adaptation and assimilation of non-European groups beyond the stage of initial contact? Some analysts of assimilation include people of color in their theories, despite the problems that arise from such an inclusion. Some have argued that assimilation, cultural and structural, is the necessary, if long-term, answer to the racial problem in the United States. One prominent analyst of U.S. racial relations, Gunnar Myrdal, argued that as a practical matter it is “to the advantage of American Negroes as individuals and as a group to become assimilated into American culture, to acquire the traits held in esteem by the dominant white Americans.” In Myrdal’s view there is an ethical contradiction in the United States between the democratic principles of the Declaration of Independence and the institutionalized discrimination against black Americans. For Myrdal this represents a “lag of public morals,” a problem solved in principle but still being worked out in an ongoing assimilation process that may or may not be completed.

More optimistic analysts have emphasized *progressive inclusion*, which will eventually provide black Americans and other subordinate groups with full citizenship in fact as well as in principle. For that reason, they expect ethnic and racial conflict to disappear as various groups become fully assimilated into the dominant culture and society.
Nathan Glazer, Milton Gordon, and Talcott Parsons have stressed the egalitarianism of U.S. institutions and what they view as the progressive emancipation of non-European groups. Gordon and others have underscored the gradual assimilation of middle-class black Americans over several decades. Full membership for black Americans seems inevitable, notes Parsons, for “the only tolerable solution to the enormous [racial] tensions lies in constituting a single societal community with full membership for all.” The importance of racial, as well as ethnic, stratification is expected to decline as powerful, universalistic societal forces wipe out the vestiges of earlier ethnocentric value systems. White immigrants have desired substantial assimilation and have been absorbed. The same is expected to happen eventually for non-European groups.

Assimilation theories have been criticized for having an “establishment” bias. A number of Asian American scholars and leaders have reacted vigorously to the application of the concept of assimilation to Asian Americans, arguing that the very concept originated in a period (1870-1925) of intense attacks by white Americans on Asian immigrants. The term was thus tainted from the beginning by its association with the notion that the only “good groups” were those that could assimilate in Anglo-conformity fashion.

In the 1990s several researchers have explored another assumption of traditional assimilationist thinking—the idea that new immigrants both should and do assimilate to the core culture in a linear, one-directional manner. Immigrants must progressively “become American” in order to overcome the “inferiority” of their old languages, cultures, and societies. This ethnocentric view ignores the fact that the assimilation process can have a negative impact. As Ruben Rumbaut notes, recent research indicates that in certain ways the physical or mental health of immigrant groups declines as they become better off economically and more assimilated to the core culture. Over a period of time immigrants gradually adopt the unhealthy diet of most Americans (and many become overweight) and experience certain family and social stresses (for example, teenagers become depressed or suicidal) associated with mainstream American life. The shift from the culture of origin to the core American culture is not necessarily a shift from an inferior to a superior culture, as many native-born Americans might assume.

Unlike Robert Park, who paid substantial attention to the historical and global contexts of migration, many of today's assimilation theorists do not analyze sufficiently the historical background and development of a particular racial or ethnic group within a national or international context. Recently, a few researchers have developed a perspective called “transnationalism.” Like traditional assimilation analyses, transnationalism emphasizes the fact that individual migrants tend to migrate along family and friendship networks. But, as Steven Gold states in an analysis of Israeli immigrants to the United States, transnationalism also emphasizes the “large scale economic, political, and legal structures within which immigrants develop their communities and lives.” Transnationalism also sees immigration as an “on-going process through which ideas, resources, and people change locations and develop meanings in multiple settings.” Immigrants often maintain their interest in the home country, and their attachments may be strong to two or more “homes” at once. Their motivation for immigration can be complex and multifaceted. They seek opportunities in a new country, but maintain strong ties to the old country. This is the case for the Israeli
immigrants that Gold studied; even for most of the second generation, their self-identity is still Israeli, not American.

... 

**Emphasizing Migration: Competition Theory**

*Competition theory* is a contemporary example of the exploration of migration issues in the tradition of Robert Park. Park emphasized that ethnic relations grew out of the migration of peoples, which in turn led to competition for scarce resources and then to accommodation and assimilation. Competition theorists have explored the contact and competition parts of this “race relations cycle.” Unlike some order-oriented theorists, they do address questions of protest and conflict, although they do not give much attention to power, exploitation, or inequality issues. …

According to competition theorists, collective action is fostered by immigration across geographical borders and by the expansion of once-segregated ethnic groups into the same labor and housing markets to which other groups have access. Attacks on immigrant or black workers, for example, increase at the city level when a group moves out of segregated jobs and challenges other groups and not, as one might expect, in cities where ethnic groups are locked into segregation and poverty. …

Competition theorists have emphasized that economic struggles often accompany political competition, which includes competition among ethnic groups for elected and appointed offices, tax dollars, and other types of political power. Joane Nagel has shown how contenders for political power often organize along ethnic lines and argues that “ethnicity is a convenient basis for political organizers due to the commonality of language and culture and the availability of ethnic organizations with ready-made leadership and membership.” Political policies that may favor one group, such as affirmative action programs for African Americans, have created political mobilization among other groups, such as Latinos and Asian Americans, that seek similar programs.

Competition theorists sometimes contrast their analyses with the power-conflict views we will discuss in the next section, perspectives that emphasize the role of capitalism, economic subordination, and institutionalized discrimination. Competition theorists write about a broad range of ethnic conflicts around the globe. When they deal with urban ethnic worlds in the United States, they often write as though institutionalized racism and capitalism-generated exploitation of workers are not major forces in recurring ethnic and racial competition and conflict in U.S. cities. As we have seen, these theorists emphasize migration and population concentration, as well as other demographic factors.

As we will see shortly, a power-conflict theorist might counter this emphasis by noting that the competition theorists are studying markets and interethnic competition in cities without a clear sense of the great inequality that has undergirded urban job and housing markets in the United States for several centuries. Missing from competition theory is a systematic and deep concern with the issues of inequality, power, exploitation, and racial discrimination that are accented by power-conflict theories.
POWER-CONFLICT THEORIES

The last few decades have witnessed the development of major power-conflict frameworks explaining U.S. racial and ethnic relations, perspectives that place much greater emphasis on economic stratification and power issues than one finds in assimilation and competition theories. Within this broad category of power-conflict theories are a number of subcategories, including the caste perspective, the internal colonialism viewpoint, and a variety of class-based and neo-Marxist theories.

The Caste School

One early exception to the assimilation perspective was the caste school of racial relations, which developed in the 1940s under W. Lloyd Warner and Allison Davis. Focusing on black-white relations in the South, these researchers viewed the position of African Americans as distinctively different from that of other racial and ethnic groups. After the Civil War, a new social system, a caste system, replaced the slavery system of the South. The white and black castes were separated by a total prohibition of intermarriage as well as by economic and social inequality. Warner and his associates were critical of the emphasis in most social science analysis on prejudiced attitudes and feelings. Instead, they emphasized institutionalized discrimination as the foundation of a castelike system of U.S. apartheid.

Early Class Theories of Racial Relations

W. E. B. Du Bois, one of the first sociological analysts in the United States, was an African American civil rights activist who had experienced the brutality of racism firsthand. Drawing on Marxist class analysis in many of his writings, Du Bois was perhaps the first major theorist to emphasize that racial oppression and capitalist-class oppression were inextricably tied together in the United States. In his view the interplay of racism and capitalism explained why there has never been real democracy for people in all racial groups in the United States. In a 1948 article titled “Is Man Free?,” he argued that both black workers and white workers were prevented from exercising full democratic rights because of the control of a small capitalist class (for example, the owners of workplaces) over the economy and politics. He believed that a democratic U.S. society must include not only equality for African Americans but also full control of workplaces by workers. Du Bois’s Marxist ideas are still fresh and provocative but have been ignored in most social science analyses of racial issues.

An early power-conflict analyst who drew on Du Bois and on class analysis was Oliver C. Cox, a scholar whose work has also been neglected, in part because of its Marxist approach. Cox emphasized the role of the capitalist class in racial exploitation; he analyzed the economic dimensions of the forced slave migration from Africa and the oppressiveness of later conditions for African American slaves. Slave trade was “a way of recruiting labor for the purpose of exploiting the great natural resources of America.” The color of Africans was not important. They were chosen “simply because they were
the best workers to be found for the heavy labor in the mines and plantations across the Atlantic.” A search for cheap labor by a profit-oriented capitalist class led to a system of racial subordination. Racial prejudice developed later as an ideology rationalizing this economic subordination of African Americans.

**Internal Colonialism**

Analysts of internal colonialism prefer to see the racial stratification and the class stratification of U.S. capitalism as separate but related systems of oppression. In social science theories, neither should be reduced to the other. An emphasis on power and resource inequalities across racial lines is at the heart of the internal colonialism model.

The framework of *internal colonialism* is built in part on the work of analysts of *external colonialism*—the worldwide imperialism of certain capitalist nations, including the United States and European nations. Balandier has noted that Europe’s capitalist expansion has affected non-European peoples since the fifteenth century: “Until very recently the greater part of the world’s population, not belonging to the white race (if we exclude China and Japan), knew only a status of dependency on one or another of the European colonial powers.” External colonialism involves the running of a country’s economy and politics by an outside colonial power. Many colonies eventually became independent of their colonizers, such as Britain or France, but continued to have their economies directed by the capitalists and corporations of the former colonial powers. This system of continuing dependency has been called *neocolonialism*. Neocolonialism is common today where there were few white settlers in the colonized country. Colonies that experienced a large in-migration of white settlers often show a different pattern. In such cases external colonialism becomes *internal colonialism* when the control and exploitation of non-European groups in the colonized country passes from whites in the home country to white immigrant groups within the newly independent country.

Non-European groups in the United States can be viewed in terms of internal colonialism. Internal colonialism here emerged out of classical European colonialism and imperialism and took on a life of its own. The origin and initial stabilization of internal colonialism in North America predate the Revolutionary War. The systematic subordination of non-Europeans began with “genocidal attempts by colonizing settlers to uproot native populations and force them into other regions.” Native Americans were killed or driven off desirable lands. Enslaved Africans were a cheap source of labor for white plantation owners before and after the Revolution. Later, Asians and Pacific peoples were imported as contract workers or annexed in the expansionist period of U.S. development. Robert Blauner, a colonialism theorist, notes that agriculture in the South often depended on black labor; in the Southwest, Mexican agricultural development was forcibly taken over by European settlers, and later agricultural development was based substantially on cheap Mexican labor coming into what was once northern Mexico.

In exploiting the labor of non-European peoples, who were made slaves or were paid very low wages, white agricultural and industrial capitalists reaped enormous profits. From the internal colonialism perspective, contemporary racial and ethnic inequality is grounded in the economic interests of whites in low-wage labor—the underpinning of
capitalistic economic exploitation. Non-European groups were subordinated because of European American desires for labor and land. Internal colonialism theorists have recognized the central role of government support of the exploitation of groups such as Native, African, Latino, and Asian Americans. The colonial and U.S. governments played an important role in legitimating slavery in the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries and in providing the soldiers who subordinated Native Americans across the nation and Mexicans in the Southwest.

Most internal colonialism theorists are not concerned primarily with white immigrant groups, many of which entered the United States after non-European groups were subordinated. Instead, they wish to analyze the establishment of racial stratification and the control processes that maintain white dominance and ideological racism.

A Neo-Marxist Emphasis on Class

Analysts of racial and ethnic relations have sometimes combined an internal colonialism perspective with an emphasis on class stratification that draws on the Marxist research pioneered by Du Bois and Cox. Mario Barrera suggests that the heart of internal colonialism is an interactive structure of class and racial stratification that divides U.S. society. Class, in the economic-exploitation sense of that term, is central in this perspective. Basic to current internal colonialism are four classes that have developed in U.S. capitalism:

1. **Capitalists**: that small group of people who control capital investments and the means of production and who buy the labor of many others;
2. **Managers**: that modest-sized group of people who work as administrators for the capitalists and have been granted control over the work of others;
3. **Petit Bourgeoisie**: that small group of merchants who control their own businesses and do most of their work themselves, buying little labor power from others;
4. **Working Class**: that huge group of blue-collar and white-collar workers who sell their labor to employers in return for wages and salaries.

The dominant class in the U.S. political-economic system is the capitalist class, which in the workplace subordinates working people in all racial and ethnic groups to its profit and investment needs. It is the capitalists who decide whether and where to create jobs. They are responsible for the flight of capital and jobs from many central cities to the suburbs and overseas.

Barrera argues that each class contains segments that are set off in terms of racial group and ethnicity. ... Each class is crosscut by a line of racial segmentation separating those who suffer from institutionalized discrimination, such as black Americans and Mexican Americans, from those who do not. Take the example of the working class. Although black, Latino, and Native American workers may share the same class position with white workers in that they are struggling against capitalist employers for better wages and working conditions, they are also in a subordinate position because of structural discrimination along racial lines within that working class. Barrera notes that the dimensions of this discrimination often include lower wages for
many subordinate-group workers, as well as their concentration in lower-status occupations. These Americans suffer from both class exploitation (as wage workers) and racial exploitation (as workers of color).

**Cultural Resistance and Oppositional Culture**

Internal colonialism theorists accent the role of the cultural stereotyping and racist ideologies of dominant groups seeking to subordinate people of color. A racist ideology dominates an internal colonialist society, intellectually dehumanizing the colonized. Stereotyping and prejudice, seen in many traditional assimilation theories as more or less temporary problems, are viewed by colonialism analysts as a way of rationalizing exploitation over a very long period, if not permanently. Attempts are made by the dominant group to envelop subordinate groups in dominant cultural values, traditions, and language—in the case of people of color, to “whiten” their cultures. In a system of internal colonialism, cultural as well as racial markers are used to set off subordinate groups such as Native Americans, Mexican Americans, Japanese Americans, and African Americans from the white Euro-American group.

A number of power-conflict scholars have honed the idea of oppositional culture as a basis for understanding the resistance of non-European groups to this dominant Euro-American culture. For example, Bonnie Mitchell and Joe Feagin argue that the oppositional cultures of Americans of color are “distinct from the dominant Euro-American culture, while also reflecting or reacting to elements of the larger society. … In the colonies and later the United States the pressures on non-Europeans for conformity to the Euro-American culture forced minority Americans to become bicultural, to know both the dominant Euro-American culture and their own oppositional culture as well.”

In the centuries of intergroup contact before the creation of what is now called the United States, Mexico, and Canada, the area of North America was populated by a diverse mixture of European, African, and Native American cultures. The nation of the United States created in the late 1700s encompassed African enslavement and the genocide of Native Americans. Faced with oppression, these and other victims of white colonialism have drawn on their own cultural resources, as well as their distinctive knowledge of Euro-American culture and society, to resist oppression in every way possible. The cultures of those oppressed by European Americans have not only provided a source of individual, family, and community resistance to racial oppression and colonialism, but have also infused, often in unrecognized ways, some significant elements into the evolving cultural mix that constitutes the core culture of the United States. Thus, the oppositional cultures of colonized groups such as African, Latino, and Native Americans have helped preserve several key elements of U.S. society, including its tradition of civil rights and social justice.

…

**Anticolonial Nationalism**

Ideological resistance has taken a number of different forms in the twentieth century. For example, anticolonial nationalism has developed as part of the cultural resistance to
European colonialism and its legitimating racist ideology. This is especially true for those people of color who see the strategy of integration as a failure. Pan-Africanism and cultural nationalism are two examples of this resistance to both internal colonialism and liberal solutions for that colonialism.

From the early 1900s to the 1950s, for example, the sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois was not only a key figure in theorizing about racial relations from a Marxist perspective but was also a major exponent of the importance of cultural nationalism. He saw pan-African nationalism as a partial solution for the conditions in which people of African descent found themselves and argued that the pan-African movement “means to us what the Zionist movement must mean to the Jews.” …

The 1920 Harlem Renaissance was a dramatic flowering of writing and arts focused on African American values and traditions. This form of cultural nationalism accented not so much political and economic resistance strategies but resistance in the form of an enhanced cultural identity and a strong sense of peoplehood. Since at least the 1920s a series of African American leaders and organizations, including Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and the Nation of Islam, have rejected assimilation and integration philosophies and accented African values, traditions, dress, language, and culture.

Other people of color have drawn on cultural nationalism as a means of resisting Euro-American culture and discrimination. For example, …the protests by Mexican Americans in New Mexico. The Alianza Federal de Mercedes, founded in the 1960s by Reies Lopez Tijerina, sought to recover lands in New Mexico that had been taken by Anglo-American invaders and to establish a strong Mexican American identity with links to the Mexican heritage. A militant Chicano movement, which emphasized Mexican culture and national pride, also emerged among Mexican Americans in a dramatic way in the 1960s and 1970s.

…

The Split Labor Market View: Another Class-Based Theory

Internal colonialism analysts are sometimes unclear about whether all classes of whites benefit from the colonization of people of color or just the dominant class of capitalist employers. A power-conflict perspective that helps in assessing this question is the split labor market view, which treats class in the sense of position in the “means of production.” This viewpoint has been defended by Edna Bonacich. She argues that in U.S. society, dominant-group (white) workers do not share the interests of the top political-economic class, the capitalists. Yet both the employer class and the white part of the working class discriminate against the racially subordinated part of the working class.

Developing a class analysis of racial subordination, Oliver Cox argued that the capitalist class, motivated by a desire for profit and cheap labor, sought African labor for the slave system in the United States. Ever since, this employer class has helped keep African Americans in a subordinate economic position in U.S. society. Similarly, Al Szymanski argued that since employers have not created enough jobs for all those wishing to work,
black and white workers are pitted against each other for too few jobs, often to the broad advantage of employers as a class.

In contrast, Bonacich emphasizes that discrimination against black workers by white workers seeking to protect their own privileges, however limited these may be, is very important. Capitalists bring in black and other racially subordinated workers to decrease labor costs, but white workers resist because they fear job displacement or lower wages. For example, over the last century white workers' unions have restricted the access of black workers to many job ladders, thus splitting the labor market and reducing black incomes. Research on unions provides historical evidence for this argument. Thus, Stanley Greenberg concludes that from the 1880s to the 1960s the industrial unions in Alabama helped forge a labor framework that created and perpetuated rigidly segregated white and black jobs. In some areas informal segregation persists to the present day. White workers gain and lose from this structural racism. They gain in the short run, because there is less competition for privileged job categories from those who are racially excluded. But white workers lose in the long run because employers can use a cordoned-off sector of lower-wage workers to undercut them.

**Middleman Minorities, Ethnic Enclaves, and Segmented Assimilation**

Drawing on insights of earlier scholars, Edna Bonacich has explored the in-between position, in terms of power and resources, that certain racial and ethnic groups have occupied in stratified societies. These groups find their economic niche as small-business people positioned between other producers and consumers. Some ethnic and racial groups become small-scale traders and merchants doing jobs that dominant groups are not eager to do. For example, many first-generation Jewish and Japanese Americans, excluded from mainstream employment by white Protestants, became small-scale merchants, tailors, restaurant operators, or gardeners. These groups have held “a distinctive class position that is of special use to the ruling class.” They “act as a go-between to this society's more subordinate groups.”

Bonacich and John Modell found that Japanese Americans fit what has been termed the “middleman minority” model. Before World War II, Japanese Americans resided in highly organized communities. Their local economies were based on self-employment, including gardening and truck farming, and on other nonindustrial family businesses. The social solidarity of the first generation of Japanese Americans helped them establish successful small businesses. However, they faced hostility from the surrounding society, and in fact were driven into the businesses they developed because they were denied other employment opportunities.

Some middleman groups, such as Jewish and Korean American merchants in certain central cities, have become targets of hostility from groups that are less well off, such as poor Latino and African Americans. In addition, strong ingroup bonds can make the middleman group an effective competitor, and even Anglo-Protestant capitalists may become hostile toward an immigrant group that competes too effectively. Thus, in some cities Jewish American business people have been viewed negatively by some better-off Anglo-Protestant merchants, who have the power to discriminate against them, as
well as by the poor renters and customers with whom they deal as landlords and merchants. …

…

**The State and Racial Formation**

Looking at the important role of governments in creating racial and ethnic designations and institutionalizing discrimination, Michael Omi and Howard Winant have developed an innovative theory of *racial formation*. Racial tensions and oppression, in their view, cannot be explained solely in terms of class or nationalism. Racial and ethnic relations are substantially defined by the actions of governments, ranging from the passing of legislation, such as restrictive immigration laws, to the imprisonment of groups defined as a threat (for example, Japanese Americans in World War II). Although the internal colonialism viewpoint gives some emphasis to the state’s role in the exploitation of people of color, it has not developed this argument sufficiently.

Omi and Winant note that the U.S. government has shaped the politics of racial relations: The U.S. Constitution and a lengthy series of laws openly defined racial groups and interracial relationships (for example, slavery) in racist terms. The U.S. Constitution counted each African American slave as three-fifths of a person, and the Naturalization Law of 1790 explicitly declared that only white immigrants could qualify for naturalization. Many non-Europeans, including Africans and Asians, were prevented from becoming citizens. Japanese and other Asian immigrants, for example, were banned by law until the 1950s from becoming citizens. In 1854 the California Supreme Court even ruled that Chinese immigrants should be classified as “Indians”(!), therefore denying them the political rights available to white Americans.

For centuries, the U.S. government officially favored northern European immigrant groups over southern Europeans, such as Italians, and over people from other continents. For example, the Immigration Act of 1924 was used to exclude Asian immigrants and most immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, those whom the Anglo-Protestant political leaders in Congress saw as racially inferior and a threat to their control of the society. Northern European Americans working through the government thereby shaped the subsequent racial and ethnic mix of the United States. …

**SUMMARY**

Most theories … fall under the two broad categories of assimilation theories and power-conflict theories. Both types of theories offer insights into the character and development of racial and ethnic relations. Assimilation theories tend to focus on voluntary immigrant groups and emphasize Anglo-conformity or pluralism outcomes. Assimilation analysts have pointed out the different dimensions of intergroup adaptation, such as acculturation and marital assimilation and have accentuated the role of value consensus in holding a racial and ethnic system together.
In contrast, power-conflict theories focus on involuntary immigration or colonial oppression and thus accent substantial inequality and hierarchy. Power-conflict theories have certain recurring themes:

1. A central concern for racial and ethnic inequalities in economic position, power, and resources;
2. An emphasis on the interrelationship of racial inequalities, the economic institutions of capitalism, and the subordination of women under patriarchal systems;
3. An emphasis on the role of the government in legalizing exploitation and segregation and in defining racial and ethnic relations;
4. An emphasis on resistance to domination by those who are oppressed.

In analyzing U.S. history, power-conflict analysts have emphasized the forced character of much cultural and economic adaptation, particularly for non-European groups, and the role of coercion, segregation, colonization, and institutionalized discrimination in keeping groups such as African, Mexican, and Native Americans on the bottom rungs of the societal racial/ethnic ladder. Power-conflict perspectives have examined the role of government in racial oppression (as in laws barring intermarriage) and have stressed the importance of oppositional cultures in providing the foundations for subordinate group resistance to racial oppression.

Power-conflict theorists have often emphasized the importance of examining racial and ethnic relations in the context of the historical development of capitalism and patriarchy.